The Dancing We

Camille Buttingsrud and Ellen Kilsgaard

ABSTRACT

In the 2023 intergenerational dance project *Superpower Ensemble*, the participants were chosen for their individual qualities to form a greater 'we' as a group. The children added spontaneity and playfulness, whereas the adult artists inspired the children with their artistic practice, professionalism, and direction. In this article, we aim to describe the subtle processes a choreographer initiates to achieve the intended aesthetic and ethical results. Our case story is *Superpower Ensemble*, and the theme investigated through the case story is 'we-ness'. By describing these processes and this theme, we seek to demonstrate some of the manifold forms of knowledge possessed by dancers, choreographers, and artists. Their practically gained expertise in *being, being together, and being in the world* has the potential to reach far beyond the artistic realm. Their findings align with academic insights into metaphysical, philosophical realms. To show the latter, we outline certain theoretical and philosophical discoveries that reinforce the findings unearthed and explored through the bodily–affective dance work in *Superpower Ensemble*.

DANSK RESUMÉ

I det intergenerationelle danseprojekt *Superpower Ensemble* fra 2023 var deltagernes individuelle egenskaber med til at skabe et nyt "vi." Børnene bidrog til forestillingen med sin spontanitet, leg og autentiske, uskolede bevægelse. De voksne kunstnere inspirerede børnene med deres kunstneriske praksis, professionalisme og retning. I artiklen beskrives de mange subtile processer en koreograf sætter i gang hos sine dansere, for at opnå de ønskede æstetiske og etiske mål. Vores casestory er *Superpower Ensemble*, og temaet, der undersøges gennem casestoryen, er "vi'et." Gennem at beskrive disse processer og dette tema ønsker vi at vise nogle af de mangfoldige former for viden som dansere, koreografer og andre kunstnere besidder. Deres praktisk opnåede ekspertise i væren, samvær og væren i verden har potentiale til at nå langt ud over det kunstneriske felt; deres resultater er forenelige med metafysisk, filosofisk forskning på højeste akademiske niveau. For at vise sidstnævnte skitserer vi enkelte filosofiske teorier, der understreger den viden, der blev undersøgt gennem det kropsligt-affektive dansearbejde i *Superpower Ensemble*.

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Introduction

In this article, we explore the communal aspects of dance by directing the spotlight on how choreographic art may develop through a we rather than an I. We use the 2023 intergenerational dance production *Superpower Ensemble*, developed and choreographed by Ellen Kilsgaard, as our case study. Ellen's aim was to let nonprofessional child dancers and adult professional dancers explore relationality and empathy through choreographic investigations. Her work is generally driven by questions about how choreographic form can emerge through the human desire and ability to be in contact and exchange with others. Ellen has a longstanding interest in including children in choreographic thinking and is fascinated by the qualities that a young person brings to choreographic work, particularly when relating to professionally trained musicians and dancers.

Phenomenologist and dance philosopher Camille Buttingsrud's research similarly presents evidence of relational forms of consciousness in absorbed dancing (Buttingsrud 2021). Her investigations unearth and verbalise dancers' experiences of being bodily immersed. Buttingsrud's (2021) findings suggest the existence of high-order states of bodily consciousness: bodily-affective forms of reflection. In these states, dancers report, the everyday ego is replaced by an openness to something larger than the individual self. A dancer's bodily awareness and bodily intentionality expand to encompass the totality of which they are part: their self, their fellow performers, the performance environment, and the audience. One interviewed dancer even reported feeling part of 'the whole universe' (Buttingsrud 2021, 7545) during moments of profound absorption.

This article is rooted in our conversations over the past decade, reflecting on experiences and thoughts related to art, dance, creativity, resonance, bodily reflection, and thinking. Having already contributed to Camille's philosophical research, our discussions now form the basis for this description of Ellen's choreographic work with *Superpower Ensemble*. We aim to explore what this might reveal about we-ness and, as a metainvestigation, to juxtapose the artistic findings with philosophical ideas on similar themes.

The methodology behind our cowriting is itself a fusion. The reflections presented here have emerged as much through artistic practice as through academic thinking, and we endeavour to present these on equal terms in their respective languages. Consequently, this article does not adhere strictly to traditional academic protocols. Some artistic reflections stand without theoretical references, as their basis lies in experiential knowledge accumulated through years of artistic knowledge production. Presenting artistic reasoning in this way, we hope to substantiate our claim that both academia and the arts, albeit unalike, offer rich research into the nature of *being*.

This article is structured around a description of the dance project. Initially, we provide an overview of the project's background. We then go on to detail its artistic aims and methods, alongside the academic methods employed. In the subsequent section, descriptions of the dance work are intertwined with academic reflections, complementing the artistic insights. In the final section before the conclusion, we turn to our metainvestigation and show how the lived understanding gained through dance can align meaningfully with academic knowledge.

Background

Ellen has worked with children in dance and choreography for more than 10 years. In collaboration with dancers and musicians, she has led dance investigations with children aged 8 to 12 all over Denmark and in Greenland. These projects have employed the same core methods and have equally evolved through external inspiration from dance groups such as Kabinet K (https://www.kabinetk.be/en).

From this foundation, *Superpower Ensemble* emerged and took shape as a formal dance performance. In this context, a smaller, selected group of children performed for a broader audience in nonschool settings.

The initial steps were taken in 2022, when a group of 12 children, two adult dancers, Julie Schmidt Andreasen and Adrian Ulrich Skjoldborg, and two musicians and composers, Henriette Groth and Pernille Louise Sejlund, joined forces. After 10 rehearsals, the group—at this point, consisting of 10 children alongside the aforementioned adult artists—performed together before an audience of family and friends.

The group continued working on the same performance in 2023. Six of the children from the previous year returned (Eva Weber Bergendorff, Helga Heeboll-Borne, Ella Kofoed Kruse, Olga Gildin Laumann, Otillia Zelda Tarpgaard-Somer, and Otto Wolff Ornsbo), and two new children joined the group (Vilja Gaski and Wilma Spuur Hansen). At the time, they were between 9 and 13 years old. A new musician and composer, Ivar Myrset Asheim, was hired for the project. Like his predecessors, he worked live with the dancers, incorporating parts of the 2022 compositions alongside newly composed material.

During spring 2023, *Superpower Ensemble* held another 10 rehearsals, and in May and June, their performance was staged at Teater ZeBU in Copenhagen. The audience consisted of first- to fifth-grade school classes and their adult companions. In September 2023, *Superpower Ensemble* performed at Horsens Børneteaterfestival, Denmark's largest curated festival for performance art aimed at younger audiences. A full video of the performance's final version can be found at http://www.ellenkilsgaard.com/superpowerensemble.

Aims and Methods

On her website, http://www.ellenkilsgaard.com/research-ensemble-superpower, Ellen references sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa's descriptions of relationships with resonance: '[The] difference between successful and unsuccessful relationships to the world [is] defined neither by the relative abundance of resources and opportunities, nor by one's share of the world, but by the degree to which one is connected with and open to other people' (Rosa 2016, 27). Rosa's articulation reflects Ellen's intuitive, experiential understanding of intersubjective openness and the importance of creating spaces for resonance in her choreographies. Even though such theoretical inspirations inform her work, Ellen primarily draws on 'thinking through practice' and the lived realisations her work generates. These animated reflections are embedded in our descriptions of the dance project, often conveyed in Ellen's own words.

Superpower Ensemble was an artistic project. Selecting children as dancers was both part of the choreographic method and a thematic choice. Although one might assume that this approach stemmed from a pedagogical calling, Ellen's ambition in working with the children has consistently been to create form[1], to produce a performance. Her leadership aimed to facilitate the emergence of choreographic structures rather than to teach. The children were integral members of the performance's cast and were carefully chosen as dancers. Their participation was autotelic – they danced for the sake of dancing, not with the aim of achieving anything external to their activity in the studio.

In order to assemble the right cast, Ellen had to consider each child's willingness to work physically, ability to cooperate, and eagerness to take on artistic responsibility, as she did with the adult cast. Some of the children in the preliminary projects had left or had not been reinvited as a consequence of the increasing demands. The remaining group had mutually agreed to develop *Superpower Ensemble*.

That being said, working artistically with children requires taking responsibility for their safety and well-being. Even though pedagogy was not at the core of the project, pedagogical skills were needed to create an ethical, safe, and enjoyable work space for the children. Throughout her years of leading, choreographing, and teaching, Ellen has developed methods that promote *bodily listening, nonverbal connection, and exchange*. She resists hegemonic modes of inhabiting the body

and, therefore, does not provide her dancers with set choreographies. An essential part of her work with the dancers in *Superpower Ensemble* consisted of facilitating mutual, nonverbal engagement between the nontrained children and the professional adults to create a 'shared body' where their differences could coexist and individual temperaments could contribute to the whole. Generally, Ellen finds that connecting diverse participants enhances contrasts and qualities. For her, casting a combination of adult and child dancers introduces new perspectives on human relationships in her dance performances. Such a cast might even serve as the very source of the choreographic shaping of a performance. As she explains: 'Differences can be generative and extremely productive – they can concert new, surprising, and poetic ways of coexistence'. Her goal with *Superpower Ensemble* was to make these experiences available – visible and tangible – to an audience through a well-defined artistic and choreographic form.

Most children at this age are not afraid of moving their bodies, Ellen claims. They have a strong drive to learn and possess exceptional openness to the world. 'This can be seen as an extension of the self into the unknown', she adds. To her, children's willingness, courage, and ability to let go and embrace the situation are essential dance qualities that she wanted her adult dancers to draw upon. The children approached their tasks on the floor with this force and immediacy, while the adults brought their experience as trained dancers and artists. Together, they enriched the process, as Ellen remarks: 'I wanted to see if their different levels, ages, abilities, and possibilities could constitute an immersed and simultaneously articulated dance performance'.

Ellen knew there would be a fine line between, on the one hand, *facilitating and embracing chaos and playfulness*, and, on the other hand, *setting tasks and limits and training the children's skills to nurture their drive to learn*. This balance was needed for the larger group – she wanted *vitalisation* and *direction* to work hand in hand.

'As a choreographer, I organise dance, music, space, and light. My approach to dance is not to reach a form in a certain way. Rather, I look for poetic expression and clarity in the work, and to get there, I use some performative techniques and principles as shaping factors', Ellen explains. Her techniques can be summarised as follows:

- *Playing* within specific tasks and movement qualities
- Playing with *timing*, *humour*, and *shifts* to create form
- *Surrendering* to and thriving on the energy that arises when people dance together, lean into each other, and give and receive energy, power, and meaning through shared expression
- *Immersing* in the *feelings*, *fantasy*, and *bodily atmospheres* that emerge while *discovering* the content[2] arising between individuals
- Receiving music through the body in the here and now and entering a playful, embodied dialogue with the musician – in other words, using one's *musicality* and *attunement* skills
- *Cultivating sensory awareness* of one another, of the space, and of the 'music' created through playful timing

These techniques are both required for and lead to absorption, presence, and commitment, Ellen explains. In *Superpower Ensemble*, her methods were reinvented by the fact that the majority of the dancers were children. 'To make them trust their own mere being and feel safe in the group, I made sure to work through happiness and engagement', she reveals. As we shall see in the next section, she succeeded in creating a welcoming work environment.

As part of the preparation for this article, Camille attended rehearsals and previews, engaged in conversations with the participants, and interviewed the children and the adult dancers. The interviews

were conducted, transcribed, and analysed according to qualitative research methods (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015)[3]. The article's academic framework is philosophical phenomenology, drawing on this tradition's theories on consciousness – Camille's area of expertise.

Creating, Rehearsing, Performing

As mentioned, Ellen wanted the project to build on the qualities of a child's *openness*, *immediacy*, and *responsiveness*. At the same time, a performance was being rehearsed, and a theatre was booked for their first show; they were creating a piece to communicate with others on a professional level. The integration of *vitalisation* and *direction* in rehearsals was sometimes a balancing act, but it also functioned as a methodological tool, Ellen reveals.

Inspired by Rosa's resonance theories and her own artistic research findings, she nurtured group intelligence: the participants' bodily 'conversations' and intersubjective quests. The children expressed the impressions they received through their tasks and exercises, which inspired and animated the adult dancers' expressions, in turn giving the children new impressions to express. Later, during the performances, all participants experienced the same impression–expression feedback loops with their audiences. The *empathetic resonance* between the children and the adult dancers became an organic shaping factor in the creation of the choreography, constituting both its method and its expression.

The skills of the professional dancers were seen in a new light, and the children were enriched by the adults' technical and artistic expertise. 'With the children, you get authenticity. Given a task, they do what is natural to them', Julie, one of the adult dancers, explained during our interviews. 'Their dance hasn't been formed yet; there is something very intuitive about it. (...) If you're schooled, you've been told that there are certain ways to do things'. Dancing with her younger peers, Julie gained new insights: 'I find it very inspiring'.

Working in an intergenerational team can be challenging, too, as adult dancer Adrian admitted. 'These kids are good; they jump and do turns. (...) [But] I often feel I have to take the lead with this number of children. Lead much more. With grown-up dancers, I can be an equal participant; [there's] not as much "follow me!" It's a bit more pedagogical with the children'.

Through Ellen's tasks, the children developed a practical understanding of *listening through the body*. Gradually, they stepped out of the 'student' position and became cocreators. 'When we dance, we don't have to talk', child dancers Vilja and Otillia mentioned in the interview we conducted while they were rehearsing. 'And when we crawl or run, we don't bump into each other. I don't have to see the others with my eyes; I feel them'. 'One can feel what the others do, even when one is jumping around. You can see them in the corner of your eye, or I can just sense them'. When asked how that was, they answered: 'one is alert all the time, keeping a watch around, in a way. But it's not very hard; it's easy. Sort of. I don't have to see it with my eyes; I feel it'.

Otillia and Vilja found bodily listening and bodily exchange not only easy but also more precise than when trying to follow a teacher's movements in a dance class. 'It's as if one is doing the movements more equally to Julie's and Adrian's movements when not following them all the time'. As Ellen sees it, this shows how the children were listening to or tuning into more than the mere shape of the moves. They were picking up the energy, direction, musicality, and intentions as well – qualities that, as she puts it, are expressed 'so fast that only the dancing body can perceive (...) and express [them] in an instant'.

Child dancer Otto made a similar observation about temporality, describing improvising with his peers: 'You don't have time to think about it; you just do it. It is as if the body is faster than the head, in a way'. When asked to elaborate, he explained: 'It feels that way; the head is behind. The body is quicker than the head. (...) It [the movement] becomes more floating, sort of. It's not like, "Would it be a good idea to take a step to the right?" You don't think that. You just step to the right'.

From a philosophical viewpoint, this is intriguing empirical evidence of the silent capabilities of the living body. The immediacy of the pre-reflective body – its temporal presence in the here and now – encompasses more than spontaneity. In more intensely focused situations, such as dance, bodily consciousness can elevate from pre-reflective to reflective levels while retaining immediacy. In such states, the absorbed or intensely focused subject can bodily reflect on the received impressions and react through bodily expression without the delay entailed by conceptual reflection.[4] Ellen's understanding of Otillia and Vilja's experiences also speaks of the 'open embrace' that distinguishes bodily reflection from conceptual reflection. The specific form of intentionality seen in bodily reflective experiences involves a directedness towards the wholeness of the situation in which one is actively engaged. The subject takes in more than a single detail; they register a spectrum of aspects within the situation (Buttingsrud 2021, 7541).

In order to facilitate a work environment where bodily listening, bodily communication, nonverbal exchange, and cocreation of a performance could flourish, Ellen made sure to create a friendly and encouraging atmosphere for all the participants. The fact that her method involved using the participants' own movement material gave the untrained children self-confidence and a feeling of being seen as individuals. As child dancer Helga put it in our interview: 'We've had some dance in my class at school. (...) It was not the same as here because, here, we know each other in a different way. (...) You feel freer because you think... you're allowed. (...) It's easier and nicer with these people'.

'It's such a nice environment to be in', Otto remarked, describing his experience. 'There's no competition, just mere collaboration'. Hearing the children appreciate the freedom, openness, and togetherness she works to achieve in her dance communities affirms Ellen's practice: 'These are the qualities that are formative, that initiate the creation of choreography'.

Olga and Wilma also expressed joy in the freedom to 'do what you feel like': 'It makes me stay in my own body. It's not like "now we'll do this, and then we'll do so and so, and step forward here". We still follow some systems; we are asked to do things, but there's no right or wrong here. There's a theme, and you can do this... or this... (...) We can do it in the group. We feel that we are part of the group. Even if we don't dance the exact same way, we still dance the same dance'.

To Otto, this form of collaboration was the most important part of being a dancer in *Superpower Ensemble*: fitting in and contributing without aiming for uniformity. The complexity heightened his enjoyment: 'When you dance with someone, it also depends on the path the others take, right? That is cool. This collaboration. Like, where do we roll, jump, leap now?'

Even though Ellen's method introduced a constant element of unpredictability into the work process, the children embraced the provocations embedded in the unforeseen moves of the others. As Otto added: 'You

don't know what you yourself will do, either'. In the friendly setting they were in, being alert and accepting these challenges was part of the game.

In general, working in a bodily absorbed state might require courage. To enter this flow state, the dancer must let go of set forms of control and be willing to reinvent the rehearsal or performance over and over again (Buttingsrud 2021, 7541). Children seem to have easy access to these core aspects of absorption, Ellen remarks, aligning them with playfulness, openness, and curiosity.

Structurally, the choreography was built on Ellen's ideas, inspired by nonverbal forms of resonance found between human beings, as well as in nature. 'The skin is permeable', Ellen notes as an example. 'It gives off and takes in. In a similar way, the individual self is a closed unit that nevertheless is permeable, just like the cells in its skin'. It expresses, gives impressions to other selves, and takes in impressions from them. When individuals in a pluralistic group engage by actively opening up to one another, empathic kinaesthetic resonance is enabled, Ellen shares. This process paves the way for new forms of meaning, artistic form, and intelligence to emerge within the group. 'The individuals are not equalised; something new is created', she explains.

The adult dancers and the children also contributed to creating the choreography. During our interview adult dancers Adrian and Julie described their methods: 'We can come with suggestions'. 'It comes from us in the improvisations, not choreographically, but through our dancing, physically. We know that now we're going to fall, or whatever. But how we fall, and how we combine it with the children's moves – all those aspects of the improvisation are channelled through us. I feel there's a lot of space for our contribution. Or, collaboration'. Ellen has worked with Julie and Adrian for several years. 'She has developed many of these methods on following and leading (...) where you take ownership and are being led into a situation that you take care of. (...) This is the unifying part', Julie added.

In their interviews, the children shared how they took ownership of the scenes they danced using their imaginations, as well. In one scene, Otillia was sitting on Julie's back while the rest of the children were walking as if in a caravan. 'It's almost as if the floor has turned into sand. (...) When we do it, it's like we're in the desert. Really!' Otillia said. 'Julie is crawling, and I'm on top of her. She's like a donkey, a very slow one'. Vilja added: 'There's a place where I'm holding Ella's head. There, I feel I'm holding a bull'.

In another scene, they assist one of the adult dancers who has fallen to the floor. Watching the eight small bodies help a grown-up body stand upright is a particularly moving scene with numerous potential interpretations. In the interviews, the children described it in practical terms. 'We are folding the (limbs of the) body; it makes it easier for Adrian to stand up'. There were feelings involved, too: 'There's a rather sad atmosphere there. And very slow music', Vilja explained. 'It's as if we are a village, or something, and there's a plague (...) When we try to raise Adrian, and he falls again and again, one feels, "Oh, no, what is happening now?"' Otillia agreed: 'It's sad, but also nice, in a way. You help a grown-up, and... We fold their body, and make it easier to stand up. It's not just the grown-ups who can help; the children can help, too. Help the grown-ups'.

Adrian also reflected on how the music made them feel emotionally connected to the different scenes. For Ellen, having live music on stage is an essential part of her methodology that reinforces her emphasis on

musicality in her dancers. 'In this context, musicality is the ability to make embodied, playful decisions in the moment and to shape the energy flow and the sensory feedback through the body', she explaines. Inspired by Daniel Stern's concept of 'vitality forms', she speaks of the musical qualities in emotional content, fantasy, and sensation. These, she noted, can be played as 'decreasing, increasing, pulsating, flowing, exploding, or mild' (Stern 2010, 14).

During the performances, the children were excited but neither nervous nor afraid, they reported. The audiences – or the 'new participants', as Ellen sees them – helped the dancers concentrate and 'take it seriously', Otto observed. 'It was so much cooler with the audience'. Some spectators wondered how the child dancers could move so lively, fast, and physically close without bumping into each other. 'We felt each other', Otto explained.

The constitutive idea behind Ellen's choreographies is to embody and develop an understanding of dance as a primordial communal activity. Dance, she explains, has its roots in our very existence together as human beings. Articulating meaning and feeling through physical movement – as well as through the voice – is our way of connecting with others and with our surroundings. It is an output we produce to meaningfully express the impressions we have received – an output to which we receive a response, generating new input or impressions. 'We move and gesture, speak and create sound in order to bridge our inner world and the outside', she describes. In Ellen's view, dance, as we know it today, is a poetic expansion of basic human communication.

Seeing the creation of a dance performance from this angle, Ellen's attention throughout the *Superpower Ensemble* project was on *being together in a meaningful way*, in an *aesthetic frame*. This togetherness did not concern only the participants; the idea of putting on a show for an external group of people was an invitation for others to experience, see, and feel the resonant qualities of the dance. The carefully facilitated bodily communication on stage was transmitted to the larger groups 'joining the conversation' – the audiences.

Shared Insights

The communal dance experiences outlined in this article stem from Ellen's aesthetic work as a dancer and leader, creating and facilitating collective artistic expressions. They also draw from her ideas, shaped by decades of practical artistic work, reflection, and dialogue. For Camille, it has been interesting to learn how Ellen's research findings align with the theoretical work of phenomenologists and other philosophers investigating the 'we'. Let us share some examples.

'Joint action' (Sebanz, Bekkering, and Knoblich 2006), 'emotional sharing' (Szanto 2015), 'we-ness' (Zahavi 2023), and 'group agency' (Peck and Chemero 2024) are examples of contemporary philosophical research areas debating the structures behind subjective experiences of the first-person plural – the 'we'. Since 2020, scholars at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen have explored the 'we' through research projects such as 'Who Are We? Self-Identity, Social Cognition, and Collective Intentionality' and 'Who Are We? Philosophy and the Social Sciences' (https://cfs.ku.dk/research-activities/researchprojects/who-are-we-self-identity/). One key question concerns the stability of the first-person singular in collective activity. In other words, how are one's perspectives as an 'I' experienced in a group situation? Does being 'one of us' constitute a group identification in which the individual self disappears? As we have heard from the dancers of *Superpower Ensemble*, this is not necessarily the case. Given the right conditions, one might experience a stable self while simultaneously being part of a group. According to Ellen's artistic research, this balance is not only possible but also required for achieving her aesthetic and ethical goals.

We also learned how Ellen was determined to create a specific atmosphere during rehearsals, enabling the dancers to feel safe and open up in the development of the performance. The term 'atmosphere' might seem elusive to many, and pragmatically, one might wonder how to go about creating an atmosphere. These questions are also the

subject of academic research. According to philosopher Lucy Osler (2020), interpersonal atmospheres are 'relational modes of experience'. They are not a mystical 'what' but rather a 'how': 'When we bodily perceive the expressive experience of participants in a group, we experience atmospheres' (Osler 2020, 3). She calls this a 'bodily form of empathetic perception' that constitutes 'social understanding' (Osler 2020, 3). Osler's theoretical discoveries emphasise Ellen's practical accomplishments in this area. The tasks Ellen assigned to the dancers during their rehearsals enabled them to sense each other bodily by listening to their own and each other's beings, movements, and feelings. This attunement led the dancers to accept and respect their own bodily expressions, as well as those of their fellow dancers. In doing so, Ellen created an atmosphere of trust, openness, and willingness to share, aligned with what the situation required.

For Ellen, *empathy* is both a condition for and an outcome of such bodily listening. Classical phenomenologist Edith Stein's work on empathy (Stein 1917) describes it as the experience a living body has when encountering another, which does not necessarily imply experiencing the same feelings as the other person. To experience empathy, Stein claims, is to feel alongside the feelings of the other. Through imagination and emotional insight, one gains a rich understanding of the experiences of the person one is facing (Svenaeus 2016, 243). Phenomenology generally understands empathy as a bodily–affective ability to 'read' the other.

In her work on shared emotions and empathy, Stein (1922, in Szanto 2015) describes how 'the relation between individual and communal experiences is constitution, not summation' (504). In other words, when a group experiences 'genuinely collective emotions', according to Stein (1922, in Szanto 2015), these are 'neither the result of emotional contagion (...) nor do they amount to a mere summation or aggregation of distinct individual emotions (...) rather they have a distinct intentional and phenomenological structure, a we-mode of being, and their own, plural subject' (505).

This was precisely what the *Superpower Ensemble* dancers experienced. Their individual emotions and motions were respected and welcomed within their communal compositions. As Ellen puts it: 'I saw the group as a *pluralistic assembly of differences*, where the dancers did not become like each other but rather created a new potential – exactly because of their differences and, at the same time, their attunement in their dance work. Something not yet thought of arose'. One could say that *Superpower Ensemble* embodied aspects of the phenomenological theories of empathy.

Staying attuned throughout the rehearsals helped the dancers remain focused on their common goal: creating a performance. This common directedness, or 'collective intentionality', was supported by the atmospheres created in each scene and by their different empathetic encounters – by the *living environment* of the project. The philosophical field of 'affordances' draws attention to the role of living spaces and activity situations in joint action (Kiverstein and Rietveld 2021). The environment Ellen created for their rehearsals and performances afforded the children and adult artists the ability to collaborate towards their common goal.

The profound philosophical, metaphysical knowledge, often tacitly embedded in the competence of dancers and choreographers, could serve as a societal resource and should not be confined to the artistic world. Through this article, as well as our broader work, we aim to foster interdisciplinary exchanges and articulate the multiple forms of knowledge found in dance. As *Superpower Ensemble* has demonstrated, sharing individual capacities within larger groups creates new, exciting, and enlightening elements.

Conclusion

Ellen's ambition is to create space for and cultivate meaningfulness and life force through her choreographic work. These aspects arise when people truly connect through dance, she claims. By investigating kinaesthetic, social, and affective resonance between dancers, she understands how these resonant and absorbed states of being transform into expressive forms that give rise to meaning. This meaningfulness and these forms can then be shared with an audience through yet another axis of resonance.

Dance as shared communication offers a way to discover and rediscover our interdependence and how we create – and are created – through our relationships with the world and with each other. Individual differences enrich and generate the conditions for new structures to emerge and new ways of presenting form. As Rosa's earlier quote suggests, it comes down to *being open to others* and *forming connections*. For this, trust and the freedom to be oneself are required.

Both the adult and child dancers of *Superpower Ensemble* seemed to feel this trust and freedom and to have formed genuine connections. Throughout our interviews, the children stressed the social aspects of being part of the group: 'I have so many friends here', Ella said, 'It's great'. Wilma agreed: 'You can see it when we are not dancing, too (...). There's such a great feeling of togetherness'. 'No one feels left out or anything', Olga acknowledged.

Dancing in the group, the child dancers developed self-confidence and the liberty to move according to their individual natures. They were needed, seen, and heard by the rest of the group and by the group leader, the choreographer. They could share themselves and, through their authentic selves, actively participate in the community. This also meant prospering together and influencing each other's moves and moods. As Eva

mentioned: 'When you've had a bad day, you get happy being here'. Shaking her shoulders in delight, Wilma simply stated: 'It [dancing in the group] is gorgeous!'

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Endnotes

1 By form, we mean the physical body's articulations – the dance expression visible from the outside.

2 By content, we mean the nonphysical, nonverbal material that emerges through dance, that constitutes expressions with and beyond the physical movements of the choreography.

3 The interview data, which consist of audio recordings stored on a computer and Word file transcriptions, are kept secure in accordance with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data restrictions. Each of the 10 interviewees read and signed a consent form, received a copy, and were given full access to their individual data.

4 On the time delay implicit in reflection: 'Husserl (...) points to the temporal character of reflection. When we reflect, the experience that we reflect upon is not simply given as existing here and now, but also as having already been given prior to reflection' (Zahavi 2015, 179). For more details on bodily experiences of reflection, see Buttingsrud (2021).

BIOGRAPHIES

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