Sharing the dance—on the reciprocity of movement in the case of elite sports dancers

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Abstract
In his recent works on daily face-to-face encounters, Zahavi claims that the phenomenon of sharing involves reciprocity. Following Zahavi’s line of thought, we wonder what exactly reciprocity amounts to and how the shared experience emerges from the dynamic process of interaction. By turning to the highly specialized field of elite sports dance, we aim at exploring the way in which reciprocity unfolds in intensive deliberate practices of movement. In our analysis, we specifically argue that the on-going dynamics of two separate flows of movement constitute a shared experience of dancing together. In this sense, moving together, in sports dance, is a practical way of understanding each other. In agreement with Zahavi, our analysis emphasizes the bi-directed nature of sharing. However, at the same time, we contribute to Zahavi’s ongoing endeavour as the special case of sports dance reveals how reciprocity can be deliberately shaped through the mutual coordination and affective bound dynamics of movement. Our article thus both pursues the methodological point that qualitative research of expert competences can constructively enrich phenomenological analysis and indicates how movement can be fundamental to the reciprocity of shared experience.

Keywords Movement·Affectivity·Shared intentionality·Coordination·Connection·Interdisciplinary methodology

Introduction
Sharing a bottle of wine, sharing a joyful moment with friends, sharing a belief that Spain won the soccer World Cup in 2010 or sharing a culture tradition with peers, we often marvel at how people manage to share objects, emotions, intentions and experiences with others in our everyday life. As Gerda Walther (1919) observed more than 90 years ago, this seemingly simple phenomenon is challenging in that two subjects must achieve a certain communality in order for experiential sharing to take place.

Walther’s description of sharing has recently been amplified and further developed by Zahavi. By drawing on the early contributions of the phenomenologists Husserl, Scheler,
Stein and Gurwitsch, Zahavi (Zahavi 2014, 2015; León and Zahavi, 2016) carefully distinguishes sharing from empathy within the face-to-face situation. Empathy as an other-directed experience can be one-sided, while sharing, as a bi-directed experience, is necessarily reciprocal (Zahavi and Rochat, 2015). Through the dynamic process of reciprocity, a feeling of togetherness may arise. That is precisely what makes shared experience unlike any kind of experience one might have in isolation.

Given what has been discussed by Zahavi so far, the reciprocity itself is not reflectively grasped and thematically observed, but arising from the interaction of our face-to-face encounter. Following Zahavi’s line of thought, we wonder what exactly reciprocity amounts to and how the shared experience emerges from the dynamic process of interaction. In this article, by turning to the case of elite sports dance, we explore how reciprocity unfolds in this kind of intensive deliberate movement. In brief, based on a case of expert competence in moving as a couple, we aim at contributing to further describe the experiential potential of how sharing can unfold through movement.

We want to emphasize that the article also presents a methodological endeavour: to highlight how qualitative inquiry of expert competences can be used for phenomenological analysis. In other words, how the phenomenon of sharing presented in the very special case of elite sports dancers can highlight possible experiential characteristics, which might be difficult to pinpoint in the phenomenological analysis of sharing as related to everyday experiences. With specific reference to the framework of phenomenological methods, the article will exemplify how the internal consistency of the qualitative data of the elite sport dancers’ practices and experiences present ‘real-life deviations’ (Zahavi 2005, 141), which can be used constructively to ‘help one to see variations that may not be so easy to imagine’ in the thought experiments related to eidetic variation (Gallagher 2012, 308, italics by us).

Before concentrating on the phenomenological analysis, we will therefore present our methodological approach by describing the contextualized practice of sports dancing and by accounting for how qualitative methodological analysis of this kind of contextualized
movement expertise can be used in a phenomenological analysis.

The practices of world champions in sports dance

Sports dance takes place in an overtly competitive environment and is performed according to standardized rules agreed on by national sports federations. The performance of sports dance unfolds as a competition in relation to ten kinds of couple dancing: five standard dances (waltz, quickstep, slow-foxtrot, tango and Viennese waltz) and five Latin dances (cha-cha-cha, samba, rumba, paso doble and jive). The dancers specialize in competing in either the five standard dances, the five Latin dances or all ten dances.

Bjørn Bitsch & Ashli Williamson (world champions in ten dances in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013) and Michelle Abildtrup & Martino Zanibellato (ranked among the top three in the world in 2012 in Latin dances, turning professional in 2013 and world champions in 2013 and 2014) agreed to participate in this study and all four dancers gave their consent for their names to be used in the presentation of their experiences. Both couples are also couples privately. Their training is characterized by a daily regime, the aim of which is to optimize their expertise in order to become – and continue to be – the best of experts at world level. Their life-style is composed of a mix of periods in which they travel to compete internationally and periods in which they follow a daily training regime including four to ten hours in the dance studio. These trainings are organized in sessions of physical training, several hours of training on their own as a couple, private classes with selected teachers and training sessions where they train together with other couples following the training schedule laid out by one of the teachers belonging to the club. All kinds of training have a specified focus, which is informed and directed by criteria of judgment, the couple’s aesthetic priorities and the professional strengths of their selected coaches.

In the tournaments, the sports dancers generally perform their dances together with several (six to twelve) other couples performing their dances at the same time in a restricted floor space, while the judges of the competition stand on the side. In other
words, the sports dancers train to optimize dances which are choreographed; however, the condition of the competition requests the dancers to be able to moderate and change the timings and directions of their dance to the conditions of the actual situation of the dance floor – that is, how the other couples move and take up the space of the floor. Although this is not the focus of this study, we recognize that competing as a couple in sports dance also demands an embodied understanding of the contextual premises of the competition. For example, the dancers need to understand how to take up their space of the floor and time their choreography in an optimal way so that their movements do not deliberately disturb or conflict with the movements of the other couples dancing at the same time. The dancers refer to this part of their expertise as belonging to their ‘floor craft’. The contextually related premise of the competition does not, however, reduce the dancer’s awareness of the partner’s movement. Floor craft is to be interpreted as a specific kind of expertise, which the dancers have acquired to both protect and strengthen the interaction of their dancing. The dancers’ expertise in handling the contextual premises of the competitions allows them to also widen their focus to encompass both themselves and other couples and, in that sense, to actively participate in the competition as a shared event.

**Methodology**

As presented in our introduction, Zahavi (2005) and Gallagher (2012) have argued, each in his own way, that ‘real life deviations’ (Zahavi 2005, 141) present rich sources of challenging material when we want to take further steps to specify phenomenological descriptions. Despite differences (i.e. how they have achieved their knowledge of the case), when Merleau-Ponty uses the Schneider case (1962, 102 ff.) and Gallagher uses the Waterman case (2005, chap. 2) for their phenomenological analysis of perceptual processes and the role of proprioception for the body-schema, respectively, they both exemplify how the
phenomenologist turns to use cases of bodily and mental dysfunctions to develop phenomenological descriptions. Until recently, the phenomenological involvement in ‘real life deviations’ has primarily been focused on exceptional states of disorders (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Gallagher 2012). In the present study, we focus on exceptional states of expertise in sports dance. That is, we turn to cases in which body and movements are central to the awareness and sensation of the body-subject. Quite contrary to everyday life, the moving body is not ‘absent’ in the experiences of these movement experts. Rather, for the elite athletes and professional dancers, who are constantly striving to improve their technique, there is nothing more important than the moving body at hand (Montero 2010). On the one hand, the sports dancers thereby present a case of practice that offers special opportunities to flesh out how movement can be experienced and handled. On the other hand, this special case does not offer insights that can be generalised to everyday life immediately. Still, and comparable to the strength of what the case study as a research design can add to current theories (Stake 1995), the phenomenological analysis of the very special case of movement expertise presents a way to challenge and indicate further aspects to be aware of in the phenomenological descriptions of shared experiences.

As has already been thoroughly discussed and emphasized by several phenomenologists, when aiming at using qualitative interviews for phenomenological analysis, we have to take care that we generate descriptions of the dancers’ lived experiences rather than explanations or opinions (e.g. Gallagher and Francesconi 2012; Høffding and Martiny 2015). However, we further argue that bringing the characteristics of the expertise of movement experts to light demands thorough care and critical awareness that the researcher aims at generating descriptions on the premises of their expertise competences. That is, methodologically we are to confront the challenge of generating descriptions of the contextualised competences of these movement experts. In line with Ravn’s preceding analyses of embodied experiences central to different kinds of deliberate movement
practices, we argue that the phenomenologist ought to have knowledge of the practice itself by involving observation (Legrand and Ravn 2009; Ravn and Hansen 2013; Ravn and Christensen 2014). The researcher’s second- and third-person perspectives related to observations and informal conversations form a practice-based ground for using words and sayings that are an implicit part of the practitioners’ expertise during the formal interview situations. Observations can thus be used to constructively focus on generating rich descriptions of the dancers’ experiences on the condition of experts’ lived experiences.

A heightened embodied awareness is often highlighted as distinctive for dancers’ expertise (e.g. Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 2012). Although we agree on this point, we want to emphasize that having a heightened embodied awareness should not be misunderstood as if all dancers tap into the same kind of embodied insights (e.g. Rothfield 2005; Potter 2008). Ravn has a background in elite sports (rhythmic sports gymnastics) and professional dance herself and her embodied competences obviously influenced her observations of the sport dancers’ practices. A certain kind of embodied resonance in relation to sports dancers’ ways of training their body and ways of being aware of their bodily sensations guided her observations and approach to follow the sports dancers’ experiences. However, at the same time, it was a central feature of Ravn’s involvement in the observations and interviews that she also self-critically questioned and re-questioned which kind of embodied involvement, sensations, etc., she thought she related to in the dancers’ practices so as not to blindly transfer her own first-person experiences of dancing to the sports dancers’ practices (Ravn and Hansen 2013; Ravn 2016). As a situation of communication, the interview presents a specific kind of encounter in which the movement expert will ‘recall’ experiences on the premises of the interview situation (Ravn and Hansen 2013). At the same time, experience is embodied and enacted in the world together with other experiencing subjects (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 354–62; Zahavi 2015). It is neither a ‘thing’, nor a specific kind of stockpile hidden inside the head or the body to which we can
retrospectively return in a straightforward manner. This means, as Høffding and Martiny (2015) have recently emphasized, that in the encounter of the interview experience becomes an unfolding process constituted by loops of memory, reflection, descriptions and questioning. Within a training session, elite athletes often include different kinds of training together with the related variations in how they focus their sensorial awareness. This was also the case with the sports dancers. Observational descriptions of how they structured their training sessions thereby presented a relevant outline for the interview, inviting descriptions to become an unfolding process on the condition of the dancers’ daily routines. During the interview sessions, observations from practice were used to elicit still further descriptions of their experiences.

In the succeeding analysis of the transcribed interviews and observational notes, central themes of the dancers’ experiences were identified by performing an explorative analysis based on the validity criteria of qualitative research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). These different themes were then organized into groups that appeared to concern the same aspect of the practitioners’ experience (van Manen 1990; Allen-Collinson 2009). A group of themes thereby implicitly presented a possible pattern of the dancers’ experiences. The groupings of the themes were based on several readings, re-questioning the identified themes as well as if themes belonged in the same group of themes. It is worth emphasizing that the themes mirror the emic characteristic of the explorative analysis and relate directly to the dancers’ way of describing their experiences. That is, the themes do not at this point reflect phenomenological descriptions. In other words, the invariant aspects of phenomenological interest are not directly expressed in the descriptions presented in the interviews. Interviewing the sports dancers about how they train to optimize their performance, what is in focus of their awareness when training and how they sense their own movement versus the movement of their partner does not in itself present phenomenological clarifications of sharing and reciprocity. Rather, it is in the following part of the analytical process, involving phenomenological descriptions of the underlying structures of our experiences, that the content of the dancers’ experiences might point to structural
invariants. Drawing on especially Froese and Gallagher’s (2010) point that empirical data of real cases present factual variations that can be used for phenomenological analysis, we thereby, in the words of Høffding and Martiny, use ‘the content, given through the lens of the eidetic variation, [to] point[s] to invariants that are structural’ (2015).

Over a period of 2 months (in 2010), Ravn followed the two Danish couples (Bjørn & Ashli and Michelle & Martino) in their daily training. During the period of observation, both couples were part of the Danish training environment of elite athletes and connected to the national training centre of sports dance. In total, Ravn followed the training of each of the couples for 5 to 7 days and performed two interviews with each of the couples – each interview lasting about an hour. As already indicated in our methodological considerations, the interview guides were prepared separately for each couple so that themes and questions closely resembled and took off in the practice observed. Furthermore, during the interviews, Ravn aimed at letting the dancers’ practices and experiences structure the interview in a way, which resembled a non-directive form of interviewing (e.g. Thorpe 2012). In this process, characteristics of the different kinds of dances were used to invite for further and still richer descriptions of the dancers’ sensorial awareness. As was noted during observations, the sports dancers use a rich and very nuanced vocabulary to denote specific qualitative aspects of their movement. The wording used to qualify their training depended on the situation, which kind of dances (Latin or ballroom) as well as which coach the dancers were working with. During the interviews, the dancers were specifically asked to exemplify and further describe how the different wordings of the qualities of movements related to their actual practices.

The central group of emic themes, which were used to organize the generated data, amounts to: the dancers’ sensorial awareness of their own bodies; the dancers’ sensorial awareness of forming a couple; and the dancers’ ‘inner’ sensations versus the ‘outer’ visible shape of their movements. In close cooperation, we (He and Ravn) employed these themes, alone and grouped, in a further analysis to identify ‘within case generalisations’ (Stake 1995, 7) and thereby the internal consistency of possible structures underlying the dancers’
descriptions. In this latter phase, we also returned to re-reading the observations and interviews to critically constructively (re-)explore if themes as well as the internal consistency of the structure identified across the emic themes reflected the contextualized experiences of the dancers.

In the succeeding phenomenological analysis, we have taken great care to present the concepts used by the dancers during practice as quotations to distinguish these practice-embedded wordings from phenomenological concepts related to descriptions of sharing and reciprocity.

**Two flows of movement meet**

In the dance training, the practices of both Michelle & Martino and Ashli & Bjørn are focused on refining and specifying *what* their choreographies are to be like (which kind of steps are to be combined and which body parts are to be moved) and – especially – *how* these choreographed movements are to be performed. The dancers’ practices and ways of talking about their movement when training generally relate to the *technique* of the dance and the *quality* of their movement, respectively. Accordingly, across the emic themes, the technique and the quality of movement present a certain structure of how the dancers focus on their movement when practicing.

When working on technical aspects, the dancers primarily focus on optimizing their skills and making the choreography precise. When asked to describe this, they will, for example, talk about the ‘shaping’ and ‘timing’ of their movement. In concrete practice, they will work on shaping a certain flow of movement from one body part to the other. For instance by pushing into the floor, using their legs, they will let the reaction of the push continue up through their various body parts and effect the upper-body and arm movement in a controlled way so that the step performed appears accentuated and sharp
– or soft – depending on the aesthetics and technique characterizing the specific dance. To a large extent, technical aspects like these rely on feedback concerning how the movement looks in the mirror, on camera or in the eyes of the trainer.

When focusing on the qualitative aspects, the dancers refer to the embodied feeling of each step of their movement and their sensorial awareness of forming a couple. Compared to focusing on the technique and choreographical precision of movement, these qualitative aspects to a large extent relate to the internalized sensations of their movements. For instance, in the rumba, both Michelle & Martino and Ashli & Bjørn emphasize that this dance is very much about a feeling of intimacy. During the dancers’ daily training, the qualitative aspects are always developed along with the technical aspects of movement and the dancers’ focus during practice constantly shifts between these two aspects.

In the following, we firstly analyse how the shared intentionality of dancing together in elite sports dance presents a specific case of a joint project. Subsequently, we focus on analysing the phenomenological themes of coordination and connection. As will be clear in the analyses, the phenomenological themes of coordination and connection each in their way relates to the technical and qualitative aspects of the dancers’ experiences of dancing together, respectively. Obviously, the technical and qualitative aspects are naturally intertwined in the dancing. In the following sections, we separate them for analytic purposes.

**Shared intentionality within a joint project**

It is not unusual that sports dancers find their dance partner across borders within the community of international sports dancers. The criteria for finding the right partner are manifold and involve considerations concerning ambition and engagement in the practice, the level and style of how they dance, and how the two dancers fit together body-wise. While the latter two aspects seem to be something the coaches can spot on the
distance, the first aspect concerning ambition, which is crucial for the dancers' decision, are primarily tested when meeting and trying out dancing together.

When describing their first try-out together, Bjørn & Ashli indicate that it was crucial for their choice that they found a partner who shared their ambitions and engagement and that the rest of the criteria could be worked if they both aimed at doing it. Bjørn explains:

‘The first time we danced together...that was not good at all. I really felt, and we both felt it that way, it was terrible. And our coach was there, and he said, ‘yeah, yeah, it looks good. Don't bother about how it feels’.’

Bjørn continues to describe how he felt really challenged dancing with a partner much lower in height:

‘Latin was okay concerning feeling, but in the ballroom dances – because of the difference in height – I simply felt my arms should be held so low. And she was three heads lower than me and that was just wrong. Cause I really care about that my arms are placed properly, and they could not do that very well. That is, not in the first amount of time we practiced. I mean, it was not fantastic.’

Ashli continues to explain:

‘We just don’t fit to each other [body-wise], but we wanted to dance together, so we had to make it work.’

For both Bjørn and Ashli, the shared intention of becoming the best of experts at world level is central to their motivation to actively engage in the joint dancing project. They decided to become a couple based on each dancer’s commitment and ability to pursue the same goals – despite their difference in height. The example thereby illustrates how
the dancer’s intention and movement are shaped by the physical circumstances as well as the contextual premises of elite sports dance.

Most accounts of acting together presuppose a sharedness of intention. Some understand the shared intentionality as a form of joint commitment (Gilbert 2009, 2013), others as a mental state adopted by an irreducible plural subject (Schmid 2009, 2014). Some conceive it to be construed out of a sophisticated level of mindreading ability, either as states with a collective mental mode (Searle 1990, 1999) or as states that are constituted by allocentric representation of goals (Tummolini 2014). In a co-authored paper, Zahavi recognizes that what has often been neglected is the possibility that shared intentionality may come in varieties (Zahavi and Satne 2015). Indebted to the contribution of Tomasello’s investigation of shared intentionality (Tomasello 2014), Zahavi distinguishes two forms of shared intentionality. A first form involves small- scale collaboration and communication. This form of shared intentionality is second- personal: a direct engagement of ‘I’ and ‘you’. It involves a short-lived dyadic relation between two specific individuals. Another form of shared intentionality refers to large-scale collaboration and communication. This form of intentionality is based on a common cultural ground and may involve all members of the cultural group that go beyond the here and now (Tomasello 2014; Zahavi and Satne 2015).

Exhausting the varieties of shared intentionality is beyond the intention of this paper. However, the kind of shared intentionality we find in expert sports dance testifies to the existence of a special kind of small-scaled shared intentionality overlooked by Zahavi in his descriptions. As we will unfold in the following, the sports dancers present a kind of small-scale shared intentionality, which is not shortly-lived, but characterized by its age-long relation between the two dancers – training and living together day and night.

To begin with, we argue that the shared intentionality of the elite sports dancers involves a triadic structure. What is essential to shared intentionality, in Zahavi’s theory,
is a dyadic structure that holds an ‘I’ and a particular ‘you’ (Zahavi 2014, 2015). He explicates that there cannot be a single ‘you’, but has to be at least two. Both participants are aware of being directed by the other in a ‘relationship of mutual address’ (Zahavi and Satne 2015, 310). As exemplified by the story of Bjørn & Ashli, the dancers individually intend that they – as a ‘we’ – are going to dance together and that dancing together includes intensive deliberate training of how they share the dance movement. Bjørn & Ashli participate equally in forming and maintaining the intentionality. However, in this case, the shared intentionality of dancing together not only entails a dyadic relation, but also various measures of deliberation and planning striving for the goal of becoming the best in the world.

By moving together, each dancer’s primary intention is concerned with the other’s movement and with performing the joint dance. They enter the partnership of dancing together with a specific aim: to perform the dance successfully. The encounter is set and deliberately structured by their dedicated engagement. This kind of small-scale shared intentionality not only involves a dyadic relation between two specific individuals, but presents a triadic structure of an ‘I-you-joint project’.

Secondly, we argue that the dancers’ practices testify that a shared intentionality cannot be reduced to a complex of personal inner mental states, but involves the movement of the subjects. According to Bratman (2007, 2009), an intention is intrinsically attached to each person’s ability to pursue a goal. He points out that a shared intentionality has three characteristics: (i) interpersonal coordination of action; (ii) planning in the pursuit of joint action; and (iii) structuring of related negotiation and deliberation concerning how to act together (Bratman 1993; Tummolini 2014). The idea is that ‘you’ and ‘I’ should partake in the shared intentionality if there is something that each of us individually intends us to perform together.

In line with Bratman, we recognize the entanglement of shared intentionality and joint project. The shared intentionality is quite transparent and specified by the context and the
rules of the shared project. In this case of expertise, the performance of dancing requires that each sports dancer deliberately relate to a web of interdependent and interlocked intentions and movements. The shared intentionality necessarily relates to the way different trainings and performances are supposed to unfold, and to the way sub-plans of each of the dancers should combine – as indeed exemplified in Bjørn’s and Ashli’s descriptions of what was important for them when committing to form a couple. Yet, Bratman identifies an intention with a complex of personal mental states that *precedes* the joint action and ‘plays a particular set of *roles* in a cognitive system’ (Tummolini 2014, 77, italics by the author). In his account, the shared intentionality is prior to any form of interaction. The case of sports dancers specifically testifies that their shared intentionality does not mean anything until they move. They can only deal with both the technical and the qualitative aspects of their dancing by moving. It is the dynamic movement of partners which allows for intention and meaning to be presented. The sports dancers thereby point to what Bratman tends to ignore, namely that shared intentionality is actualized by the movement of the involved subjects.

Thirdly, the case of sports dance exemplifies that a shared intentionality plays a specific guiding, coordinating and organizing role in the joint mode of the dancers’ deliberate practice. Bratman (2009) and Tummolini (2014) both identify three norms of instrumental rationality that are implicitly accepted by an agent: consistency, agglomeration and stability. This is also the case for elite sports dancers. On the one hand, the overall intentionality of dancing together and training together is supposed to be coherent with the dancers’ other beliefs. On the other hand, the dancers should be able to consistently agglomerate their intentions of specific targeted training into their overall beliefs. Furthermore, the shared intentionality should be relatively stable over time and involve resistance to failures and challenges. The appeal to these norms allows the shared intentionality to differ from other mental states, like goals or desires. For instance, ordinary goals are not necessarily consistent with each other. The three norms of
rationality conform to a general consistency and fulfil the guiding, coordination and organizing roles of the shared intentionality in sports dance (see Tummolini 2014, 81–3, for a detailed discussion). In the case of sports dance, the structuring (and re-structuring) of movement constrains the shared intentionality and contributes to its specific content. The case of sports dancers is thereby relevant as a reminder that the intentionality of movement is also somehow to be presented in a performative mode when dancing – and, expectedly, when involving in other kinds of shared experience.

To briefly summarize, the sports dancers exemplify a specific kind of shared intentionality, which involves a triadic structure and is realized not only in, but also because of movement. Having an intention to dance together is not in itself enough for settling on a way to achieve it. The sports dancers indicate that, in order to successfully fulfil their intentions and achieving their overall goal, the deliberate engagement in how to ‘make it work’ requires both ambitious commitment in relation to the joint project and extended practice. Throughout their practices, the shared intentionality is directly affected by moving together.

*Coordinating the flows of movement*

In a physical sense, sports dance is all about how to couple two separate dynamic flows of movements. An elite sports dancer is not only able to perform movements precisely, but also able to *coordinate* her movement with her partner in a coherent and continuous manner.

For example, Martino describes, how he uses ‘body-weight’ to coordinate his movements with Michelle’s movements. In his own words:

‘For me it’s very important, that she feels all the body-weight that I’m using, because then she feels how much I want to get out of the step. And that’s what I always ask her, to make me feel where she is, at all time. So I can tune in with her body-weight.’
In this sense, Martino coordinates the dynamic flow of their movements from an embodied awareness, which extends beyond the physicality of his own body to include his partner’s body. In this brief description, he exemplifies that the distribution and balance of weight when dancing together is a shared affair and that this shared affair also forms a constant point of reference for the coordination. At the same time, the dancers deliberately shift their focus during practice between being directed at the coordination of the movement of their own body and being directed at the coordination of their movement as a couple. For example, in a group session focused on training the turning technique in the Viennese waltz, Bjørn & Ashli specifically focus on adjusting how their step backwards has a clear backwards direction and does not ‘swing’ and change direction during the movement. As part of the training, they dance the movement on their own before dancing the turn together to check how this adjustment feels like when dancing together, specifically how the clarification of the direction of the backward step creates space for the partner’s movement.

At other times, during training, when working with a teacher, it is usual that the teacher takes over the role of one of the dancers to better sense what needs to be corrected or to impose a certain change in the way the partner holds or uses her body as part of the movement they share in the dancing. For example, Bjørn has just tried out dancing a waltz with another dancer, who is a former world champion and now works as a teacher. Bjørn describes for Ashli:

‘She shapes in the same way [as you] but all the time she places her centre ‘in’... She is more constant in the stretch and I can feel it all from her centre. And then – there is kind of more resistance in her feet. That might be why it all feels lighter.’

Ashli: ‘hmmm mmm.’
They try to dance a waltz together. Bjørn: ‘f**k that was good...^

Ashli: ‘yes, it was so much better.’

The latter two examples indicate that the sports dancers train and nurse the bi-directed characteristics of their coordination by being physically aware of how they create space for each other’s movement as well as how the coordination of movement might be adjusted to change the flow of movement between bodies. Even when practicing alone, and Ashli’s movement is thus not part of Bjørn’s reflection, Bjørn’s movement is performed with the implicit aim of optimizing his coordination with Ashli. In other words, even though Ashli is not bodily present in Bjørn’s movement, she may still shape his dancing experience in the lived presence and vice versa. Also, in the phase of dancing the waltzing turns together, Ashli’s steps might be the theme of his focus, but at the same time Bjørn might also be implicitly aware of the accuracy of his own movement. For example, when they check how the adjustment of their turn in waltzing feels like when dancing together, at the same time, Bjørn will be very aware that he does not let go of his posture.

During the interviews, both couples also emphasize how they move together in a ‘protected space’. When competing, they have to move around in a space filled with other couples. Referring to their expertise in ‘floor crafting’, Martino & Michelle describe that they move together ‘in a small box’, the small box simultaneously moving around ‘in a big box’ that is full of other couples. The male dancer protects the space of the couple (the small box) and, at the same time, the two dancers inhabit this space in a shared way. That is, the embodied expertise of being a sports dancer also includes the ability to actively be part of and contribute to shaping this ‘shared space’ of their dancing.

The interviewed dancers’ descriptions bring to the fore that the idea of coordination is to optimize the way movements flow from the one part of the body to another and continue to form part of the partner’s movement. The process of coordination always
includes adjustments, attunements, etc. through time and space, in relation to their partner as well as to the actual contextual setting. In this sense, the variations in how this flow unfolds are jointly constructed by the participants and the contextual setting. It evolves through their deliberate training and is nursed also by the dancers' experiences of breakdowns in the coordination.

De Jaegher and Di Paolo define coordination as a 'non-accidental correlation between the behaviours of two or more systems that are in sustained coupling...' (2007, 470) For instance, two pendulum clocks synchronize their oscillation and the individual flashing behaviour of fireflies synchronize at the group level. Based on the dynamical systems theory, they provide an understanding of the irreducible on-going interactions between two embodied subjects unfolding in the processes of coordination. According to De Jaegher and Di Paolo, Bit [coordination] allows us to view interactions as processes extended in time with a rich structure that is only apparent at the relational level of collective dynamics (Ibid, 490). The sports dancers clearly exemplify De Jaegher and Di Paolo's description of how coordination is based on both the continuity of two separated flows of movement and the differentiation between these two. Fuchs and De Jaegher specify that Bit is the continuous fluctuation between synchronized, desynchronized and in-between states that drives the process forward. The to-and-fro between attunement and alienation is necessary in order to understand each other without melting into each other (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 471). In that sense, coordination is not so much about the resemblance of movement as about the co-constitution of a dynamical interplay.

With regard to this latter aspect of the process of coordination, it is central to emphasize that, in their practices of training, the sports dancers not only illustrate these co-constitutional conditions of coordination, they also indicate that they deliberately shift between focusing their awareness on their own individualized movement and the sharedness created by focusing their awareness on a sense of movement extending beyond the boundaries of their own body. To optimize the turns in their waltzing, they
strategically use their sensorial awareness to focus on various aspects of the movement flow.

Bearing in mind the sports dancers’ way of coping deliberately with space to optimize their dancing, we find, however, that De Jaegher and Di Paolo’s account tends to primarily focus on the temporal patterns of the interaction dynamics. That is, the space afforded by the settings is only implicitly presented in their work by, for example, referring to environmental constraints. In comparison, the sports dancers clearly indicate that the mutual coordination of movement also involves the deliberate shaping of a shared space. The relatively passive constraints of, for example, the size and the possibly slippery surface of the floor are obviously important to the shaping of their space. However, the movement of other dancers and the specific character of the music played dynamically interfere and possibly challenge the shared space created. In other words, the space afforded by the contextual setting is itself also part of a dynamic process. ‘Shaping a shared space’ needs to be actively taken care of to succeed in coordinating the flow of their movements in an optimal way.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty discerns two dialectical dimensions of spatiality: objective space and bodily space. An objective space refers to the spatiality of positions, while a bodily space refers to the spatiality of the situation (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 115–6). In the case of sports dance, when partners are engaged in an athletic situation, the performance of the joint dancing project not only displays objective spatiality, such as front and back, right and left, etc., but also displays bodily spatiality that indicates the concrete relational openness between one partner, the other partner and the situation. For example, controlling a foot rotation and strategizing on how to shift the body-weight present movement processes that are laid out across the space from the perspective of how the partner is positioned. In this sense, the process of coordination is always connecting the space created between the two dancers and the defined space in the context of competition. The spatiality created and shared by the two dancers allows both
of them to access a ‘familiar’ situation that they get through together. It implies a ‘we’ that makes a direct reference to the surrounding world.

The case of sports dance illustrates that coordination is about optimizing the way movements flow from the one part of the body to another and to the partner’s body, the sense of movement flow thus extending beyond the physical boundaries of the dancer’s own body. The resulting ‘relational dynamics of coordination’ (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007) and Bright balance between self and other (Zahavi 2015, 93) can be plotted out, trained deliberately and used strategically to optimize their dancing. The sports dancers furthermore indicate that the relational domain of their dancing demands them to actively include the shaping of space and thereby reminds us that the relational dynamics of coordination is also a spatial matter.

**Shaping the connection**

In the interviews, Michelle & Martino and Ashli & Bjørn specify their focus on the quality of their movement as related to, for example, the ‘musicality’, the ‘intentions’ and the implicit ‘story lines’ of each step in the choreography of a dance. However, and more importantly, throughout the sessions focused on the quality of their movement the dancers specifically comment on whether they feel connected and whether ‘there is connection’ when dancing together. Michelle, for example, describes:

‘And I think what we have learned to understand through the connection, is that a lot of time when you work on connection, you think about push or pull the arm. But I think that through the years we have learned, that it’s actually more about his body and my body, and then the connection should happen a little bit by itself so if I’m right connected, and he is connected, then we should be connected.’

At another time during one of the interviews, Michelle explains how her awareness of the connection involves a bodily feeling of Martino’s body:
‘But... yeah of course my arm would end in the connection. My body would end in the connecting arm, but I can still feel his hip for example.’

Michelle also refers to ‘connection’ to describe her sense of how a dynamic force is taking hold of her within the entanglement of their body movements. That is, she emphasizes that they also work with their sense of being connected by thinking that the connection has to be constant:

‘That it cannot break, that there always need to be like...we often call it vacuum. There needs to be this feeling of constant touch.’

In the interview, Martino supplements Michelle’s descriptions by further explaining how they strategically shape the connection by deliberately turning to a feeling of body weight. In relation to the coordination of the physical flow of movement (section 2.2), Martino described that he ‘tuned in’ with Michelle’s body weight. However, when turning to the description of the connection, it seems that there is more to the sense of body weight than the physical aspect related to keeping the balance:

‘[The feeling of connection] is related to our body-weight, your partner’s body-weight. So if she has too much body-weight, she might go out of balance. And my body-weight would change, because...I need to have body-weight to balance her. And that’s how the connection changed. But what is important is this constant change of body-weight, makes connection fluid’ (italics by us).

The sports dancers’ descriptions of connections emphasize that the experiential sharing in question amounts to more than mere reciprocal bodily motility. For it to be a case of sharing, it also has to involve an element of reciprocal affectivity. In the process of the relational interplay of dancers, the feeling of connection plays an important role, not only
in maintaining reciprocal engagement, but also in actively (re-)working and (re-)shaping their movements. This is why it makes perfect sense for the sports dancers to articulate the experience of shared dancing using the pronoun ‘we’: ‘we should be connected’. To become part of a ‘we’, for professional dancers, reciprocity has to involve their *blended bodily feelings* of forming, metaphorically speaking, a shared body of four legs.

Obviously, this notion demands further elaboration. Some of the insights can be found in classical phenomenology. A good example is Stern’s notion of ‘vitality affects’ (1985, 53–60). Stern uses this concept to refer to the bodily feeling imbued with affective qualities in the dynamic interaction of infant-caretaker. He points out that the intensive displays of facial, vocal and bodily movement give rise to a shared affective experience of infant and caretaker.

Working on their connection, the sports dancers focus on a mutual modification of their movement. So, for example, if the sports dancers feel they receive ambiguous feedback about their connection in their choreographed version of the dance, they will ‘go back’ and work on the basic steps characterizing the specific dance until the connection feels right again. As movement experts, the dancers deliberately shape the affective quality through the subtle modification of bodily dynamics, such as body-weight, muscular tension and resistance. With reference to Stern’s notion of *vitality affects*, the case of sports dance highlights the primordiality of bodily movement for affective quality. For the sports dancers, the relational dynamic of bodily movement creates and constitutes their experience of affective connection.

Drawing on the enactive phenomenological approach, Colombetti (2015) argues that affectivity can be extended via the integration of non-organic mediation items. Taking the example of a jazz musician, a sad saxophonist playing a sad tune on his own, Colombetti claims that, as the musician plays, the saxophone becomes integrated within the “adaptive autonomous organization of a new, high-order composite system constituted by the musician and his instrument” (2015, 9). The sad tune both derives from and contributes to
the saxophonist’s feeling of sadness. In the words of Colombetti, his particular emotional state is underpinned by ‘hybrid processes involving organic and non-organic elements’ (Ibid, 1).

Compared to Colombetti’s case of the jazz musician, the case of sports dance presents an intensive example of affective bound dynamics. It exemplifies how the constitutive part of an affective state can be another ‘organism’, rather than a ‘non-organic element’. As one dancer couples her movement with her partner’s, two cycles of bodily feeling become intertwined. One sports dancer’s bodily feeling extends onto the partner and vice versa. Importantly, these intertwined bodily feelings continuously feed back into each of the dancers’ bodily feeling, inducing a kind of blended affectivity.

The sports dancers thereby exemplify that a feeling of connection is ‘primarily a shared state that we experience through interbodily affection’ (Fuchs and Koch 2014). Rather than entailing a metaphysical fusion, what we want to emphasize here is the fact that two flows of movement are interlocked to such an extent (both physically and experientially) that each of the sports dancers’ experience is dynamically shaped by the relational entanglement. The sports dancers furthermore demonstrate that this feeling of connection can be reflectively grasped and deliberately worked on by modifying the subtle dynamic of moving together.

**Conclusion: sharing by moving**

In agreement with Zahavi’s resent work on reciprocity, our analysis of the elite sports dancers’ practice emphasized the bi-directed nature of experiential sharing. Furthermore, we have contributed to Zahavi’s on-going endeavour as the case of sports dance revealed that reciprocity can be perceived as an active affair of the dancers’ expert competence – and that movement is key to how reciprocity is dynamically shaped by the dancers during their practices.
The shared intentionality we found in the case of elite sports dance testified to the existence of a special kind of shared intentionality that involved a triadic structure of an ‘I-you-joint project’. Within this structure, shared intentionality was realized not only in, but also because of movement. That is, the sports dancers reflectively grasped and worked on reciprocity through the coordination of their movement and their feeling of connection. While the former way of working reciprocity concerns the attunement of bodily motility, the latter way concerns how the sports dancers shape the blended bodily affectivity when moving together. In this sense, the sports dancers denoted how moving together can form a practical way of understanding each other.

As discussed in our methodological considerations, the experiences of experts who deliberately explore and push their bodily potentials to the limit cannot be applied to everyday experiences of sharing just like that. Still, the experiences of sports dance world champions cannot be totally alien to the experiences of non-body-experts moving together. While acknowledging that the experiential aspects of the sports dancers’ experiences cannot be straightforwardly generalized, such experiences must somehow arise from and thereby possibly underline a structure of experience that is there before the dance, allowing the shared dance to happen. Accordingly, we take the sports dancers’ expertise in sharing to be a possible ‘high-lighter of what is paradigmatically in the shadow’ of our everyday experiences (Legrand and Ravn 2009, 394).

Resembling scientific discussions of how a case study can contribute to develop theoretical insights (e.g. Stake 1995; Flyvbjerg 2011), this study of an exceptional case of expertise shows that reciprocity can be deliberately trained and presents an example of how movement can be fundamental to the reciprocity of shared experience. That is, the special case of sports dance reveals how reciprocity can be dynamically shaped through the mutual coordination and the affective bound dynamics of movement.
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Notes

1 Experiential sharing is one type of sharing. It is specifically characterized by being bound to a pair of individuals of the here and now.

2 Tango in sports dance is different from Argentinean tango, in terms of its dance steps, physical carriage and the relationship of movement to music.

3 As discussed by, for example, Leder 1990.

4 In accordance with ethnographical considerations, we use the term ‘emic’ to emphasize that the empirical data are organized according to significant indigenous themes and categories. Similarly, the term ‘etic’ is used to indicate that data are organized according to themes and categories reflecting the analyst’s theoretical ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 194).

5 See also Høffding and Martiny (2015) for an in-depth discussion on this methodological stance – and how it can be understood as if performing an analysis running in two tiers.

6 It should be remembered that the themes – here the description of ‘inner versus outer’ – first of all presents the dancers’ way of describing part of their practice.

7 The word ‘flow’ is here used to refer to how body limbs can form part of a successive row of movement. Descriptions are based on observational notes.

8 In the article ‘You, me and we, the sharing of emotional experience’, Zahavi recognizes that: ‘Whereas the you-me relation can be dyadic, the we often involves a triadic structure, where the focus is on a shared object or project’ (2015, 96). Zahavi does not elaborate on this idea, since what has been highlighted by him is how the ‘you-me’ dyadic experience precedes and retains in emotional sharing. In the case of couple dancing, the triadic structure can be further developed in a way that goes beyond Zahavi’s descriptions.
In a later paper, Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) further specify the concept of coordination distinguishing between ‘coordination with’ and ‘coordination to’. Coordination with entails co-regulation and is interactively achieved. In contrast, coordination to is uni-directed and refers to one just following the lead of the other. In the context of elite sports dance, the concept of ‘coordination’ is used in the sense of coordination with.

The dynamical systems theory (DST) is a mathematical framework that uses differential equations to describe how the behaviour of a system, or of coupled systems, evolves over time.

Over the years, Colombetti (2014, 2015) has argued that affectivity is a primordial capacity of our being in the world. She further describes that affectivity is displayed as emotions, moods and motivational states (such as desires, needs, fatigue, pain). For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the emotional aspects of affectivity and in particular on the emotional bond of two interactants.

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