How to explore dancers’ sense experiences? A study of how multi-sited fieldwork and phenomenology can be combined

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ABSTRACT
In this article, we deal with how sense experiences can be described and analysed in movement activities such as dance. We present a methodological framework of how multi-sited fieldwork and phenomenology can be combined to explore on-going constitutive processes of subjects’ sense experiences. The challenge of how to employ phenomenology in relation to a fieldwork based on particular and subjective experiences is constructively related to phenomenological discussions of the content versus the structure of experience. Phenomenology as a philosophical enterprise is subsequently linked to concrete methodological challenges, by presenting and discussing how, in a specific study, we handle the ‘in practise’ sense experiences of different dancers. Being a dancer herself, the first author included her embodied competence when performing the fieldwork. The body thereby became both the researcher’s tool and the subject to be investigated. The comparative structure implicit to performing a multi-sited fieldwork was used to build a creative tension between the researcher’s and the dancers’ experiences. Two descriptions of dancers’ sense experiences are presented. They exemplify how the dancers turn to an overall sense of how the body feels in preference to working with specific modalities of sensing. Furthermore, the dancers’ sensing of the physicality of their moving bodies appears to be shaped by their unique intention is at the same time given form through their interactions with other dancers.

Keywords: philosophy; qualitative methodologies; participant observation; subjectivity; researcher positions

Introduction
Sensing is central to our practical experiences of learning and employing physical skills and techniques. As framed by sports sociologist, Andrew Sparkes, there is an obvious logic in claiming that ‘people’s knowledge of themselves, others and the world they inhabit is inextricably linked to the senses’ (2009, pp. 23–24). In his discussions of challenges and possibilities in sensing in sports, Sparkes brings forth how this statement is at once complex and problematic. The senses and sensing are by no means biological constants and how the senses become linked to experience and knowledge is a complex
affair (Ibid.). Anthropologists have strongly argued that preferences in the use of the senses and the way people make meaning of sense experiences constitute elements of socialising processes and are to be understood as intrinsically situated, both culturally and historically (Howes 1991, 2003, 2005, Classen 1997, Ingold 2000, p. 243ff.). Anthropologists such as Pink (2009) and Hsu (2008) have brought forth argumentation that the sensuous and sensing body is to be understood as the most fundamental domain of cultural expression and deserves serious attention in the analysis of the body and of societies. In line with these arguments, as well as Sparkes’ discussions, we concur that ‘sensual aspects of the field’ present very meaningful data. However, the aim of elaborating on these ‘sensorial aspects’ also presents some methodological challenges, in relation to how the researcher becomes related in an embodied fashion to the interactions and the situatedness of the fieldwork (Hastrup 1995, Coffey 1999). Firstly, elaborating on sensorial aspects encourages researchers to clarify the methods in use when focusing on such ‘inner realms’ of the experiences of subjects (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). This is particularly the case in terms of ways in which theoretical clarifications concerning the subjective and inner realms of experiences might inform the process of generating and analysing data. Secondly, a number of anthropologists agree that, such in depth explorations on sense experiences challenges the way in which the embodied experiences of the fieldworkers can inform the generation of ‘data’ (Csordas 1990, Coffey 1999, Ingold 2000, Pink 2009).

Concerning the first of these methodological challenges, the researcher has to face the complex process of how senses and sensing come into being for the subject. That is, how senses and sensing become constituted1 in the athlete’s experience and form the backdrop for the subject’s experiential perspective of the situated moment. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007, p. 116) argue that, in order to describe and understand such embodied perspectives we need methods that are ‘truly grounded in the carnal realities
of the lived sporting bodies’. Accordingly the researcher is required to engage in phenomenological insights of the body, sensing and perception, as well as confronted the methodological challenges of explicating how phenomenology will deepen descriptions, analyses and discussions of the subject’s sense experiences. To sum up, this first challenge concerns the questions of how the fieldwork of subjective experiences, which from the outset is socialised and particular, might draw constructively on the invariant insights concerning experience described in phenomenology.

The second methodological challenge concerns the role of the researchers embodied perspective, in particular, how the researcher, when participating in the physical activities creatively constructs correspondence between her own and the others experiences (Pink 2009, pp. 36–40). In dance (Foster 1992, Thomas 2003, Claid 2006), as well as in various sports activities, such as boxing (Wacquant 2005) and capoeira (Downey 2005), it has been emphasised that the learning of a technique involves a process of incorporating certain skills and ways of moving as well as a process of shaping an inner landscape of relevant sensations and sensory awareness. As has been indicated in relation to educational processes in contemporary dance by several dance researchers, the embodied learning of the dancer specifically includes a development of a heightened awareness of his or her sense of the qualities of movement (Fortin and Seidentorp 1995, Claid 2006, Bales and Nettl-Fiol 2008, Potter 2008). Dancers are therefore expected to have trained a heightened awareness concerning their sensing of movement and body. They are in different ways trained to focus on the adjustment of muscle-tension, balance and positions of their body and to evaluate their performance of movement in relation to a felt quality of the movement, rather than basing the evaluation on measurable outcomes, as these are caused by their movement activity (Ravn 2009, pp. 6–7). As part of their training, dancers explore how movement might be initiated, directed and used for interaction and focus on how they might be in control of these same
processes (Rouhiainen 2003, Thomas 2003, p. 112, Foster 2011, p. 174 ff.) A heightened awareness concerning the sensing of the body and movement is also considered to characterise, for example, different martial arts, such as tai chi and aikido, as well as sports activities like golf and sports-dance. Being a dancer herself, the first author included her embodied competence when performing the fieldwork. This also means that the researcher’s first person perspective of sensing and movement is from the outset based on a ‘familiarity’ with the embodied activities of the field (Coffey 1999, p. 60). The challenge of constructively creating correspondence between her own and the other dancers’ experiences is therefore expected to be a question of adjusting and shaping competences rather than being a sensory apprenticeship in activities (Pink 2009, pp. 69–71).

The aim of this paper is to elaborate on how sense experiences can be described and analysed, in the face of the specific acknowledgement of meeting the two methodological challenges just described. We will pursue this aim by discussing the theoretical considerations to be taken into account when combining fieldwork with phenomenology. We will continue by presenting a methodological framework of how multi-sited fieldwork and phenomenology can be combined to explore on-going constitutive processes of subjects’ sense experiences in movement activities, such as dance. Based on the theoretical considerations and related choices, we also discuss how methodological choices are made and exemplify how data are generated and analysed. Furthermore, to highlight how the first person perspective of the researcher herself a dancer, might be used constructively in the generation of data, some key descriptions concerning dancers’ sensing of movement and the body will be presented.

Theoretical considerations
Phenomenology as philosophical enterprise

In accordance with Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions (1964, 1968, 1998/1962), we understand phenomenology as a never finished philosophical exploration of the flux that is constantly present behind our everyday mode of acting and directing ourselves and which he describes as our being-in-the-world. As he emphasises in the preface of ‘Phenomenology of Perception’ (1998/1962), a full exploration – involving a total phenomenological reduction – of the constant flux of our everyday mode of experience is impossible (Merleau-Ponty 1998/1962, p. xiv). However, the continuous attempt bears in promise an opening of an extra dimension of our experience. That is, how the subjects’ experiences are to be understood as forming part of on-going constituting processes of subjects’ being-in-the-world (Moran 2000, pp. 153–154, Zahavi 2003, p. 49). In the continuous attempt to explore and describe these processes, Merleau-Ponty highlights that the subject’s experiences take shape through complex, interacting processes of subject, body and the world. In his own words, that

the world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. The subject is a being-in-the-world. (Merleau-Ponty 1998/1962, p. 430)

In accordance with Merleau-Ponty’s explorations of the body, perception and movement (1964, 1998/1962), we consider that perception forms our basic communication with the world (1964, p. 12, 31, 1998/1962, p. x–xi, 96, 431). This means that subjects’ sense experiences, as these are described by the subjects, are based on but also at the same time considered to be alien to perception. We can never experience – and therefore never consciously sense – anything if we have not first perceived it. We cannot go behind or before our perception, because that would demand another way of perceiving. If we focus on describing senses and sensing phenomenologically, we begin by realising that ‘sensory experience is unstable and alien to natural perception, which we achieve with
our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of interacting senses’ (Merleau-
Ponty 1998/1962, p. 225). From the outset then, subjects’ descriptions of their sense
experiences present and emphasise how the sensing of the body, the environment and
others are experienced and given form in the world in a fundamentally intertwined way
(Ibid., p. 345, 430).

Generally, there seems to be agreement between researchers on the conceptual level in
the presentation of phenomenology. However, despite that researchers seem to agree
that the first person perspective of experience is not phenomenology per se, there are
very different methodological opinions on how phenomenology is to be dealt within
relation to empirical descriptions of subjective sense experiences. In the following, we
intend to follow the critical, methodological considerations presented by Gallagher and
Zahavi (2008). Firstly, this means that we understand the methodological challenge to
correct questions of interdisciplinarity in preference to be about applying
phenomenology into the process of generating data when performing fieldwork. We
begin by stating that ‘phenomenology is a philosophical enterprise; it is not an empirical
discipline’. However, this does not rule out that phenomenology can be ‘put to work’ in
experimental science (Ibid., p. 29).

This also means that we agree with Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) when they emphasise in
several ways throughout their book that researchers should be aware not to mistake
phenomenology for ‘a subjective account of experience’, but instead take
phenomenology as ‘an account of subjective experience’ (Ibid., p. 19). However, turning
from experimental science methodologies to multi-sited fieldwork, we are confronted
with the methodological challenge that, in order to make any ‘account of subjective
experience’, we have to find constructive ways of handling and going beyond the
subjective and particular accounts. In accordance with Gallagher and Zahavi’s
presentations, we suggest that we have to find methodological ways to elaborate on first
person perspectives of experiences while being concerned with the *structure* of subjects’ experience and consciousness, rather than ending up elaborating on the *content* of subjective experiences (Ibid., pp. 25–26). For example, one of the dancers described how, as part of her technique, she used seeing as a specific way of involving different body parts by ‘sending her eyes to see’ from these different body parts. She specified:

... you simply work with sending your eyes to different places. Sending them round, for example, to look in at the back of the skull. Or to look out backwards through the skull or up above your head. It is very abstract, of course, but it does actually do something to the way you physically see. It is not just a metaphor. It does something to your physical sight.

In terms of content, the dancer thereby describes how, by using this technique of seeing, she changes the quality of her movement, sense of presence and involvement with the environment. In terms of structure the dancer’s descriptions exemplify that her sense of seeing is not only related to the modality of the eyes but is to be considered an affair of the whole body; an ‘affair’ to which the dancer, through training, might purposely make changes. To put it short, if we intend to look into the structure of experiences, we will focus on how the meanings of sense experiences comes about for the subject rather than focusing on what the sense experiences means to the subject.

**Qualitative research and phenomenology**

Psychologist Finlay pragmatically suggests that in carrying out phenomenology in relation to practice based qualitative studies ‘a phenomenological method is sound if it links appropriately to some phenomenological philosophy or theory, and if its claims about method are justified and consistent’ (2009, p. 8). Finlay’s suggestion is in many ways appealing and constructive but also leaves relatively open what it means
methodologically to link appropriately. Allen-Collinson (2009) more critically discusses the promises and challenges related to working with phenomenology in relation to methodologies combining participation, observations and interviews in sports. We find her critique of some of the descriptions in ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’ (IPA) worth noting. In overall terms IPA refers to analyses that explore ‘sense-making activities of participants in relation to their own subjective experiences’ (Ibid., p. 288). Allen-Collinson brings attention to the fact that it is sometimes difficult to discern in which ways these studies ‘are actually distinguishable from qualitative research in general’ (Ibid., p. 289) and that relatively many IPA studies apparently base the phenomenologically related discussion on second-hand interpretations of the subjects’ experiences. Finally, she also discusses the methodological risk that the researcher might end up imposing meanings, categories, concepts and terminologies upon the subjects’ experiences. To realise the promises of phenomenology in relation to accounts truly grounded in the ‘flesh’ of the athlete’s body (Ibid., p. 279), Allen-Collinson’s critique indicates that we should be critically aware of how the tension between the researcher’s and the athlete’s experiences are handled constructively in the generation of descriptions. Researchers should consider and make visible throughout the methodological descriptions how they come to know of subjects’ experiences.

Turning to qualitative research in psychology and dance, phenomenology has been applied as a specific method and it has been suggested (Giorgo 1997, Stewart 2005, Finlay 2008) that researchers follow particular methodological guidelines on how they should employ their own and/or the informants’ sensing and awareness when generating data. In some of these qualitative research studies, the methodological framework requires the researcher to work with an ‘awakened attention’ to her or his bodily states (Fraleigh 1991, 2000, Stewart 1998, 2005, Stelter 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). For example, presents a seven-step model, derived from Spiegelberg’s (1994) description of ‘the’
phenomenological method. Stewart brings the seven-step model into use in his dance practises. It is Stewart’s intention thereby to surpass conceptualisations, preconceptions and personal memories when applying these methodological steps to his dance practice and to be able to move with an awakened awareness towards his movements’ direct involvement in the world. What becomes central to the methodology Stewart presents is the link between a process in which he ‘intuited phenomena by noticing patterns of motion’ in nature, moved in response to these patterns and analysed these movements by using selected parts of the Laban system for describing movement (Stewart 2005, p. 364, italics by Stewart). Along the lines of working with an awakened attention Fraleigh (1991, 2000), Stelter (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010), Engel (2006) and Winther (2009) in different ways present phenomenological methods as possible ways for athletes and dancers to shift their way of being present when training and performing. They emphasise the ‘embodied sensation of presence’ (Engel 2006, p. 113, Stelter 2006, p. 81) and the ability to shift to a non-judgemental ‘being in the present moment’ (Stelter 2008b, p. 114) as central to how phenomenology is to be used in relation to empirical investigation and intervention. They thereby implicitly come to suggest that a phenomenological method is linked to the researcher’s ability to awaken a sensitive immediacy of experience by undertaking certain shifts in their awareness. No doubt, such shifts in awareness create a difference in experience compared to how the athlete or the researcher would ‘normally’ relate to training and performance. However, as is central to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and his exploration of perception (1998/1962, pp. vii–xxi, 26) as well as Gallagher and Zahavi’s methodological discussions (2008, p. 8, 19, 21), there is no immediate way to uncover either an essence or an essential structure of experience. Trying to surpass pre-conceptions of any situation by awakening attention to bodily states does not, per se, present an essence of experience in front of us ‘right at hand’. Obviously, by entering an awakened state, the athlete or the researcher will no
doubt succeed in changing their sense of presence and immediacy in relation to their experience. Their experience of the situated moment most probably changes and will bring a new perspective to the subjects’ experiential perspective of the situation. However, following Merleau-Ponty’s and Gallagher’s and Zahavi’s discussions, this shift does not mean that the athlete or the researcher thereby succeed in either unravelling the intertwined subject and world or getting closer to their experience as experienced.

Continuing in this critical vein, dance philosopher, Rothfield (2005) and dance historian, Burt (2009) have pointed to the fact that by emphasising and fore-fronting a specific kind of sensitive immediacy of experience as a way of getting in touch with our phenomenological being-in-the-world, the researcher at the same time comes to create an implicit disjunction between an immediate and a reflective realm of experience. Further on, the researcher comes to imply a certain ‘sameness’ concerning the given activity, as if, for example, dance is to be considered a relatively ‘holistic phenomenon having an essential structure’ (Ibid., p. 46). So, in the end there is an obvious risk that, when emphasising awakened attention, presence and immediacy as important methodological strategies, the researcher ends up giving value to subjective, immediate sensations of experiences rather than showing how phenomenology can be put to work in relation to qualitative data. Following Gallagher and Zahavi’s (2008) discussions on how to employ phenomenology, the researcher thereby comes to forefront the content in preference to the structure of subjective experience.

It is central to the methodological framework we present that the phenomenologically related exploration of the dancers’ sense experiences is not approached under the assumption that phenomenological descriptions primarily require an awakened attention to one’s bodily states. Rather, we argue that accessing and exploring one’s own bodily experiences also requires the generation and analysis of data, which in a wider perspective involves oneself as the observation of one’s participation itself (Hastrup 1995,
As has been emphasised by, for example, Brinkmann et al. (2008, p. 7), the generation and analysis of qualitative data related to lived experiences are inter-related processes that should not be confused with the collection of data that is ‘out there’ and could be ‘picked up’ while the researcher remains untouched.

Based on Gallagher and Zahavi’s (2008) discussions on how phenomenology can be put to work, as well as Allen-Collinson’s (2009) critical discussion of second-hand interpretation of sense experience in IPA studies, we also argue that ‘putting phenomenology to work’ in relation to qualitative methodologies requires the researcher to actively cope with a direct involvement and a creative tension between first and second person perspectives of experiences throughout the inter-related phases of generating and analysing the data. It requires the researcher to include and handle her first person and subjective experiences and the subjective experiences of the athlete and/or dancer constructively. Further on, it also challenges her ability to create both connexion and differences between these first person perspectives and her second person perspective of sense experiences when interviewing and analysing. As will be presented in the following section, combining the researcher’s embodied competence as a dancer with a multi-sited fieldwork design represents one way of handling this methodological request of using the researcher’s first person experiences of embodied activities when generating data.

**Design**

**The professional dancers**

Nine professional dancers (four males and five females) were included in the study. They were all primarily involved in ‘Western’ artistic dance and working in performances and performance relations complementary to classical ballet. They all worked freelance, and
had solo careers on an international level. Among these nine dancers, four had many years of experience of improvised performances and two specifically dedicated their work to techniques related to Body Mind centring (BMC)\(^4\) and Butoh dance.\(^5\) It should be noted that the expertise of the professional dancers of today is often based on a bricolage of different techniques (Bales and Nettl-Fiol 2008) which the dancers have combined in eclectic ways and developed into personalised movement techniques (Ibid., pp. 31–32). On one hand, the dancers in this study share an expertise in that they are all professional dancers, yet on the other hand they also present a diversity of experiences of how the dancing body can be thought of and how training and performances are dealt with.

**The multi-sited fieldwork: observation and participation**

The data were generated over a period of 17 months (Ravn 2009, pp. 115–136) on the basis of a fieldwork including participant observations, informal as well as formal semi-structured interviews. In this retrospective presentation, the handling of the methods used appears more straightforward and linear than was the case during the actual multi-sited fieldwork and the subsequent phases of analysis. It is important to emphasise that the generation and analysis of data, should always be considered a flexible process. For example, the researcher returns to notes and interviews several times to rework the processing of descriptions and the analyses. For the sake of clarity, the methods used for the respective generation and analysis of the data are described in separate sections.

In the multi-sited design, the field ‘site’ can be viewed as ‘an intersection of people, practices and shifting terrains, both physical and virtual’ (Strauss 2000, pp. 171–172). In reality this meant that the researcher (Ravn) selectively and strategically traversed environments of professional dance within Western Europe. It also meant that, as participant-observer, Ravn did not ‘just join in’ but in an active way purposely and
selectively created the occasions for contact with the dancers (Marcus 1995, p. 113, Amit 2000, p. 15). In comparison to contacts often established in geographically located ethnographic fieldwork, contacts with the dancers were mobile and episodic. This characteristic of the fieldwork reflects the conditions under which the freelance dancers work (Rouhiainen 2003).

In his definition and discussion of the multi-sited aspects of fieldwork Marcus (1995) indicates that there are varying intensities and qualities in the different sites which end up constituting the multi-sited field. When using fieldwork to study athletes’ or dancers’ sense experiences, the body and movement are not only the means to come to describe and understand a culture of a certain movement activity. Rather, to a certain extent the body and movement become both the mean and the goal of the fieldwork. This also means that the diversities of how the body and movement are approached, experienced and thought of in the dancers’ practices becomes an implicit quality of the multi-sited design of the fieldwork. Instead of being aware of how the different intensities and qualities might define the cultural activity, the current focus on the body and movement itself invites for being aware of the differences within the multi-sited field.

In logistical terms, the study was planned and conducted over a series of one-week fieldwork periods, according to each dancer’s schedule of employment. It was performed at multiple sites – geographically located in Copenhagen, Malmo, London, Amsterdam, Vienna and Brussels. On two occasions each dancer was observed and followed actively by Ravn in their regular training and workshops. She participated in the workshops and training sessions on the same conditions as all the other dancers who had signed up for the classes.

Through her active participation, Ravn gained a particular kind of access to the dancers’ process of verbalisation and conceptualisation in direct relation to their experiences. This form of participation was motivated by the idea that the way dancers describe their body
and movement is culturally informed and framed according to contextual conditions (Denzin 1989, p. 33, Bateson 2000/1972, p. 178, 186) and by Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of how the speaking subject is ‘the subject taking up a position in the world of his meanings’ (Merleau-Ponty 1998/1962, p. 193). This meant, specifically, that notes from direct observations and participation were used in the interview situation to elicit and contextualise dancers’ descriptions as the dialogue developed. Ravn used descriptions of her second person perspective of the dancers’ movement and actions in training sessions and workshops in combination with descriptions of her own experiences – corresponding to the researcher’s first person perspective of participating in the same practice as the dancer. Specific concepts, such as, for example, ‘alignment’, ‘space’ and ‘transparency’ were only used if introduced by the dancer during the fieldwork or during the interview situation.

**Interviewing and analyses**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with each dancer at the end of each fieldwork period. The topic of the interview focused on the dancer’s personalised technique and how he/she structured his/her movement experience. Rather than containing a specific list of precise questions, the interview guide was structured according to certain themes⁶ (Kvale 2002/1994, p. 133). The interview guide was prepared individually according to each dancer’s practice. As already touched on, the dancers’ expertise included a heightened awareness of how movement is sensed as well as an ability to describe their sense experiences. It was therefore not a problem to have the dancers to articulate their sensing. So, instead of including a list of ‘sensory categories’ (Pink 2009, p. 91) the interview guide contained a list of themes related to the shared practice and the dancers were then asked to describe their sense experiences relatively freely in relation to the suggested theme. The intention was to use the
interview situation to elaborate on the dancer’s experiences in an inductive way rather than aiming to reach an expected degree of interpretation which would either confirm or counter a hypothesis (Atkinson and Coffey 2002, pp. 802–811) Notes from the fieldwork were prepared so that follow-up questions could be asked in a subjectively meaningful way (Johnson and Weller 2002, p. 498).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and each of the dancers was invited to read and comment on his or her interviews. At the beginning phases of the analyses, Ravn edited each interview text to reduce the large amount of interview data. The editing included the omission of what was considered by the researcher to be irrelevant material, such as, for example, when the dancer developed his thoughts on a specific movement theme into an evaluation of a new choreography in process. Certain characteristics of spoken language were removed, and the text was edited into a readable written language, while adhering as closely as possible to the formulations, language and descriptions of each dancer. Repetitions concerning a certain movement theme were either elided or edited so the formulation could be placed as part of an assembled description of this theme. Each of the dancers was invited to accept, comment on or adjust the edited interview, so that, according to the dancer him/herself, it presented an accurate report of his/her experiences in movement (Ravn 2009, pp. 141–142). In their acceptance, the dancers also agreed that they may be quoted from the script of the edited interviews in future publications. The edited version thus presented a condensed version of each dancer’s descriptions that maintained their individual way of structuring and giving emphasis to their experiences. Both the original transcriptions and the edited versions were included in the subsequent analysis. During the different phases of the analysis, transcriptions and field notes were discussed with Hansen on several occasions. From the outset, the processing of the data paid attention to the dancers’ ways of structuring lived experiences in movement. A ‘line-by-line reading was rehearsed several
times, and each time guided by constantly asking the question: ‘what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?’ (Manen 1990, p. 93, italics by Manen). The analysis focused on the dancer’s particular modes of thematisation of their lived experience of movement. The thematisation is set in comparison to different foci around which phenomenological descriptions could be facilitated (Ibid., p. 91). The analysis of the dancers’ reports focused on how experiences come into being for the subject, and thereby on the accomplishment of perceptual synthesis (Csordas 1990, pp. 34–35).

First and second person perspectives of experience: in constructive tension

Ravn’s participant observation was based on an embodied competence that she already shared with the dancers. In the process of becoming a dancer, like the other dancers she had learned to sense her body with a heightened awareness of possible qualities of movement (Foster 1992, Thomas 2003, Potter 2008). Ravn’s embodied competence in dance obviously influenced her way of performing in the fieldwork and thereby the generation of ethnographical data (Grau 2005, p. 141, 2007, p. 87). The embodied competence of the researcher facilitated her ability ‘to see something’ that would otherwise have remained unnoticed (Brownell 2006, p. 252). From a sensory ‘correspondence’ that was already present (Sklar 2000, p. 72), Ravn could focus on the dancers’ particular ways of coping with, and structuring, movement in their individualised techniques. The experiences of shared practices both framed and guided the dancers’ descriptions and the researcher’s understanding of what was described in the interview situations. The researcher thereby avoided reducing the dancers’ experiences to mere descriptions based on second-hand interpretation or reducing them to third person data. By including both her first and second perspectives of the current dance practice she succeeded in making the dancers’ description of their sense experiences present and
implicitly validated in an inter-subjective arena.

Compared to what is often considered the main challenge in the performance of ethnographical fieldwork, the first challenge for Ravn was not in creating a ‘familiarity’ with practices and meanings. Instead, the major challenge was to find ways to be able to doubt and be critical of what her competences might mean to the research process and to be able to question the implicit structure and logic in the practices and meanings given by the dancers (Grau 2007, p. 90). This demanded that she develop ways of including active strategies of how to work with a critical second person perspective to the dancers descriptions. As touched upon in a prior section of this article, the multi-sited design of the fieldwork meant that the researcher’s shared competence in dance was brought into correspondence with different ways of working with and emphasising sensing and movement. It was important in the design of the study that the implicit comparative aspect between the sites could be used to create different experiential perspectives of dance expertise. This included that her awareness of her body and her sense experiences were shaped and adjusted according to the current dance training. During Ravn’s on-going discussions with Hansen during the period of performing the multi-sited fieldwork, it was confirmed that Ravn shared a sensory correspondence with the different dancers in the fieldwork. However, it also became clear that it was necessary for her to experiment, adapt and shape her ways of being aware of and working with sensing and sense awareness in the various workshops and training sessions. These experimentations and adaptations concerning sensing were not ‘just’ about devoting more attention to one sense in preference to another. In a more profound way, it was about both shifting awareness in each situation and shaping awareness differently. This will be described further in the following presentation of some central results from the case of dancers.
Sensing the body and movement

The body as weighted

Despite turning attention to the body and working with very different kinds of aesthetic criteria of movement, the dancers in general described their training and technique as based on discovering and inventing movements out of their bodily being (Ravn 2007, 2009, pp. 95–98). For example, one of the dancers, in his practical approach, focused specifically on how to actively use the weight of the body’s limbs in movement; for instance, how to use different kinds of momentum of swinging arms or legs to initiate a series of movement that would take the body around on the floor. In this kind of training, the sense of the mobility of the joints combined with a sense of weighted and swinging limbs were emphasised in the instructions the dancer gave when leading the training. The dancer described:

In a more practical sense I try and take my starting point in really basic rules in the body associated with weight and gravity. When, for example, I stand, a lot of it is about putting the body in a position in which the muscles do not need to work and that instead you kind of stand and are able to balance more on the skeletal structure – in other words to use the body’s construction more than the body’s strength. I try to find something where it’s all about, like, positioning things. Often it’s a matter of letting go joints, so that you aren’t standing and lifting combined with trying to get the weight down in the feet.

Accordingly, Ravn, when working with this dancer throughout the week, continuously focused on investigating how her internal sensation of the body could be focused according to the instructions presented through this dancer’s descriptions and movement. Situated in between other dancers working with the same instructions, her awareness of her body was directed towards letting a sense of weight be present in the different limbs – and to let this sense of weight guide the dynamic of the movement initiated. For Ravn, this sense of feeling weighted became connected with a sense of
releasing muscle tension and letting her limbs hang from their joints when moving. This sensation of ‘hanging’ limbs also emphasised a sense of letting the momentum involved in limbs in motion take the connected limbs and the whole body into movement and around in space.

**Weight as organic presence**

Some weeks later, after having participated in the training described above, Ravn participated in a one-week workshop focusing on BMC and Butoh-related techniques. Both of the two dancers working with these techniques emphasise that their technique focuses on a control of energy and that the form of the movements is secondary to this. The form appears as if implicitly connected to the energy of the movements. During workshops and training sessions, the dancers in different ways focused on using imaginative work as the springboard for initiating and exploring different qualities of movement and on exploring on how to activate and use their own latent knowledge of places and depths in the body in movement. During one of the workshops in which Ravn participated, the imaginative work specifically focused on exploring interoceptive sense experiences of anatomical structure and selected body organs – specifically on the skeleton, the bodily fluids and the skin.

When working with the skeleton, Ravn’s sensing of limbs and joints in movement was experienced very differently, compared to the previous workshop described above. The instructions and discussions at the workshop, combined with the presence of the other dancers’ physical approach in these practice-led explorations, led Ravn to adjust her awareness and her sensing of how movement could be initiated. What became particularly present to Ravn’s experience of movement in this workshop was the lightness of her skeletal structure. An experience, which came as a surprise to Ravn’s sensing of her
body in movement. The sense of any momentum of the limbs, which had been so apparent in the previous workshop, seemed to be irrelevant and in that sense receded into the background.

Ravn brought her experiences of feeling weighted compared to her sense of moving with the lightness of her skeleton into the interview with the dancer leading the workshop based on BMC and Butoh-related techniques. She asked the dancer how she conceived of and sensed the weight of the body when moving, since it was a surprise to Ravn’s own experience how she suddenly felt the absence of any weightedness in her movements. The dancer’s first response was to emphasise that weight was not important to her technique. She distinguished between being able to control the weighted aspect of the materiality of her body and working with the quality of weight when moving. She referred to the first aspect as a question of being ‘grounded’, which is a term she used to refer to her sense of having a continuous sense of the vertical and a way of anchoring her movement. The dancer preferred, however, to elaborate more on the latter aspect, i.e. her exploration of working with weight as an organic presence of different materialities and phenomena. She illustrated this way of working with weight by comparing how working with the quality of the mist or the quality of a stone will present very different kinds of movement qualities. She described it in the following way:

> There is a hell of a lot of control. The control of weight in terms of form, that’s implicit for me, because it’s obvious that if you want to have a choreography that looks like this – where I raise my leg – then I am obliged to control my weight. I am obliged to know where I am to put it physically. But there is a difference between having it be a mist standing on one leg from if it was a stone standing on one leg. I’d still have to use a hell of a lot of control so as not to fall – in fact much more. [...] If I were to pass on the choreography, I would never say: try and release your joints and feel … never, never, never. I would take it from the mental plane and let it define it, and if that doesn’t work, then I’d find another image. People get far too physical. They want to stand there thinking about joints that have to move, and it’s an entirely different field of energy you have to access if it’s the quality of mist that is there.
After describing these two possibilities, the dancer closed her eyes and exemplified her point by basically staying still while changing the quality of her presence as if there was a change to a hidden tension in the density of her body.

**Surpassing the content of the dancers’ sensing: looking for structure**

In both of the workshops just presented, Ravn had to experiment with and adapt prior ways of sensing the weight of her body in movement. No doubt, the first of the workshops described, where she related to the physical mass of her body by focusing on a sense of feeling weighted, was more similar to the dance techniques she had worked with before. In this workshop her sensing of movement were directed to altering the timing of how a sense of momentum was put to work. In the workshop based on BMC and Butoh-related techniques, her sensing was experienced as if she was investigating and working with a new kind of awareness towards the physicality of her body.

The descriptions illustrate how the creative tension involved in using the researcher’s first person experiences to follow the dancers’ descriptions from a second person perspective was employed. The descriptions also exemplify that when turning awareness towards the weight of the body, different kinds of sense experiences of the body and movement might be revealed. In accordance with the phenomenological descriptions of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Gallagher and Zahavi (2008), none of the two dancers are to be understood as revealing an innate quality of what the weight of the body does to the subject’s sense of their movement. It would be a theoretical mistake to take one of the techniques to be ‘more’ related to phenomenological description than the other (Ravn 2010a). Similarly, it would also be a mistake to think of the weight of the body as concerning only the resistances and momentums of the body’s physical mass, as this can be described in the physics of movement.
The descriptions reveal that weight might be thought of, handled and sensed quite differently in relation to movement and they indicate how the experiences of movement experts, such as dancers, illuminate the particular and subjective characteristic of sense experiences. The descriptions thereby indicate a diversity of how body and movement are sensed – and can be sensed. In Merleau-Pontian terms, the dancers’ descriptions exemplify what is meant by saying that sensing, is to be considered part of the subject’s on-going communication with the world. An intercommunication, which is to be understood as an ambiguous setting (1998/1962, p. 166, 169). At the same time the ‘facticity’ of the body (Merleau-Ponty 1998/1962, p. vii) includes certain predispositions which Merleau-Ponty has also described as a prepersonal system of being that is at the subject’s disposal ‘in virtue of a kind of primordial contract and through a gift of nature, with no effort made on my part’ (Ibid., p. 216). In a complex and intertwined sense, the ambiguous setting of the intercommunication between subject and world is anchored in a bodily perspective. At the same time the prepersonal system of being is shaped as the body is lived and becomes experienced. The dancers’ practices and descriptions thereby come to exemplify how sense experiences are prosessual and related to the physical facticity at the same time. The dancers’ sensing of the physicality of their moving bodies takes form based on their unique intentions and how these intentions have taken – and are taking form through interactions with other dancers. The descriptions thereby exemplify what it might mean from the experienced perspective of a dancer that the phenomenological body is to be thought of as a nexus of living meanings (Ibid., p. 150, 235).

The quotes exemplify how the two dancers turn to the body in a non-reifying way. That is, in their sense experience the dancers are aware of what the movement feels like in preference to scrutinising their movement through one or more specified sense modalities (Legrand and Ravn 2009). This is not to say that the dancers do not reify the
body during training when focusing, for example, on watching carefully the specific movement path of a limb. However, we find it important to note how the dancers’ sensing of the moving body is also about what the weight feels like and how in that sense the body is ‘lived through’. It would be a mistake to take the dancers’ overall sense of the movement as being a perceptual process in the Merleau-Pontian sense. Just as it would be a reduction to think of the dancers’ description as presenting (sub-)-cultural meanings ascribed ‘kinaesthesia’ in a second order process. Instead we suggest that the dancers overall sense of what the movement feels like relates to the ‘cross-modal’ (Pink 2009, p. 28) or ‘intermodal’ (Gallagher 2005, p. 51, 75) characteristic of sensing. They highlight how this intermodality of their sense experience is not simply a silent background for modal specific sensations and how an intermodal sense experience is central to their awareness of their body and to their way of moving. Sensing the body can be about correcting positions and movement paths but might also, as the dancers exemplify, be about working with an overall sense of what the movement feels like. As exemplified by the two dancers, the overall sense of what the weight of the body feels like when moving differs between dancers. It might, for example, involve sensing the momentums of the weighted limbs or sensing the energy related to different weighted and imaginative materialities.

**Conclusion**

To put phenomenology, a philosophical enterprise, to work in relation to fieldwork demands several interdisciplinary clarifications and considerations. The challenge of how to employ phenomenology in relation to subjective sense experiences of the body and movement requires that one considers the methodological challenges relating to working with both the particular subjective and the phenomenological invariance of experience. We have confronted the theoretical challenge by focusing on how the
content versus the structure of experience might be described and analysed. We have chosen to illuminate the concrete methodological challenges by focusing on describing how data concerning dancers’ sense experiences might be generated and analysed. Our focus on the methodological challenges has been on the expense of describing several of the dancers’ experiences and more results from the study. Different characteristic of the dancers’ sense experiences have been presented and discussed elsewhere (Ravn 2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, Legrand and Ravn 2009).

Compared to the multi-sited fieldwork as described by Marcus (1995) and Amit (2000) and the sensory ethnography of Pink (2009), we have not engaged in an embodied activity to elaborate on social lives and cultural meanings. Instead the fieldworker’s focused on the subjects’ sense of their bodies. The body thereby becomes both the fieldworker’s tool and the subject to be investigated. This focus has forefronted the differences within the multi-sited field of dancers.

Throughout the paper we have exemplified how different positions of the field-worker might be used actively when generating data during fieldwork and further how the embodied competence of the researcher can be handled constructively and critically when looking into the lived experiences of sensing. Anthropological elaboration on senses and sensing (Ingold 2000, Howes 2005, Hsu 2008, Potter 2008) as well as sensory ethnography (Coffey 1999, Pink 2009) are relatively new areas in academia. The presented study adds to this academic field by suggesting how the expertise of movement experts might be explored. We specifically outline how descriptions of subjects’ sense experiences might be generated without being compelled to focus on the specific modal facets of a given activity – as is, for example, the case in the sensory ethnographic interview situation described by Pink (2009, pp. 91–92). The way the researcher’s embodied competence was involved meant that the interview situation was based on a shared competence. This invited the dancers to forefront their overall sense
of what their body feels like when moving and, not least, how they used this overall sense of their bodies in their dance technique.

The dancers’ descriptions of how they sense weight in movement present different ways of ‘listening’ to the physicality of the body and actively using this listening to develop different movement qualities. Using the presented methodology, it becomes possible to indicate how such ‘listening’ to the body is not to be mistaken for the dancers revealing an essence of how the weight of the body essentially constitutes resistance in movement in a phenomenological sense. Rather, the implicit comparative structure of the multi-sited fieldwork made it possible to describe how the dancers’ sensing of their bodies is given form and takes on meanings through interactive processes as well as is shaped by the dancers’ unique intentions.

The study indicates how the exploration of movement expertise might add important new and promising insights in relation to how the sense of movement might take on meaning for the subject. The design in this study might be used in other studies of movement experts to describe how the subjects’ sense of movement (the content of subject’s sense experience) varies with, for example, the different sport activities, dance techniques or kinds of martial arts. By the same token the design might be used to more thoroughly describe the different ways subjects can be aware of their bodies (the structure of subject’s sense experience).

Finally, the study emphasizes the fact that instructing subjects’ to change their awareness by stressing ‘immediacy’, ‘presence’ and ‘intuitive awareness’ will most likely not reveal deeper layers of experience in a phenomenological sense. Such techniques, like other dance techniques, primarily present an approach to creating a different experience of what the body might feel like.

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Notes

1. We use here the notion ‘constituted’ in accordance to Moran and Zahavi’s presentation of Husserl’s writing on constitution as a threefold process. The process of constitution is about how objects come into being for the subject and is experienced in consciousness as other than consciousness (Moran 2000, pp. 165–166). Constitution unfolds itself in the structure of subjectivity and the world in a threefold process of subjectivity-intersubjectivity-world (Zahavi 2003, p. 74–76). The threefold process illuminates subject and world as fundamentally intertwined.

2. Ravn’s prior experiences include more than 10 years of competing in rhythmic sport gymnastics on an international level, followed by three years of training in classical ballet (classes 3–5 times a week) and on-going training in various contemporary dance techniques (Ravn 2009, pp. 84–85).

3. Four solo dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet were also included in the study. Each dancer’s practices and descriptions from interviews were worked with as individual cases in the earlier part of the analysis (Ravn 2009, p. 141 ff.). As we have chosen ‘only’ to present and refer to the nine contemporary dances in the methodological discussions in this article, for the case of clarity we have chosen only to include those dancers in the presentation of the design.

4. The theories and methods of BMC rely on experimenting, experiencing and exploring anatomical and physiological mechanisms and principles. The training is also referred
to as a re-education of the body and a journey through which ‘we are led to an understanding of how the mind is expressed through the body in movement’ (Cohen 2008, p. 1).

5. The sense of transformations of energy and presence combined with relatively ‘slow-moving’ choreographies are some of the most striking aspects of the expressiveness of Butoh dance forms (Ravn 2009, p. 108). Butoh technique can be described as striving towards a ‘hypersensitive’ awareness to make the dancer able to ‘tap into a universal consciousness, bridging a gap between “self” and “other”’ (Hassel 2005, p. 16).

6. The following themes were central to the questions asked:

- How the dancer thinks of the physical materiality in her/his technique?
- Based on the shared practices each dancer was asked to exemplify their initial descriptions further. How they are aware of their body when moving?
- Each dancer was asked about the focus of their sense awareness. The question was phrased in an open way. Subsequently, they were also asked to describe the sense experiences they recall from different situations of the shared practice – and to exemplify how they by purpose direct their sense awareness in these situations.
- When referring to the shared practices, Ravn used her own experiences (including both a first and second order perspective) to elicit further descriptions and examples by the dancer (Ravn 2009, pp. 137–138).

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