



# Who moves? Analyzing fashion show organizing through micro-interactions of bodily movement

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## abstract

This paper inquires into the organizing of fashion shows through bodily movements. Specifically, it explores the ‘hands-on’ micro-level embodied practices thereof, and elaborates on the significance of fine-grained bodily movements through the spaces of the show, in order to reflect on what drives and controls such movements in this specific empirical setting. To do so we must first link bodily movements to the concept of embodiment, but despite obvious connections, these analogous theoretical spheres have not been sufficiently connected within the field of organization studies. This paper argues that we cannot understand the complexity of fashion show organizing without first critically reflecting on the relationship between embodiment and bodily movements. Empirically, this paper engages with a site where such relationships are intensified and discusses the relevance and even the return of classical theories of working bodies to contemporary organization studies. This paper thus illustrates how fashion show organizing can bring valuable perspectives to the study of embodiment, movement and experience to contemporary organization studies.

## Introduction

In this paper, I engage with a site of organizing shaped and defined by various forms and styles of movements: a fashion show. In particular, I wish to explore how bodily movements in this specific context are meticulously organized and controlled. Arguably, such bodily movements, seen as basic, expressive micro-

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level actions, are at the very heart of all organizing activities, as they enable us to conduct various activities and relate to others (Haddington et al., 2013), and there is simply no life without the subtlety of breathing and our fine-grained bodily movements (Coaten and Newman-Bluestein, 2013). By bodily movements I particularly mean situated embodied actions and ‘meaningful interactions and relations between various agents’ (Parviainen, 2011: 530) that intimately involve all our senses (e.g. Howes, 2006; Meriläinen et al., 2015), are experienced in social life, are fundamental to us and, in a wider sense, political. In line with Parviainen (2011), I further view bodily movements as central to our identity construction and the performing of the self in the world, but also always relational and to some extent ‘pre-choreographed’, controlled and constrained by various ideals, norms, embodied agents and agencies around us.

The field of organization studies is currently *moving away* from static, realist and reductive understandings of organizations as merely functional, singular or fixed entities ‘spatially bounded’ to certain *places* (e.g. Costas, 2013; O’ Doherty et al., 2013) towards understanding organizations as polysemic experiences (Rippin, 2013a) ‘all over’ and across times and spaces. The exploration of various forms of movements, imagined or ‘real’ of individual subjects, material objects, power, knowledge and capital (Costas, 2013), is gaining more and more interest and has shown it self capable of generating meaningful insights. Meanwhile bodily movements, fundamental to our agency and subjectivity, have apparently been treated as the automatically performed and rather taken-for-granted aspects of human life (e.g. Dale, 2000; Shilling, 2013). As such, their significance has been surprisingly overlooked within our field.

This paper intends to show how the fashion show, as a research site, can generate valuable perspectives to the study of embodiment and movement. As Coaten and Newman-Bluestein (2013: 677) remind us: ‘Since embodiment is the experience and awareness of the lived body, constantly in movement, there can be no discussion about embodiment without movement’. The field of organization studies has tended to marginalize this close and fundamental relationship, and consequently this paper argues that we must analytically first link bodily movements to the lived experiences of embodiment in order to further reflect on and understand ambiguous organizing occurring ‘on the move’. By doing so, I argue that we can gain deeper understanding not only of how gestures and fine-grained bodily movements shape activities of organizing, but also of how organizing creates and controls complex movement choreographies or how hierarchies of bodily movements over time and space are produced.

However, major problems remain. How can we study the organizing of bodies in movement, not in the classic manner of Taylor or the Gilbreths but in more recent and contemporary ‘ad hoc’ organizations? How can we furthermore study bodies in movement if we lack the vocabulary to sufficiently capture lived, complex and dynamic movement interactions? Moreover, whose agency and bodily movements do we as researchers privilege and what does it take to understand the interactions and co-creation of movement? In the context of a fashion show, we easily think of the stylized movements of certain bodies yet forget about others. This paper discusses not only the organizing of the obviously controlled and scripted bodily movements of the fashion models, but intends to reflect on the quick movements and vivid bodily gestures of the anxious designer as well as the movements of the researcher in the field. Here, I believe it is of importance to critically discuss both what I see and experience as well as what I *don't* while moving around my empirical site. My overall intention throughout the paper is thus to be reflexive regarding my theoretical and empirical priorities, choices and limitations.

Finally, this paper is concerned with a particular fashion show where clothing collections are staged on decorated and moving bodies, paradoxically, without the help of additional money to spend on the show. This is surprising, as fashion shows are typically expensive if not extremely costly events for the designers organizing them (e.g. Mears, 2011; Taylor, 2013). Negotiating the tension between ‘high fashion’ and ‘low budget’ is arguably meaningful to *how* the bodily movements in my empirical context are constructed and performed. In addition, shedding light on this tension adds insight to the mundane, less glamorous and rather harsh premises of fashion.

The paper will proceed as follows. I begin with establishing my approach to organizing by discussing the overlooked relationship between embodiment and bodily movements. Following this, I open up my empirical site – the fashion show – as an illustrative example of an organization both controlling and producing specific bodily movements in a variety of ways. I then discuss the methodology of my study including a critical reflection on my encounters with bodily movements as well as the ethics of the research. Finally, I analyze the organizing of a particular fashion show and conclude the paper with some insights on how understanding the fundamental relationship between embodiment and bodily movements might contribute to further developing understandings of ambiguous organizing within the field of organization studies.

## Experiencing organizing as/through bodily movements

As previously stated, this paper is concerned with exploring the significance of bodily movements in organizing a fashion show. Despite certain more recent contributions on the constructed body in organization through movement, postures and dress (e.g. Hassard et al., 2000; Rafaeli et al., 1997; Trethewey, 1999; see also Biehl-Missal, 2014; Meriläinen et al., 2015) and the ever-growing interdisciplinary literature on bodies in motion at work (e.g. Hindmarch and Pilnick 2007; Patriotta and Spedale 2009; Wolkowitz, 2006), it has within the field of organization studies been challenging to find ways to study the organizing of bodily movements as well as our embodied experiences of inhabiting a moving body *moved by* various things. This lack of empirical studies might be attributed to the denial of the material and corporeal in organization studies (Hassard et al., 2000; Styhre, 2004) or the taken-for-granted ‘practical command of our bodies’ (Shilling, 2013: 217). Also, it appears as if bodily movements, touch and proximity has had to battle the dominant preoccupation of organization studies with brains, masculine thought and action (Rippin, 2013b) phenomena paradoxically enough often viewed as objective and neutral (Dale, 2000), ‘external to our bodies’ (Shilling, 2013: 217) or existing somehow outside us. However, historically present already in the early time-and-motion studies of for instance Taylor (1911) and the Gilbreths (1911) with their detailed documentation of movements and gestures in factory work, bodily movements have a complex and far-reaching relationship with organizing.

The many ways in which we move in organizations matter as our bodily movements organize actions (Raviola, 2012). Before discussing the organizing of bodily movements and organizing *as* movements in further detail, we need, however, to consider the theoretical relationship between embodiment and bodily movements. Studies of the body and embodiment within organization studies (e.g. Bell and King, 2010; Dale, 2000; Hassard et al., 2000) have arguably been rather preoccupied with exploring bodily appearance and bodily norms in organizational life, the body as a rather ‘immobile’ project, object or site of discipline, control and resistance, perhaps as a result of the wider turn to feminist and Foucauldian approaches in the social sciences. Meanwhile, the embodiment literature has been far less interested in the fluidity and complexity of our physical existence with surprisingly little written about our everyday embodied and kinesthetic experiences of movement. Despite an ever-growing literature on bodyspace (e.g. Riach and Wilson, 2014) and how people navigate space (e.g. Beyes and Steyart, 2011; Dale and Burrell, 2007) within organization studies, theorists of movement and politics have arguably often neglected the materiality of the *moving* body.

In my attempt to understand fashion show organizing ‘on the move’, I start from a perspective that emphasizes the relationship between embodiment and movement. There are, of course, multiple ways of engaging with forms of embodiment. Here, embodiment is understood as the experience of ‘possessing a body that moves and feels’ (Noland, 2009: 105) and captures lived, subjective experiences of inhabiting a body that is capable of engaging in various activities of organizing in motion. I view the body as both material and social, as ‘a culturally fabricated physicality in which matter and meaning are inextricably linked’ (Meriläinen et al., 2015: 6). As living and breathing human beings we always move in both voluntary and involuntary ways, thus our embodied experiences as *moving* subjects matter to us and to our environment. Embodiment fundamentally requires bodily movements and it is therefore surprising to notice how the literature on embodiment has often overlooked this fundamental dimension. Embodiment alone does not, however, explain the kind of ambiguity of organizing that interests me here, hence the notion of bodily movement appears relevant to explore further.

Bodily movements comprise the various ways we integrate and manage our actions through our bodies in our everyday life. Although this paper focuses on *bodily* movement interactions exclusively, I acknowledge the concept of movement in general to be complex, not neutral, contradictory and context-dependent, encompassing various philosophical questions that lie outside the realm of this paper. In a contemporary Western world where immobility is easily equated with ‘an unwillingness to be more productive’ (Corbett, 2013: 414), overemphasizing movement (whatever form one might think of) as a positive concern not only runs the risk of simplifying confusing and ‘complex relationality’ (O’ Doherty et al., 2013: 1430), but also of idealizing movement as a politico-moral imperative seemingly equal, beneficial and useful to all. This observation also relates to the performing of bodily movements, as bodies in organizations are always constructed through embodied agency, posture, dress, fine grained gestures, bodily techniques, the changing of position and continuous bodily movements that are never innocent or apolitical (see e.g. Biehl-Missal, 2014; Raviola, 2012). This leads us to the conclusion that bodily movements and interactions are always expressed in a dynamic, multilayered reality involving hierarchies, structures, prescribed conditions and the co-presence of various actors.

Bodily movements can arguably also be approached as an intimate, embodied experience. As human beings, we feel seemingly ‘free’ to form our bodily movements individually, yet we are always shaped, constrained and controlled by surrounding cultural, political, social and technical environments, norms and occupational cultures, other non-human and human agents in our proximity as

well as physical spaces, architectural solutions and the entire infrastructure around us (e.g. Dale and Burrell, 2007; Parviainen, 2011; Tschumi, 1994). By dynamically interacting with others through times and spaces, bodies perform both scripted and improvised movements that disrupt, affect and re-organize bodies in a variety of material and temporal ways (Raviola, 2012). Here, bodily movements are furthermore viewed as relational: we are always mobile and construct our bodily movements in relation to other agents. Various persons and things around us *move* us and make us move in specific and deliberate ways, whereas the movements of several agents meet in complex movement interactions (Haddington et al., 2013).

Furthermore, who is privileged to move in organizations? If bodily movements *construct* organizing actions, these movements can evidently be utterly uncomfortable, painful, gendered, difficult and stressful for those involved to construct and perform. For instance, ‘restrained bodily movements’ have typically defined female identity (Biehl-Missal, 2014: 14; see also Young, 1990), and classical ballet provides an illustrative example of a gendered practice presenting and reproducing such normatized movements. Influenced by Costas (2013), Corbett (2013) and Skeggs (2004), I approach bodily movements not as positive, harmless or frictionless micro-level actions outside complicated structures, institutions and power hierarchies. Instead, bodily movements relate to complicated questions around embodied agency, control, power and resistance. These forms of movements capture the very mundane yet dynamic movement-based interactions of organizing. Here, it is relevant to point out how dance theorists (e.g. Aalten, 2007; Klien and Walk, 2008; Wulff, 1998) have long explained ‘organizing’ as the choreographing and actual use of bodily movements, gestures, steps and patterns (see also Chandler, 2012; Slutskaya and De Cock, 2008 on the relevance of dance for organization studies).

How could organizing not be mobile or involve bodily movements and interactions? Organizing is something that engaged, mobile people have always done. Human bodies, ‘defined by kinetic and dynamic relations’ (Probyn, 2010: 77) are always present, active and vital for carrying out deliberate organizing actions by moving and acting across times and spaces. The situated activity of organizing involves multiple activities of ordering (e.g. Burrell, 2013) in which adorned human bodies are continuously on the move through both verbal and non-verbal *actions*, ever-changing body postures and bodily movements, gazes, gestures, practices of walk and talk (e.g. Haddington et al., 2013). The very term *organizing* implies action, hence it is by definition always occurring in motion not only in linear, systematic, logic and deliberate ways, but in ways that give inherently chaotic, confusing, contradictory and irrational impressions (e.g. Burrell, 2013; King and Vickery, 2013).

## Moving around – organizing a fashion show

A fashion show is in this paper understood as ‘a presentation of clothing on moving bodies in front of an audience’ (Skov et. al, 2009: 2) which is always polysemic (Rippin, 2013a) and shifting, constituted by a variety of expressions, non-verbal and verbal actions, movements, meanings and doings generated across different spaces, with powerful audiences, producers and multiple contextual conventions involved. If anything, fashion shows have been criticized for restricting bodily movements, sculpting bodies, promoting narrow ideals and health-hostile representations, as well as creating certain controlled bodily movements performed by ‘robotic’ dummies denied individual agency (e.g. Entwistle, 2002; Mears, 2008; Neumann, 2012; Rundquist, 2012).

The transgressive, elusive phenomenon of fashion has in itself an intimate and complex relationship with motion. Fashion, obsessed with novelty and change is a form of continuous, often extreme and fetishized movement as fashion continuously travels and goes on by. The global fashion industry incorporates a complex array of large-scale international movements, where clothing samples move between design studios and factories overseas, to move onto bodies during fittings and fashion shows of a surprising variety and finally, moving on the skin of the final consumers. Fabrics matter, as different fabrics with specific functions perform and behave differently on human bodies in motion. Esposito (2011: 607) refers to fashion’s paradox, a search for continuity within change as fashion’s stability of transition. Historically, speed, fashion, film and motion go together as archetypal forms of the rapid developments of modern societies (Evans, 2013). In the early fashion shows of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with mechanical bodies reproducing the machine-like aesthetics of modernism, ‘being modern’ conjured a permanent being in motion, Evans (2013) writes. Throughout history, pop cultural fashion shows have promoted motion. For those involved in the cyclic industry of fashion, movement, high pace and constant change is still a consuming normality as commodities need to move rapidly.

One might ask in what ways a fashion show might be seen as different from other forms of organizing? What is the connection between this specific form of organizing of bodily movements and other established forms of organizing? The organizing of fashion shows might be seen as a case of *ad hoc* organizing or event organizing, these being the established terms for the project-oriented and condensed nature of fashion show organizing. Furthermore, organizing as bricolage (e.g. Rhodes and Westwood, 2006), understood in the meaning of making do, taking whatever there is at hand to create something meaningful provides another perspective on fashion show organizing due to its improvisational characteristics and the need to act with the limited resources

available. This said, I will, in what follows discuss the methodology of this study including some ethical considerations inherent herein.

## **Methodological considerations**

In my research on fashion shows I have conducted what might be described as qualitative, explorative and open-minded ‘what-goes-on-in-here’-kind of ethnographically inspired multi-sited research. The empirical material for the present study consists of participant observations of the preparations of staging a fashion show. When it comes to engaging with forms of movements, mobility researchers tend to argue that the ‘researcher must move towards the subject or topic of research’ (D’Andrea et al., 2011: 153). My intention throughout this paper is to explore how bodily movements construct organizing, particularly by being mobile and reflexive in the field myself and by reflecting on the ethics of such research.

The empirical material presented in this paper is primarily based on my field notes. My material includes participative modes of fieldwork within the hidden backstage spaces of fashion as well as numerous informal conversations with performers engaged in organizing a fashion show, such as the designer, the designer’s assistants, dressers and models. The participant observation, 150 hours in total, is documented as field notes in my research diaries. In dealing with a complex, ambiguous and at times even paradoxical form of organization, I can only capture limited aspects of the organizing of bodily movements in my empirical context. Consequently, it is evident that my selectivity has a driving role in what I choose to present as meaningful throughout, which, in turn, relates to my way of constructing and representing reality. My analysis focuses on the behind-the-scenes dynamics and mobile aspects of organizing in the backstage of the show. In ethnographic research analysis and interpretation often become intertwined as they ‘take place throughout the research’ process (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008: 149). Aware of the difficulties of presenting ethnographic material, my analysis is based on a close reading of my raw field notes from which I have constructed fuller and more comprehensive narrative descriptions.

‘Doing research is a rich, complex and multi-level experience that mobilizes the whole person conducting this inquiry’, write Sergi and Hallin (2011: 192). I have followed the fashion label present in this paper from January 2013 until August 2014, during a significantly longer period of fieldwork than the work this paper is based upon. For the fashion show of September 2013 I agreed to take a position which turned out to be rather difficult for me to handle. Only a week before the show the designer asked me to be the event manager of the fashion show, as he



wanted me to bring in coordination and order to the somewhat messy, creative project. The designer offered me a practical exercise in organizing, perfectly suitable for a doctoral researcher in organization and management, he thought. I did not dare to say no to this request and felt obliged to take on the position, fearing I might otherwise lose access to my long-term research site. I also did not want to risk ruining my relationship with the designer.

In reality, research often involves elements of reciprocity. From a critical perspective, dumping a pretty significant workload on me at the last minute was perhaps a powerful way of getting the biggest use and the best performance out of me. In the process of organizing the show I was in effect a source of free labour, one capable of dealing with those necessary, dull or 'managerial' aspects of organizing that the designer did not bother to or have the time to engage with himself. I pondered how working for the designer would affect and possibly change my relationship to him, as well as influence my fieldwork and analysis. As a researcher, I had so far performed the role of a curious fashion novice helping out where I could and eager to learn all about fashion and the designer's work. As an insider, I was expected to know plenty of things myself and had to take on a more active role than before. I also knew I had to perform well under pressure and was later evaluated by the designer and his team. This dual role I performed had implications on how I acted in the field and was able to represent reality, and deserves to be discussed to account for the research process in transparent ways.

It is, of course, problematic to collect data in the ways I did and evidently I risked losing critical distance by becoming an insider. Although dealing with my position and the organization of the show where all bits were constantly moving was challenging, becoming intensely involved also meant being 'inside-the-situation', learning plenty by doing and perhaps experiencing things I might have missed solely as a researcher. Also, my experience gave me a different perspective to organizing compared to what I had previously experienced while conducting fieldwork. As such, the experience was valuable and interesting. I was always careful to let the people involved know I was collecting data and writing a piece on the process of organizing the show. The fashion show production was small and I could always present myself to everyone involved as both a researcher and a team member. I had met everyone except for the dressers and the make-up team before the day of the show. My role as a researcher was never met with suspicion, only occasional confusion. Overall, I was careful to be nice and friendly to everyone volunteering for the show, although I still had to perform as the 'manager', keeping track of all major activities before and after the show.

During a seven-day week I wrote approximately seventy e-mails, made numerous phone calls, created schedules and detailed timetables, took measurements of models, (un)dressed models at fittings, wrote to do-lists, transformed cheap runway shoes to look edgy, photographed looks, organized a stylebook, packed and carried things to the show venue and organized the backstage. I also worked as a backroom coordinator together with Oliver,<sup>1</sup> the right hand man of the designer. I timed the day of the show, kept track of all rehearsals and other activities and finally organized the model line-up and the calling of the show. I found myself running after models having coffee and cigarettes instead of heading to the dress rehearsals from hair- and make-up, sending off models out on the catwalk and helping out wherever I could. As the doors opened for the guests, I performed a front stage host showing guests to their seats and moved backstage only minutes before the show begun. After the show, I moved to the sales stand and was on duty until the closing of the Design Market event. What was distinctive about the work I performed in the field? Perhaps running around in the context of fashion does not differ or add much to the kind of work practices present in event management in general.

In what follows, I discuss the organizing of the backstage of the fashion show, emphasizing the significance of the bodily movements involved. Performed in an interesting tension between 'high fashion' yet low budget, I illustrate variations of bodily movements and bodies moving material things as crucial for understanding organizing within my empirical context.

### **Presenting RUNWAY SHOW SS14 + AW 13 COLLECTIONS – a low budget show**

In fashion, it takes a lot of effort to look effortless. Putting on a low budget fashion show that aims to look both effortless and exclusive demands a great deal of creativity in crafting illusionary lures from inexpensive materials. The fashion show was presented in conjunction with Design Market, a busy, two-day sales event organized at The Cable Factory,<sup>2</sup> a hub of the creative economy in Helsinki, Finland. The building hosts Helsinki Design Market, an event attracting thousands of visitors to its main halls elbowing for design bargains in the crowds. Sunday's fashion show is one out of three shows presented during the weekend. It is the only show showing the new work of a single fashion label, as the two other shows staged on Saturday are group fashion shows.

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1 Oliver is a pseudonym as are all names of persons that appear in the paper.

2 The Cable Factory building is rich in studios and exhibition halls, providing facilities and workspaces for various firms, artists, graphic designers, film professionals and freelancers operating in the creative field.

As for any fashion show, the show I studied intended to create buzz and interest around a fashion label. The show is called 'RUNWAY SHOW SS14 + AW 13 COLLECTIONS' on Facebook, which is the only place where the show exists before Sunday. The expression '100 % creativity' on the event image hints not only at the art of fashion to be showcased. If fashion shows usually demand considerable budgets, the expression also stands for the lack of a budget: 'It is 100 % creativity, it is no budget throughout', the designer repeatedly tells me when referring to the show. In uncertain economical times a designer running a small label with limited resources needs to carefully consider what to invest in. Lacking finances to spend on various additional features, 'low budget' is apparently the only way to do a show. As fashion is by its nature elusive and challenging to manage, a designer can only do his or her best to create and introduce something interesting and see how it is eventually accepted and welcomed (or not) by their audience.

The designer planned to show a total of 40 outfits or looks, consisting of several individual pieces, multiple layers creating different movements and effects, as well as accessories, belts and leather bags. A total of 40 outfits require 20 models and one outfit change backstage. A backstage of preferably 20 volunteering dressers is needed, complemented with a hair-and makeup team of twelve persons, a DJ, two in-house photographers, two doormen and preferably additional set-up crew. The designer expects 'some heavier people coming' to his show. By 'heavier' he means established and well-known fashion bloggers, photographers, journalists and designer colleagues. Since the show is presented on a Sunday, the Finnish fashion *crème de la crème*, the most influential buyers and fashion editors are not likely to join. Apparently, Sunday is a tricky show day and mobilizing the fashion elite is difficult. Representatives of traditional media such as magazine editors are apparently too comfortable in their daytime nine-to-five jobs to work during weekends: 'They are lazy. If it had been on a Thursday evening they'd all come. Now they are all at their summerhouses raking leaves', the designer points out with some irony, as if he'd still hope for everyone important to attend solely out of a passion for fashion. In marked difference to magazine editors, bloggers appear more active in attending fashion happenings regardless of time. Stereotypically, bloggers represent a younger generation of freelance workers that do not necessarily make a clear distinction between work and leisure. In what follows, I aim to illustrate the organizing of the backstage of the show, performed 'on the move' in between the designer's studio, the Design Market and the show venue.

## **Creating spaces that allow and restrict bodily movements – organizing the backstage of a fashion show**

By the hidden backstage of the fashion show I refer to the entire machinery necessary for executing a show and not just the physically limited structure behind the front stage allowing and constraining movements for those involved. Plenty of the preparation-work takes place in the designer's studio where garments are finished, stylebooks for the 'looks' are created and the outfits are put together. The designer and his assistants create living, moving three-dimensional forms by adding variations of fluidity, structure, form and texture through dress. The outfits carefully put together for the show intend to stimulate and communicate aesthetic and affective visions to the audience as the outfits move on the catwalk thanks to the movements of the models. How the garments are presented in motion is a highly important matter to the design crew. Comments in the studio like 'I think when its open this jacket is more interesting', 'we need more layers' or 'we need to put something a bit more rock and roll on top of that' reflect the importance of getting all the details right.

Helsinki Design Week does not support the fashion show economically beyond offering a venue, including chairs, front- and backstage facilities. The event organizer thus doesn't provide additional yet crucial show elements such as lights or sound. This comes to determine how the bodily movements in the field are performed. The organizing and realization of the vital elements of lights and sound is left to the designer, who needs to transform the overall frame to fully support what he intends to show onstage. 'We need to do some tricks on the runway', he says. To him, the show venue is far from satisfactory as it is. The designer appears annoyed about having to improvise and move heavy material things to transform his show facilities. As there is no budget for the show, the transformation involves taking down the studio lights and moving them to the show venue. This is when 'low budget' becomes an exhausting burden that requires far more physical bodily movement and organizing than would otherwise be the case. The bodies of the designer's team would certainly move less if they didn't have to mobilize all the heavy equipment themselves. It takes time, carrying, lifting and careful adjustments to finally get the lights pointed right at the venue.

In addition to the lights, four heavy garment bags, four metallic clothing racks, 24 pairs of runway shoes, 16 pairs of grey stockings, a steamer, snacks, 20 t-shirts for the backstage workers, a bag of essentials such as safety pins, breast tape, pencils, paper, stuffing for the runway shoes and a huge backdrop need to be moved from the studio to the car and from the car to the venue on Saturday. It takes several drives back-and-forth to efficiently move all these material things

from one place to another. The curtains of the venue are taken down as chairs and tables are moved around. Having attended hundreds of trade shows and sales events, the designer, an experienced practitioner of organizing, exhibits a great deal of proficiency in packing and setting up. The show involves physical activities of organizing 'on the move' taking place 'outside the confines of a specific workplace' (Costas, 2013: 1469). The mobilizing of the things illustrates the hard work behind the curtains of fashion, where everything is done only for the sake of impressing audiences and keeping up appearances for the rather brief 20 minutes that a show lasts. The designer emphasizes how his audiences have no idea about the consuming preparations his show requires.

Moreover, learning from others or attending the fashion shows held in the same venue on Saturday turned out to be the best way to prepare for the show. The designer summarizes his intentions: 'We take what is best from their show, improve what they did poorly and make an outstanding show'. On Saturday, I meet Tina, who is in charge of organizing the hair and make-up of the show for the first time. She is an experienced make-up artist and body painter in the freelance field who has worked with the designer since his first fashion show in 2003. We have arranged a meeting at the busy sales stand from which we first proceed to inspect the provisional hair- and make-up facilities and then move to the show venue to closely examine the first fashion show. Oliver and photographer Paul,<sup>3</sup> a young and humble man in his twenties, joins us.

The provisional make-up and hair spot is located on the second floor of The Cable Factory in a small glass box room with windows overlooking the halls, approximately 100 meters from the show venue. It is crowded and taken over by another team as we arrive. It is extremely hot inside and the air is thick with hairspray. 'I am glad that we have a different hairspray sponsor', Tina comments. 'Our smells better!'. Tina has gathered a team of students to do the hair and make-up of the show. However, students under supervision are always a risk: 'you can't trust their skill before you see it'. Also, less experienced students generally work slower than professionals. Tina pays careful attention to the physical working environment and asks all the practical questions. How many electricity outlets are there? How many hairdressers can simultaneously fit in the room? 'If there are no proper make-up chairs it will take even longer, as the make-up artists continuously have to bend over the model', she continues. The

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3 Paul works as a part-time nurse, part-time freelancer and dreams of doing fashion shoots for living. The designer met him in Copenhagen by coincidence only weeks earlier, as Paul happened to pass by the designer's stand at the fair. Paul is around during the entire weekend, helping out with adjusting the lights and the backdrop. He brings along his own photography equipment and has agreed to share his photographs with the designer.

physical space and the (lack of) proper chairs have a significant impact on how the bodily movements are performed and determine both the working pace and the end result of the hair- and make-up team. Working with strict and inflexible time limits within crowded, regulated spaces, the work is performed with little or no freedom of bodily movement. This illustrates well how the performance of bodily movement in the field is significantly constrained by the physical space and the materials available.

During the actual show, there is not enough time for the make-up artists to physically perform certain bodily movements, such as lifting their arms to change the eye make-up of the models from a spring/summer to an autumn/winter look. 'The models, 1.80 metres on average, are too tall for us in their heels and we cannot even reach their eyes in a hurry. We only have time to smudge off their lipstick and replace it with a nude base', Tina tells me. The artistic mood between the two collections must differ on the catwalk, yet there is no time to do any radical changes backstage. Again, mobile and mundane hands-on aspects of organizing illustrate the significance of bodily movements in this context. Next, we move across the crowds to see the one o' clock show. 'This is all terrible! You cannot see anything!', Tina complains next to me as the show is on. 'The music is too loud and the models walk too fast – there is actually no time to see! You only get two seconds of the outfits as they pass by', she continues. Apparently, the skill of moving in the right and appreciated ways is not easy to accomplish. 'Should the catwalk be the other way around?', Tina ponders. 'If the lights are like this tomorrow the models are going to look like faces with black holes in them', she adds. It is all very dramatic and apparently there is plenty to do in order to get it all right before the show on Sunday.

The backstage facilities are inspected for the first time right after Saturday's show. Quite surprisingly, there is no proper back room, the models have already disappeared and the space is almost empty as we enter. I recognize Mike, a male model also doing our show the following day. He describes the lack of a proper backstage as challenging and rather chaotic: 'We were in quite a hurry and some models almost didn't make it on time as they had to run down the stairs'. Having models leaping on stairs in high heels to enter the catwalk on time sounds inappropriate and dangerous. I am slightly anxious about what is still ahead in terms of actual, practical organizing.

Whereas the dressing of the models on Saturday took place in the staircases, restricting bodily movements significantly, the designer wanted a somewhat proper dressing area for his show. He wanted his team to create an easy to overlook backstage that fitted 40 people, allowing for certain bodily movements around the clothing racks. In the approximately twenty square meters that were

created in the previous evening, the slender fashionable bodies stand static and still before entering the catwalk. Their assigned dressers, moving briskly around them, can only occupy a limited amount of space each. Touch and bodily proximity characterizes the crowded, ad hoc backstage, with bodies working with skin touching the skin of each other. It becomes a site of material, human contact; still, I experienced it as a site of shared excitement and surprising amounts of care.

### **Organizing the movements of bodies**

I will now briefly discuss the organizing of bodily movements in my empirical setting, particularly those of the models of the show. Before the show, separate fittings are organized in the designer's studio or flagship store. These fittings also function as castings, where bodily movements are evaluated by a critical gaze that might even distract some models. Physical movements and the performance of walking determine the selection of the models of the show. More specifically, the practice of walking is recorded for the designer, who is not always physically present at a fitting, but can later gaze at and evaluate the movements of the models on his computer. The fittings are when the models themselves organize their bodily movements, complemented with verbal instructions from the designer or his assistant. At fittings some models manage to move in desired ways without further instructions, whereas others are carefully instructed.

A model performing a strut is not moving in a particularly 'free' manner. S/he has most likely practiced her/his walk in front of mirrors at home, by watching and imitating walking clips on YouTube and/or by attending several castings and shows to gain practical walking experience. Walking is therefore a learnt practice where incorporated skills are mobilised (Evans, 2013). For a runway model, performing an impressive and graceful runway walk is hugely important. What is regarded a strong walk is, however, often difficult to pin down (e.g. Mears, 2011), something which I became aware of in my empirical context as well. The posture, pace and tempo of movement has to be right and the turns need to be performed with ease. During fittings, the designer appreciates a relaxed yet good body posture, a soft and neutral facial expression and a straight and strong walk not swinging or using too much hip. If a model is dropped, which happens, it is probably due to the model's personal way of moving being judged as being 'too radical', 'ugly' or 'weak' by the designer. As such, the designer might judge a 'poor' walking performance as too difficult to correct verbally and as a valid reason to simply consider another model for his show.

The performed, highly gendered bodily movements of the models reveal possible flaws, such as insecurity, nervousness, a poor body posture, an angry or undesired facial expression, difficulties of moving gracefully in high heels, bodily parts such as hands that swing unintentionally or other things that the designer wishes to erase. However, as bodies always move both intentionally and unintentionally, a model can rarely ever fully control her moving body to reach the ideal walk, the nature of which is paradoxically enough never clearly articulated. If the bodily movements performed at fittings reveal possible flaws, the model's physique is surprisingly rarely seen as a problem. Clothes easily hide and cover undesirable shapes such as a 'wider' hip and are therefore used to manipulate a model's form and shape. Meanwhile, clothes with a narrow cut might restrict and regulate the performance of bodily movements, which also became evident during the fittings I observed.

As soon as the model is properly dressed at a fitting, s/he is requested to walk some 8-10 meters depending on the space, pose a couple of times, turn around and walk back. The desired walk is straight yet seemingly relaxed and performed in a resolute manner. The trivial procedure of walking back and forth and posing in-between is repeated several times under guidance and supervision. When the designer is away, design assistant Oliver instructs and corrects the moving models. Instructing a non-verbal moving activity is not particularly easy, as the bodies must be corrected verbally at the right moment in real time. 'Try to walk a bit slower and relax. Just relax. Walk slower, even slower, no hurry'. 'Keep your shoulders down and back, don't put your hand on your hip, keep your arms relaxed and down', Oliver directs. As models are asked to move under an explicitly critical gaze the situation is not particularly laid-back or relaxing for a model. 'When you pose, always put your weight on one hip', Oliver notices. 'Now you do like this [imitates the model] and instead of that, do like this [demonstrates the desired pose]', he proposes, using his own body for physical demonstration. 'Let's take it one more time still, try to walk a bit slower', Oliver demands. 'Still slower?', the somewhat surprised model asks. 'Yes', he promptly answers.

The episode above illustrates who has the power to judge and organize bodily movements. Moreover, the assistant uses both his body and verbal descriptions to instruct the model when it comes to performing the desired walk with the desired tempo. When the model has left a fitting, his or her walk or look in general is often discussed and subject to further critical commentary. Clearly, the designer is more pleased with the walk of some models than others. 'She walked amazingly!', he could say in an excited and satisfied voice when he was really pleased or even, 'She is a star!'. If not convinced, the designer expressed a



worried, 'I am quite concerned about her walk', further pondering what to do in order to correct the bodily movements before the show.

The designer choreographs the bodily movements of the show. Interestingly, he creates an *ad hoc* script for his models to follow on Sunday, only hours prior to the show, as there is only time for one proper rehearsal before the models are sent to hair and make-up. The models line up one by one before entering the catwalk. The short designer moves vividly, and gesticulates separate instructions to each model entering the catwalk. He needs to keep up with the pace of the tall, strutting model and runs next to each one of them delivering individual, verbal instructions. As the designer prefers the movements of certain bodies, he instructs his star models – the ones performing the most convincing, strong walk and gracious bodily movements – to stay longer on the catwalk. These stars, who are posing more frequently, also wear the most spectacular outfits, and their performances are saved for the end of the show. The models with the 'weaker' bodily movements are dressed in the simpler, less spectacular outfits. They also perform more simple and straightforward choreographies with less turns and stops, and they appear for a shorter time on the catwalk. As such, the organizing of the models illustrates a distinct hierarchy of moving bodies at the fashion show.

## Discussion and concluding remarks

My intention throughout this paper has been to explore how bodily movements are organized and controlled in the context of a fashion show. My point of departure has been my personal *experience* of organizing (Rippin, 2013a), and the manner in which a fashion show can be experienced as a way of thinking critically about organization, embodiment and bodily movements. In doing so, I have deliberately also moved away from safe and typical 'contemporary business school' research topics (O' Doherty et al., 2013: 1432), a field where the mobile physical body as well as the material are still surprisingly 'discounted and discredited' (Rippin, 2013b: 364). Although this paper has focused more on moving bodies than the logistics of material objects, a fashion show organization cannot discount or discredit aspects any forms of materiality in motion. Instead, all these dimensions are meticulously manipulated, controlled and celebrated in the staging of a show, both before and after the totality of physical body and material dress appear on the catwalk. Perhaps the point to emphasize here is that embodiment alone or bodily movements alone are not enough to analyze and explain the fashion show organization.

A fashion show provides an extreme yet interesting event for studying the organizing of bodily movements, one where bodies are organized to move in specific, often extremely controlled ways. Movements are theoretically and empirically complex and complicated, and as researchers 'we study and write about society not as an abstraction but as composed of actual bodies in proximity to other bodies' (Probyn, 2010: 76). This paper has attempted to capture embodied elements and experiences of organizing, in particular, and I have attempted to do so by creating a mobile text. Somewhat ironically, the end result turned out to be more linear than I would have preferred, at times positively immobile, demonstrating the difficulty and challenge of writing bodily movements in practice.

This paper shows the importance of paying attention to the various fine-grained, micro-level physical bodily movements present in organizing. What first might seem like insignificant micro-actions and interactions can significantly shape organizing, particularly when considered in conjunction with issues of space, as this both constrains and enables bodily movements. This was illustrated in particular through the hair- and make-up facilities of the show and the effort it takes to transform the models. Make-up artists and hairdressers self-organize to perform their work under challenging working conditions within crowded, restricting spaces. Of course, plenty has already been written on how space constrains and enables actions (e.g. Hernes, 2004; Kornberger and Clegg, 2004), but such analyses have often focused on the macro aspects of organizing and paid less attention to the embodied characteristics of organizing.

Further, this paper has attempted to illustrate how a fashion show is performed in the continuous negotiations between high fashion and low budget. This tension had a significant impact on how the bodily movements in the setting were organized and performed. In the previous section of this paper, I illustrated how bodily movements and bodies moving material things were absolutely crucial to the overall organizing of the show. To me, it was not surprising to find hard and dedicated work, the designer stressing, running and bossing people around, late nights, improvisation and continuous changes behind the scenes. This negotiation between the polished front stages and the 'dirty', manipulative backstage of fashion has been addressed before (e.g. Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Rocamora, 2009). But what was surprising to me was the realization of how the bodily movements of the organizers were driven by a continuous performing of the appearance of high fashion, while simultaneously working from the very unglamorous premises of low budget. Such a keeping up of appearances involved making cheap solutions 'on the move', such as moving heavy things around in preparing for the show. To his audiences, the designer offered affective stimuli and desperately tried to signal exclusivity and 'doing

well' despite continuously improvising and extensively moving both his own body and making other's bodies move around behind the curtains of the catwalk.

Creative project-based organizations in contemporary post-industrial economies are often assumed to be differently constrained than more 'traditional' organizations (see e.g. Styhre and Sundgren, 2005). However, the bodily movements in my empirical setting, especially those performed on the runway, tended to be strictly scripted and controlled, in a manner not that far removed from the organization of e.g. a factory worker's bodily movements. Interestingly, where we know plenty about 'working class' bodies serving capitalist interests (e.g. Slavishak, 2008; Zandy, 2004), we arguably know far less about the control of bodily movements in the creative economy, an economy often lauded for the freedom it supposedly provides (Rehn, 2009). This paper has attempted to outline the importance of studying the organizing of bodies in movement in the ad hoc-organizations of the postindustrial economy, an economy in which value creation increasingly depends upon bodily presentation, body motion and body work. Here, the paradoxically both classical and modern concept of *dress*, as a moving 'three-dimensional and lived media' (Bell and Davison, 2013: 168) regulating and restricting bodily movements, provides us with a fitting (sic) concept through which we can further develop ideas of bodily movements in modern organizations.

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