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# Playful Choreographies and Choreographies of Play

## New Research in Dance and Play Studies

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The author explores the relationship of play to choreography. He defines choreography as the rules that guide body movements from their minute physicality to their broad social and cultural contours. He conducts a review of the literature and accentuates five general topics—learning through creativity; choreography as writing and pedagogy; comparisons of dance and choreography to play and sport; children’s play and environments as choreographies; and choreography as critical play interventions in public spaces. He argues that viewing play through a choreographic lens helps us understand how players physically communicate and create meaning through action in various play situations. **Key words:** choreography and play; participatory sense making

### Introduction

**I**N THIS ARTICLE, I suggest a broad conception of choreography based on the dynamics of the spontaneous embodied communication that occurs when we move physically together in play situations. The “graph” in choreography refers not just to choreography as a written notation of a sequence of dance steps. Broadening the perspective, I invite the reader to imagine the spontaneous steps of a group of people moving together without a script as the writing of an instant choreography. The term choreography is commonly used to denote highly strategic, thoroughly planned, positioned, and controlled actions. Thoroughness and attention to detail define choreography in a variety of contexts, from dancers’ performance of well-rehearsed steps on a theater stage to meetings of world leaders amid a complex web of security operations and journalistic photo shoots set against backdrops of spectacular architecture or natural wonders (Mason 2022).

By contrast, the term play signals freedom and spontaneity. However, when choreographer and scholar Susan Leigh Foster states that choreography sometimes can be described as a “set of principles that guide spontaneous invention” (Foster 2011, 3), the contrast between play and choreography diminishes. Furthermore, Foster’s statement opens up a seemingly undeveloped potential for exploring play through a choreographic lens.

A set of movement principles can be regarded as a set of movement rules. Several play scholars (Winther-Lindqvist 2018; Hughes 1999; Piaget 1976; Tull-och 2014; Sutton-Smith 1997; Huizinga 1950) argue that play and games follow particular rules and that there are different kinds of rules present in play situations. Similarly, through a choreographic exploration of play, I address the relationship between the different rules when playing and play’s embodied nature. This includes the kind of spontaneous choreography that occurs between the bodies of people who play together.

Throughout this article, I use a broad concept of choreography: the ability to organize ways in which one can move and participate with one’s own body in a given situation and in relation to others. We can see, choreography in the overall organization of society as a controlling “system of command” (Allsopp and Lepecki 2008, 2) embedded in the social, political, and cultural environment. But we can also see choreography in the spontaneous movement decisions between playmates, constituting “a kind of record of action” (Foster 2011, 4). For my purposes, I wish to understand choreography as the rules governing our movements in a broad sense “sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, the broad contours of action” (Foster 2011, 2).

I seek to employ a choreographer’s perspective to explore the relationship between play and choreography. I entered academia following a career as a contemporary dancer and choreographer. In my current research, I explore a choreographic approach to a playful teaching culture in higher education—more specifically, teaching students in early childhood and social education. In this article, I want to take a broader look at the relationship between play and choreography and thereby sketch a landscape of the interplay between these phenomena. This includes a review of the literature that provides the data on which I base my analysis and my discussion. I seek to develop an area of research specifically focused on playful choreographies and choreographies of play. However, before addressing previously published research, I find it necessary to explore and present the theoretical foundations for this approach to play and choreography. Therefore, I must deviate from the structure of more traditional articles

by placing the literature review later in the discussion.

By drawing attention to the physical character of play, I aim to engage with scholars and practitioners interested in thematizing, understanding, and developing playful ways of being together in a variety of contexts. This also includes educators outside the context of dance education who consider play and physical movement in their teaching—for instance, in day care centers, schools, and nonformal education. Playful movement and mischievous action are contagious and might seem disturbing in traditional classrooms. However, understanding the value of unexpected, disturbing, or sometimes hardly noticeable playful action can serve as a stepping stone, helping educators facilitate development, learning, and care. Furthermore, through my critical conversation, I hope to engage with other play and dance scholars and contribute to a new scholarly intersection where playful accounts explore in detail the choreography of spontaneous movement.

I first explore the relationship of play to choreography through a theoretical discussion of the function of rules in both phenomena, focusing on movement and spontaneous bodily play encounters. Then, examining how this relationship has been approached in the existing research, I identify five themes from the research that I can use for further analysis. These themes represent the use and understanding of choreography on a spectrum with productive and liberating rules at one end and manipulative and coercive rules at the other. Similarly, the use and understanding of the rules of movement are represented on a spectrum ranging from explicit to implicit and hidden rules. I hope to use my review as a way of engaging in a dialogue that produces a new area of research, one exploring spontaneous play actions as a form of choreography. I argue that the intersection of the fields of research on play and choreography is a fruitful area for future study because such exploration can reveal new aspects of both these phenomena. Play can be explored through a choreographic lens and choreography through a playful lens.

### **Play as Physical Action with Negotiated Rules**

To uncover how different rules in play can have different physical consequences for the participants, I find it useful to explore how people apply and bend the rules when playing together. Play theorist Linda Hughes has made a distinction between three kinds of rules used by children when they play (Hughes

1999, 1991): rules for the game; rules for the social context; and rules for the rules (Hughes 1991; Winther-Lindqvist 2018). Hughes's study focuses on how children play folk games, using variations and adaptations to make sense of the play actions given the social context in which they are played. Thus, according to Hughes, rules are often flexible. I find Hughes's third category of rules relevant in a choreographic context, in the sense that it can help explain the living, constant creation and renewal of the relationship between the participants in a specific play situation. Rules for the rules, therefore, point to a participant's driven and flexible choreography, one that is not just controlled by external constraints. The rules for the rules, for instance, concern negotiations between the participants as they deal with "when and how the rules of the game ought to be applied, ignored, or modified . . . [and] which of many possible courses of action is to be preferred over others in particular circumstances" (Hughes 1999, 95).

According to developmental psychologist Ditte Winther-Lindqvist (2018), rules for the rules are very often announced verbally and explicitly agreed to by participants during a game. For instance, Winther-Lindqvist shows in a study that five-year-old children change the rules when playing football. If one participant starts crying after losing the ball, it is given back to him and he gets another chance. Hughes and Winther-Lindqvist touch less upon the physical consequences when applying the rules. The example of the crying boy reveals a psychological component rather than showing how participants adjust the rules through their embodied experience. Furthermore, it is unclear whether unspoken and unannounced rules felt in the moment in the heat of the game also constitute a kind of rules for the rules. Nevertheless, Hughes does emphasize the "contradictions between what players say and what they do" (Hughes 1999, 108) to avoid stopping the play or disrupting the game with minor violations of the rules for the game. Through a choreographic lens, this suggests that the players often prioritize the continuation of the physical action and thus their mutual bodily engagement. Stopping a play or a game to argue and negotiate disrupts bodily engagement and playful entanglement and thereby affirms the already established spontaneous communication that takes place through collective sensing and physical movement.

We can also observe the physical consequences of applying the rules in types of play not traditionally regarded as games with rules. In the contemporary psychological literature, Whitebread et al. (2012) proposes five types of play other than games with rules: physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, and pretend play. Taking a closer look at one of these, pretend play, Whitebread and

his colleagues state that children “follow the social rules governing the character they are portraying” (23). However, a choreographic lens can shed further light on the aspect of how the social rules govern a character in pretend play: When you portray a character, this character has a certain style and pattern of movement relating to and interacting with other characters and the space in which the play takes place.

Let me provide a couple of examples. A child playing a pregnant woman might pad her stomach with a pillow and move as she imagines a pregnant woman moves, heavily and slowly touching her back and sighing, pretending to be in pain, and so on. In addition, a child playing a father might run around the play space with a suitcase in hand, pretending to be catching a train to work. The children’s imaginations might add new meanings to the characters; the pregnant character might use her pillow to throw herself violently to the floor or deliberately bump into the other children in the play with her soft stomach because she wants to explore her new physical attributes rather than faithfully portraying what it feels like to be pregnant. Similarly, the father character might experiment with ways of using a suitcase, trying out alternative ways of moving—for instance, opening the suitcase and folding his body in order to fit inside. Thus, these children become instant choreographers of their own play situations. Furthermore, they have the power to shift their pretend play situation into other play types—namely, playing with objects and physical play. Indeed, if I observe the play situation as a choreographer, I notice that the characters in the play move in different patterns in the space dictated partly by the social rules of the characters and partly by the spontaneous inventions of the children’s choreography as they bend the rules and create and act out imaginary play situations that make sense to them and their playmates.

### **Choreography as Playful Participatory Sense Making**

When we interact with people we meet, we enact different kinds of sense-making choreographies through the coordination of our bodily movements. To further describe how playful choreography takes place among playmates, I take a closer look at some of the concepts from the enactive approach to cognitive science. In short, the enactive approach states that “cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and . . . these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in

a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 173).

The implications of this claim are, first of all, that we exist (and move) in the world with other individuals through our bodies. Cognition does not only take place inside our heads. Through our bodily interactions, we are participating in sense-making activities. The philosophers Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel A. Di Paolo (2007) argue, using their concept of participatory sense making, that “interaction is not reducible to individual actions or intentions” (494). An everyday example of how we individually cannot control meaningful actions occurs when two people meet in a narrow corridor and suddenly and unintentionally perform a little dance as they try to get past each other.

By contrast, such small dances are what we often look for and try to encourage in a joyful play situation. In an article written with Marieke Rohde, Di Paolo and De Jaegher (Di Paolo, Rohde, and De Jaegher 2010) examine play practices and argue that “the player is the lawgiver and the rule-follower, the question maker and the responder” (39). Choreographically, we can perhaps say that in play we deliberately attempt to create pleasurable and unpredictable corridor dances and we try to make them last by playfully challenging each other through our movements.

In a play situation, the corridor dance does not become awkward, as it often does when we meet a stranger in a public space and just want to escape as quickly as possible. Rather, in the “play corridor” we signal the fun we feel in losing ourselves in the situation by letting go of our attempts to control fully our individual physical movements. A choreographic project in relation to play might describe and understand the specific movement patterns in playful situations. Thus, a choreographic analysis might help explain how we coordinate meaningful actions, for instance “by studying body movements of the participants in relation to each other” (De Jaegher, Peräkylä, and Stevanovic 2016, 8).

### **The Hidden, Secret, and Silent Choreographies of Play**

Not all playful choreographies are easy to depict—or are even meant to be seen. Depending on how dancers cope with set phrases of movement and how rigidly the rules of movements are defined, a choreography understood as a scripted performance differs from the playful process of developing a choreography. If I go to the theatre to watch a ballet performance, I can usually see clearly

the choreography on the stage through the sequence of steps and movements performed by the dancers. The ballet dancers are very explicit about showing their movements, which are not spontaneous but part of the choreography. By watching the choreography, I can imagine the studio rehearsals prior to the performance in which a choreographer, in a more or less specific way, has taught a dance to—or led a creative process with—the dancers. If the dancers work more democratically in a choreographic collective, I can imagine the process of experimentation that leads to creating and refining the movement interactions that become the final choreographic product. These kinds of set choreographies can often be performed playfully and characterized as a kind of play. However, how are the less obvious choreographies in play situations disclosed?

In relation to social sense making, De Jaegher, Peräkylä, and Stevanovic (2016) ask the reader to consider the “‘invisible excess of sense,’ a presence of hidden, ineffable or even secret meanings, which is best left to play its role as precisely silent” (7). Some of the players that we observe through our choreographic gaze might not understand their play interactions as choreographies. The meaning-making processes and body movements that compose the choreography are perhaps only possible and playful if they are not articulated and deliberately choreographed. Indeed, when the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) writes that “the structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative” (105), he contributes to the idea that there are tacit and unintentional aspects of bodily movement in play situations. Here the players set aside individual agency and let their bodily movements and movement interactions be ruled by the play itself.

Hidden choreographies can also be understood in another sense. Players might not always want people outside the play to know about their specific choreography. Rather, they might prefer to keep their play world a secret. Therefore, what might appear a silent and invisible choreography to outsiders might be an obvious and expressive practice inside the play world. These hidden aspects of play are sometimes connected to forbidden activities. The sociologist William A. Corsaro (2003) shows through ethnographic research that breaking the rules made by adults behind their back is highly valued among children. Similarly, play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith distinguishes between the public and private transcript of adults and the public and private transcript of children. According to Sutton-Smith (1997), children’s “private or hidden transcript is their play life, in which they can express both their special identity and their resentment at being a captive population” (123). The rules that children make up in their secret

play worlds must generate a different kind of quality in the bodily movement of the participants, as well as different kinds of movement patterns and rhythms. Playing in the way your parents would like you to play differs from playing in the secret and forbidden ways you do with your best playmates.

To sum up, a landscape of the different choreographies in play should include but not be limited to spontaneous bodily inventions, physical consequences from the application of different kinds of rules, silent and secret playful dances, and descriptions of expressive movement patterns and interactions in rebellious play encounters.

### Literature Review as Discussion Partner

I started by exploring a specific relationship between play and choreography involving rules of movement and spontaneous bodily play encounters. Guided by this theoretical discussion, I now identify and evaluate existing research on the topic.

The concept of creativity turns up in the intersection of the fields of research about play and about choreography. The researchers on creativity in education, Kerry Chappell and Charlotte Hathaway (2019), address play and improvisation in relation to dance and creativity but do not explore in depth the relation between play and choreography. Nevertheless, they point toward new understandings of creativity influenced by new understandings of choreography: “There are exciting possible next steps ahead . . . . Creativity will be interwoven within multiple understandings of choreography (e.g. Bannon 2017; Midgelow 2019) which consider choreographic craft, improvisation and new understandings of embodiment and the body itself as text” (37).

This does not directly focus on the interrelationship between play and choreography. Chappell and Hathaway mostly refer to studies that consider choreography a craft to be taught rather than as spontaneous movement interactions.

In contrast, I explore choreography’s relation to play by looking at the creative aspects of choreography. And in my understanding of the phenomenon of play, I include playful as well as creative activities. I do so to incorporate playful and creative approaches to learning in education (Nørgård, Toft-Nielsen, and Whitton 2017; Hammershøj 2014) and consider “the capacity to use play outside the context of play” (Sicart 2014, 21).

In a Nordic research context, the word “play” is more commonly used and



often distinguished from learning in educational contexts (Sundsdal and Øksnes 2021). This is not always the case in other international research traditions. Thus, I will also explore play through such search terms as “creative learning” or “creativity in education.” In terms of a broader understanding of play, Sutton-Smith (1997) has likewise emphasized that “variability is the key to play” (229) in several contrasting theories and understandings of play. For instance, variability is explored by Hughes in her concept of rules for the rules, in which she looks at the different ways the same game can be played by different players in different social contexts.

Following the leitmotif of unfolding the idea of a fruitful relationship between play and choreography, the purpose of my review is twofold: how does the existing research address this leitmotif and why is it interesting to look at play through a choreographic lens? The literature supports an analysis that sketches the interplay of the two phenomena. I study the interrelationship between choreography and play in the literature using Randolph’s (2009) five-stage model: problem formulation; data collection; data evaluation; analysis and interpretation; and communication.

The first step in the data collection involved a search for English-language, peer-reviewed articles in relevant search engines (ProQuest and Scopus). I then conducted a search for relevant Nordic articles in databases for Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The main search terms I used were play and choreography in searches strung together with game, improvisation, movement, dance, and creativity. To broaden the search, I used a truncation technique to include various word endings—for instance in the search string: *Choreograph\* AND Creativ\**. The search was restricted to publication dated from 2000 to 2021.

I selected or rejected studies based on a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria. For instance, I excluded studies that addressed play in the sense of at play, a theater play, etc., and I excluded studies dealing with choreography at a microscopic cell level. In my initial search I found 315 articles; after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, I selected 26 articles. Because these included articles different in their approach from the interrelation between play and choreography, I found it useful to divide them into thematic categories as a way to present and discuss my findings.

In practical terms, each article was represented by a Post-it note, which I moved around, grouping them in different categories on a large table (McLaughlin Library 2021). This helped me formulate different themes for each group of articles, and for a while I continued to move different articles between different

themes. The moving of the sticky notes on the table in my living room in itself became a kind of choreographic play. At the end of this process, five themes emerged: learning through creativity; choreography as writing and pedagogy; comparisons between dance and choreography and play and sport; children's play and environments understood as choreographies; and choreography as critical play interventions in public spaces.

In this article, I define choreography as the rules of movement in a broad sense. If we look at the five themes, we see the use of choreography on a spectrum with productive and liberating rules at one end and manipulative and coercive rules at the other. I find another distinction that moves across this spectrum: explicit rules versus implicit and hidden rules. A player might observe a system of rules that regulate and enable his or her movements when playing. However, can this player also see a possibility of changing the system by making new rules, either through nonverbal changes in movement patterns or by defining new explicit verbal rules?

### **Learning through Creativity**

This theme highlights creativity rather than play. The focus is on physical activities in education and how they support young people's academic and social development. The physical activities serve to make learning meaningful. I include these studies, even though they rarely thematize play as a phenomenon, to embrace research conducted outside a Nordic research context, in which play and creativity are more often distinguished. Notwithstanding this, the studies show a development in the understanding of how choreography is related to playful processes.

Through empirical experiments involving students in teacher education and the teaching of mathematics, a study by An and associates (An et al. 2017) shows how mathematics becomes more meaningful for students when practiced through dance and movement. Miriam Giguere (2006, 2011) uses experiences from artist visits in a fifth-year class in Pennsylvania to describe how children's cognitive development and ability to solve problems are facilitated in dance, movement, and choreography (Giguere 2011, 2006). Giguere's (2011) point is that children do not express their emotions only by moving but also by applying, developing, and practicing advanced forms of thinking when choreographing dances. Giguere (2006) associated creativity with problem solving and compared

choreographing a dance to the practice of writing. Bishop and al-Rifaie (2017) use descriptions of the creativity of dancers and choreographers to challenge specific theories of creativity that disregard its bodily and social aspects. The social element in some types of dance activities is also thematized by Karen Schupp (2015), who recommends that, by training young people's collaborative skills through dance, educational institutions can support their subsequent success in their working lives.

In this first theme, it is the educators who create a choreographic framework to let students learn through movement. The students find possibilities to play inside the choreographic framework introduced by their teachers. The rules of these playful choreographies are productive; however, the rules lean toward the controlled end of the choreography spectrum. It can also be questioned how closely these creative activities are related to the phenomenon of play, if play is primarily used instrumentally as a skill (Sundsdal and Øksnes 2021) for succeeding in education and working lives.

### **Choreography as Writing and Pedagogy**

In the second theme, choreography lies at the core of studies of creative writing and pedagogy. Bannerman (2010) compares the choreographic process with creative writing and argues that texts written by choreographers can be understood as expressions of bodily experiences of moving and being moved. Based on phenomenology, neomaterialism, and the work of Gilles Deleuze, Ulmer (2015) provides three examples of choreographic writing focused on helping choreographers write in a way related to the specific creative characteristics of dance. Building on philosophy of mind, Irvine (2016) shows that working with a certain type of choreographic method, the writing of dance scores, helps dancers make decisions as they are dancing. Dance scores come in different variations, but, in simple terms, they consist of a number of rules or instructions that serve to guide the movements of the performers. Choreographer Jonathan Burrows (2010) describes two kinds of dance scores. The first he calls a representation of a dance piece similar to a musical score. Describing the second, he notes that "what is written or thought is a tool for information, image and inspiration, which acts as a source for what you will see, but whose shape may be very different from the final realization" (141). Finally, using choreography as an approach to teaching, Harrington (2014) examines the relationship between choreography

and pedagogy through descriptions of a teaching course with dance students, in which choreography becomes a pedagogical tool for the teacher and a structuring link between different subjects in cocreative processes for the students.

All four studies emphasize the importance of the creative element in choreography. It is the play actors themselves who make rules of movement both to create and to describe playful movement. Nevertheless, these descriptions ignore possible and already established social and cultural systems of movement rules that influence the possibilities open to the play actors.

### **Comparisons of Dance and Choreography to Play and Sport**

Within this theme, four articles—each in their own way—draw parallels between the art of dance and other bodily movement and playful practices. Klein (2012) looks at football through the eyes of a dancer and finds common characteristics as well as differences, arguing that football is a “playful interaction, whose tension is not acted out between the poles emotion-motion, but in the fight for victory or defeat” (13). The Amsterdam-based choreographer Carolien Hermans (2018) describes an experiment in which she first invited three boys into a dance studio and asked them to play and then used their interactions and movements as an inspiration for a dance improvisation session with dance students. Lindqvist (2001) compares children’s play with local dance classes in Sweden and concludes that this kind of dance teaching ignores children’s preoccupation with roles and narratives in play. Thus, according to Lindqvist, there is a gap between dance activities related to “movement-training in relation to music” and dance activities related to drama and fiction (41). By contrast, Chappell (2007) directly addresses Lindqvist’s point in a study involving specialist dance teachers by showing that “these dance teachers encouraged play rooted in physicality and embodied knowledge within a strong dance/movement meaning-making framework which could be coupled with dramatization” (50).

It is worth noting that when Chappell mentions choreography, she places it in opposition to the play structures in dance activities and as “formulaic choreography” (42). Thus, Chappell does not herself directly link play and choreography.

Overall, this third theme addresses the differences between play and choreography. Furthermore, Lindqvist and Chappell point toward a missing link: the ability to understand the embodied and choreographic aspect of roles and

narratives in play. Behind a narrative like the classic playing of mommy and daddy lies specific implicit rules for how the different characters use their bodies.

### **Children's Play and Environments Understood as Choreographies**

In line with the other themes, the research of the fourth theme applies choreography in a variety of ways. In a structural sense, Kornerup and Gravgaard (2017) describe early morning in a day care center, with all its interactions, welcome routines, and practices, as a choreography. Årlemalm-Hagsér (2010) applies Barrie Thorne's (1993) concept of gender choreography to analyze the gender stereotypes used by day care professionals on a playground when they try to stimulate children's play. A study by Martha Sif Karrebæk (2011) applies the concept of "social choreography," as formulated by Karin Aronsson (Aronsson 1998), in a microanalysis of four boys' play in a day care center focused on how the play commences, develops, and concludes, as well as which positions and characters the participants create through negotiation. Manso, Ferreira, and Vaz (2017) characterize children's play as improvised choreographies. Without using choreography in the description, Berkhuizen (2020) focuses on children's ability to construct their own original and unconventional places for play as something often ignored by adults as children's play practices.

In relation to adult ideas about children's play, it is striking that the studies related to the first and second theme describe the physical movement practices of schoolchildren and students in higher education as creative. By contrast, the studies related to this fourth theme describe as playful the physical movement practices of preschool children. The fourth theme concerns the different aspects of the adult framing of children's play in both productive and unproductive, manipulative ways. We see these power relations among children when they play together, for instance when one child acts as the choreographer by making other children dance or move in particular ways (Manso, Ferreira, and Vaz 2017). Even though Manso, Ferreira, and Vaz use the term "improvisational choreographies," still they understand choreography as a practice in which choreographers are distinguished from dancers in a hierarchy of decision making. Berkhuizen (2020), on the other hand, shows that children, collectively, can create their own secret choreographic system of imagination within the rules made by adults.

## Choreography as Critical Play Interventions in Public Spaces

Both through analyses and interventions, the studies related to the fifth and final theme bring play and choreography into direct interaction with public spaces and public practices. David Cardell (2010), considering commercial playhouses in Sweden (sometimes called funzones), also uses the term “social choreography.” However, Cardell does not draw on Karin Aronsson’s concept as related to the previous theme, but instead uses the concept in a critical sense first formulated by Andrew Hewitt (2005). Cardell understands social choreography as “a way of explaining the interplay between aesthetics and ideology, how actors are incorporated into structures while at the same time (re)producing them” (5). Cardell’s criticism finds these funzones governed by the desire of adults to control children’s play.

Other studies focus on how choreography in digital spaces shapes the physicality of gamers. Criticizing the typical gender stereotypes of the avatars seen in digital games, Miller (2015) outlines the process of developing a new game in which participants can create their own original body identity. Isbister and associates criticize the well-known game *Just Dance* for its lack of possibilities for cocreation and playful movement because it uses prescriptive kind of choreography (Isbister et al. 2016). As an alternative, the authors present their design of the battle game *Yamove!* in an attempt to choreograph playful human interaction in a universe that mixes technology with physical and fun dance battles.

Four of my selected studies address dance and choreography as artistic practice: Spampinato (2019) analyses an Israeli performance group that stages public choreographies and rituals such as parades, dances, and games to explore how political power prevents populations from creating change. Wood (2017) describes a choreographic practice with three dancers in urban spaces. With their movements and behavior, the dancers seek to create poetic moments as a form of public activism. Merriman (2010) seeks to revitalize the concept of choreography in architectural geography through descriptions of the happenings organized in the 1960s by the U.S.-based, avant-garde duo Lawrence and Anna Halprin that explored how the intended use of architecture could be changed through dance and movement.

In this fifth theme, it becomes even clearer that a particular choreographic gaze can reveal the authors of the system of rules. Becoming aware of the unproductive and restrictive aspects of rules enables resistance and innovation and the

creation of new types of play. Thus, when we are able to see the choreographic rules in play and games, we might also have the opportunity to change these rules and thereby attempt to redefine the way we move and play together. These attempts can result in the creation of playful choreographies.

## Discussion

With the review's five themes in mind, I now return to unfolding the idea about a fruitful relationship between play and choreography. I wish to consider the initial choreographic exploration of play in this article and tentatively open a new theme to explore further the landscape of the interplay of our two phenomena.

In my review of the literature, there seems to be as many definitions of choreography as there are definitions of play. However, very rarely do the studies view choreography as playful. Often, choreography is understood as a plan or a way to move that an agent or authority compels others to follow. In other cases, choreography is understood as a skill or subject one can study in dance education. Some of the studies do address choreographies that consist of playful movements (Isbister et al. 2016). Notwithstanding, the existing research gives little consideration to the detailed choreographies of play.

One way to approach this topic is to consider every physical characteristic of play as choreography. Looking at choreography through the lens of play is to ask: Where in this specific situation is somebody playing, and how can this playing be described choreographically? Here, concepts from the enactive approach can serve as guiding principles as we try to describe the variations in what it looks like when players, through different rhythms and qualities of movement, create participatory sense-making play action and relate to each other in original and playful corridor dances.

Research considering the detailed choreographies of play cannot ignore the practice of improvisational dance, which has several things in common with play. Besides mentioning the work of Anna Halprin, who pioneered the field of experimental improvisation and postmodern dance (Merriman 2010) under the review's fifth theme, I have not not addressed the vast range of movement practices that involve the scaffolding and guidance of playfulness, improvisation, and imagination (Albright and David 2003). More specifically, looking at the dance form known as contact improvisation (Novack 1990) reveals a number of strategies and democratic values in relation to the occurrence and practice of



playful movement. Contact improvisers search for the “unpredictable unfolding of movement” (Foster 2011, 3) as they allow their bodies to interact through touch and the sophisticated use of each other’s body weight. Can these interactive movements all be characterized as playful, or is such a description limited to only particular aspects?

Improvisational dancers have specific strategies in common with songwriters (Preston 2013) and jazz musicians, including call-response structures (Ravn, Høffding, and McGuirk 2021) and turn-taking strategies (Preston 2013), which are a form of unpredictable conversation. Initially, the actions of those improvising through music and movement might not always look and feel playful; there might therefore be a phase of pretending to be playful before successfully establishing a playful interaction. Furthermore, some of these playful practices require expertise, guidance, and many hours of practice. To illustrate, training for a dance technique like Gaga (Galili 2015) involves a teacher who uses a specific language designed to guide and evoke practitioners’ imagination and thereby help them to express themselves using a particular playful and explorative movement language. If we look at some of these practices from a play perspective, we might be able to detect and isolate specific playful moments in relation to different practices and modes of play in everyday life (Karoff 2013).

Another playful approach to examining movement practices that involve improvisation is to ask if these practices exclude or allow for the hidden, secret, and silent choreographies of play. Even if a movement practice promotes a specific kind of playful movement language, a playful project might look at the spontaneous and unintended moments outside or in the cracks of the practice where there might be contagious outbreaks of joyful group interaction. At first sight, these moments might not be considered valuable—they might even appear disturbing. However, in an educational context, it can be useful to understand the value of unintended and contagious playful choreographies when teachers and educators try to incorporate playful qualities into their teaching.

In relation to rhythm, playful choreographies often arise against a more stringent background. Thus, we might say that several choreographies coexist in the same way that philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his rhythmanalysis describes how activities with a playful and cyclical rhythm often coexist with activities with linear rhythms (Lefebvre 2004). For instance, Anne-Lene Sand describes how young people in urban spaces draw inspiration from seemingly hopeless architecture to create their own self-organized play activities (Sand 2017).

Another promising candidate for providing a helpful theoretical framework



for describing playful choreographies in detail is the concept of social affordances (Rietveld 2012). In the same way as “a person waiting for a coffee machine can afford a conversation and an extended hand affords a handshake” (207), play taking place in a room with chairs might invite the players to use the chairs in other ways than for sitting (Rucińska 2017). I envisage a choreographic project here that is even more specific in how these play actors bodily interact with each other and the environment.

A commanding choreography is not necessarily a suppressive choreography. Sometimes challenging rules and commands create a tension within choreography, and the dancer or player is thereby challenged by having something to work against. This aspect resembles sport philosopher R. Scott Kretchmar’s (2017) description of constitutive rules in the playground of sport: we invent and redefine rules “to create superior difficulties” (63). Kretchmar’s idea is that actors in sports, similar to writers of novels, use their sport as a playground where they reinvent real-life problems. Thus, if the play is too easy, the participants change the rules to make it more exciting, longer lasting, and more pleasurable. Our map of playful choreographies should also include this kind of choreographing from inside the play world.

Certainly, a choreographed situation can be in opposition to a playful situation. This is described in recent choreographic research (Allsopp and Lepdecki 2008; Ehrenberg 2019), as well as in several of the studies I have reviewed (Cardell 2010; Ärlemalm-Hagsér 2010; Chappell 2007). Here, choreography either manipulates or stiffens people so much that playing becomes impossible. It is essential to disclose these choreographic power structures to understand the possibilities for play. Similarly, exploring the detailed choreography of joyful play encounters can offer new perspectives on the relationship between play and choreography and thus open new and fruitful areas for future study.

## Conclusion

I have sought to outline an area of research for the interdisciplinary fields of dance studies and play studies by unfolding and exploring a fruitful relationship between play and choreography. By understanding choreography as the rules of movement in a broad sense, I sketch a landscape that shows how previously published research addresses the relationship between choreography and play through a spectrum with productive and liberating rules at one end and manipu-

lative and coercive rules at the other. Although the latter kind of choreographic rules are generally in opposition to play, the first kind of rules create opportunities for playful situations to unfold. Only to a lesser degree does the existing research explore the spontaneous embodied communication that occurs when we sense and move physically together in play situations. Furthermore, when these spontaneous inventions in play are considered, they are rarely perceived as constituting a choreography.

Understanding every physical characteristic of play as choreography makes it possible to open an area of research that can add knowledge about both play and choreography. A choreographic project in relation to play could be used to describe and understand how players in various play situations physically communicate by offering social affordances as invitations to play and thereby creating meaningful coaction. This might open doors to ways of understanding, for example, how play in an educational setting can help young people be creative and imperfect together. In play, we can instantly become collective choreographers in interweaving patterns of multiple forms of movement and rhythm.

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