

Take care of caring

What could an aesthetic of embodied care look like?

A movement research residency carried out by Keren Hoffman and Stine Albrektsen, exploring different aesthetics of embodied care in dance improvisation. (April/May 2026).

Keren Hoffman is a dance artist and facilitator, working as a freelancer in Copenhagen since 2023.

Stine Albrektsen is a person working with dance, voice and somatics practices in Copenhagen.

Keren and Stine met through their common interest in contact improvisation, where themes of support and listening became returning topics in their dancing. They continued to meet and exchange ideas in the studio, eventually landing on a mutual wish for diving into a deep movement research on the theme of care.

“In my dance practice - especially in contact improvisation - I always feel both touched and curious when I notice a strong quality of care between me and my dance partner. I often felt this in my dances with Keren, and it made me curious to explore this theme on a deeper level. I also relate the topic to a broader context and believe that we actually really need to take care of this caring quality in our society today. We need to practice and cultivate it, so we don't lose it”.

- Stine

“For quite some time I have been exploring the healing quality that is inherent in improvised dance practices, and some somatic approaches. The main interest is the ability that dance improvisation has to connect people together, and to practice skills of listening, empathy and care. In times of social fragmentation, I believe that communication and expression through movement and art can be a powerful and transformative means toward healing and connection.”

- Keren

The process of the experiment

Before starting the eight-days experiment, we brainstormed to get inspiration and to land on our research question. We created a list of words we associate to our theme of care, and reflected on how to work with these words within the context of embodied dance and movement.

We agreed to meet on our first day without a set plan for what to do, but with a set of ideas to try out and see where that would take us. Our usual schedule ended up with a structure of:

- Arriving and checking in
- A short individual warm up and landing in the space
- A touch based score for bodywork, attending to our physical and emotional needs of the day
- A longer session exploring embodied care within different scores
- Lunch and reflection time
- A shorter session continuing our exploration
- Closing and planning the next day

What were our main practices for exploring?

Mover/witnesser practices:

- Mover: moving from their needs. Witness: writing what she thinks the movers needs are.
- Mover: moving from their needs. Witness: verbalizing what they think the mover needs while they are moving.
- Mover: moving from inner impulses. Witness: writing down what they themselves are experiencing while witnessing.
- Mover: moving from inner impulses. Witness: verbalizing their own experience of watching the mover.
- Mover: moving from inner impulses. Witness: writing down their experience in a poetic language, allowing for story telling and vivid imagination.

Creative writing:

“Writing letters to care” - with the purpose of stimulating our curiosity to the theme of care and deepening our dialogue with it.

The ten duets of care:

While improvising together we wanted to experiment with different variations of caring, exploring how different combinations of caring for each other would bring different dances to life.

We created the ten duet of care, playing with different roles of what/who to care for in a dance duet and what/who was cared for. We landed on three components - Keren, Stine and “the dance”, from which we developed ten variations or scores for ten different duets of care. We started with the score of improvising together with the task being that each of us was taking care of ourselves. Next the score was to improvise together with dancer A taking care of herself while dancer B was taking care of dancer A. We continued playing with variations of “caring for”, and added the third component - the dance.

We then created a list of the scores, showing who would care for who in each dance. K, S and D indicate Keren, Stine and The Dance. The arrows indicate the action of care.

1. $S \rightarrow S \ \& \ K \rightarrow K$
2. $S \rightarrow S \ \& \ K \rightarrow S$
3. $S \rightarrow K \ \& \ K \rightarrow K$
4. $S \rightarrow K \ \& \ K \rightarrow S$
5. $S \rightarrow D \ \& \ K \rightarrow S$
6. $S \rightarrow K \ \& \ K \rightarrow D$
7. $S \rightarrow D \ \& \ K \rightarrow D$
8. $S \rightarrow D \ \& \ K \rightarrow K$
9. $S \rightarrow S \ \& \ K \rightarrow D$
10. $D \rightarrow S + K$

Inviting guests for the research:

On our last day we invited a friend to join our experiment, trying out the ten duets of care with one more person, shifting between the roles of participating and observing, and reflecting with new eyes and ideas on our project.

Findings & Insights

During our experiment we came across a series of new insights along the way. Even though our main question: “What could an aesthetic of embodied care look like?” would be hard to answer at this point, we can name a few of the patterns we identified in our care-dances, along with some qualities that appeared repeatedly.

We identified a series of actions that we used as a way of “caring for” in our dances:

- Observing/witnessing the other
- Offering physical support
- Giving physical touch (to the other or one self)
- Giving space to the other
- Mirroring the other
- Offering resistance
- Stretching/warming up
- Following impulses towards movement and stillness

During the research we were often writing notes and journaling - sometimes while watching the other person dance, sometimes between dances and sometimes as a way to finish off the day. Below we share some of the notes we wrote when exploring the ten duets of care.

“While taking care of ourselves in this dance, we were enjoying being in our own zone. It highlighted the context of ‘duet’ in which we experimented, and evoked the question of what a duet actually means, especially when we are each so focused on ourselves”.

“What do I need to do in order to take care of my partner? In what ways can I care for her?”

“Sometimes as an act of care in dance, I offer suggestions for my partner to use, if she wants to. These can be movement offers, for example: creating an imaginary circle on the floor, like an open space for her to fill with something. Or touch-based suggestions, offering some kind of support”.

“Sometimes the best way to take care of my partner is to give her space”.

“Sometimes in order to take care of my partner I would use small manipulations, and sometimes I would use mirroring and echoing”.

“When taking care of the dance, often I was asking myself: What does this dance need right now in terms of composition/choreography”.

“When we both took care of the dance, we both acted our movements in a clear, decisive quality”.

“The duet $S \rightarrow K$ & $K \rightarrow S$ was often awkward in an interesting way. It had the quality of reciprocity and symbiosis”.

“Sometimes one of us doesn’t want any care from the other. It’s interesting to be in this tension. The caregiver needs to read her partners’ needs or desires, and the carereceiver knows that she’s being taken care of, but doesn’t necessarily want it”.

“When the dance is taking care of me, I let go and follow whatever happens. It’s also okay if nothing happens. The responsibility is kind of off me and I have more fun”.

“When I’m taking care of the dance, I am aware of the room and how my partner is moving. I make decisions based on an outside eye or more of a compositional eye. It gives me a focus point and feels like a good place to create from”.

“When I’m taking care of my partner, I observe and keep an eye on them while moving myself. I make myself available for support and/or give them space”.

“When I’m taking care of myself I tune into my needs. I try to listen to what kind of movement my body wants and go with that. If I can’t locate or identify a specific need, it sometimes makes me feel stuck”.

Possible options for further research

We shared a short example from our ten duets of care at the Platform event at Forsøgstationen. After listening to the feedback from the audience we added a few optional directions to further develop this research.

- Exploring the dramatic potential that lies in the attempt of caring for someone. How does one behave when they want to care for their dance partner? What if the “subject of care” - the partner, doesn’t need or doesn’t want to be taken care of?
- Trying to dance with the opposite of caring. What movement qualities does “not caring” evoke? What kind of compositions and aesthetics does it create?
- Working towards creating a workshop based on our research - inviting others to explore the theme with us.