Chapter 3: The Dancers

Each morning the dancers of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company commuted to work wearing their street clothes, soon to be replaced with well-worn sweatpants, T-shirts, leotards and socks. In the last chapter, I explored the material and infrastructural conditions that enabled Forsythe's choreographies to emerge and change—showing this entwinement to be dynamically interlaced with the political and economic landscape of Frankfurt am Main. In this chapter I turn to the so-called human resources of these organizations: focusing on the dancers. Besides stating who these artists are, I explore their cultural and professional backgrounds, their working contracts and their values. Through these queries, I shape an occupational portrait of dancers coming together for professional activity and clarify key aspects of the occupational culture that supported *Duo*.

As a new dancer joining the Ballett Frankfurt in 2004, my first action was to fly from Columbus, Ohio, to Frankfurt. After dropping my luggage off at a hotel, I met a German member of the team at the theater, who escorted me to the public city office (*Ordnungsamt*) to register myself as foreigner with a working visa. The apparatus of the *Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt am Main*, in terms of how it legally legitimized dancers to travel and become members of the team was a fundamental aspect of the workplace—a fascinating institutional 'choreography.' In this chapter I will show how my story of immigration fits into the mosaic of international dancers joining forces in Frankfurt and begin discussing what this transnationalism signifies for *Duo*.

3.1 Frankfurt am Main

Frankfurt is well known as an international and intellectual German city—the fifth largest by population in Germany. Statistics for the population in 2017 (see Table 2) demonstrate the diversity of its inhabitants: showing nearly thirty percent of the population to be foreigners and one quarter Germans with a migration background. This is relevant to understanding the climate of Forsythe's companies, for the international character of the ensembles was mirrored by the city population.

Table 2. Frankfurt am Main Population (2017)[*1]

Population	741 093
Population density (inhabitants per km²)	2 985
Up to 17 years (percent)	16.7
65 years and over (percent)	15.7
Foreigners (percent)	29.5
German inhabitants with migration background[*2] **(percent)**	23.6

*1: See "Statistisches Portrait / Statistical Portrait Frankfurt am Main 2017." | *2: People who emigrated to Germany or who have at least one parent who emigrated to Germany.

In the present era of increasing far-right agitation against immigration in both Europe and the United States, it is worth pausing to acknowledge Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company's utopic assembly of international dancers—as well as the values and legal policy that made this possible. Though Germany was late to acknowledge itself as a country of immigration, and not all fields in the performing arts have opened generously to migrants, municipal ballet companies in western Germany have been notably international for decades.[1] Without this underlying cultural value of the artistic profession and its recognition by the state, as an American, Forsythe might not have come to the Stuttgart Ballet in 1973 and his companies would not have achieved the international diversity they boasted.

Ballett Frankfurt would place Frankfurt on the map as a locus of contemporary innovation—a "magnet place" for dancers seeking to engage in radical choreographic work. Sociologist Michael Farrell describes a "magnet place" as a location "where people value the expertise and practice the skills the prospective members hope to acquire."[2] Under Forsythe's direction, the ensemble became a company with considerable reputation and international status, touring worldwide throughout Europe, North America and also to Asia, Australia and South America. Dancer Dana Caspersen recounts:

> The company, both companies really [Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company], were always kind of a hub for international dancers. So, there was, was literally almost always ten or twenty guests [visiting dancers] in the room. It was always full of people. And Frankfurt Ballett was always the same … people were in and out, taking class all the time, hanging out at rehearsals. […] The broader network that was connected to the work was extensive and it would come. And then, when we were on tour people were constantly coming, so you really got to meet a lot of people. We connected to a lot of different folks.[3]

1 Admittedly, this diversity reflected the mobility of predominantly Caucasian dancers within the ballet network (moving within and between Europe, North America, Britain and Australia); people of color were a minority therein. For further discussion of these issues focusing on European theater, see Sharifi, "Theatre and Migration," in particular on Germany pp. 336–72.

2 See Farrell, *Collaborative Circles*, p. 19.

3 Dana Caspersen, videoconference interview with the author, December 19, 2018.

In Forsythe's ensembles, there was extensive border crossing, mingling and intermingling of dancers, fueled by an excitement of being attractive and different: "original," said *Duo* dancer Francesca Harper, a "hub" and "network" as Dana Caspersen described it. On the whole, the ensembles were tolerant and open to guests and visitors.

3.2 The Dancers' Working Conditions

3.2.1 Auditions

Throughout their careers, professional dancers are sorted into schools and companies through a process of attending auditions, or selection based upon their performance in training or rehearsal.[4] Breaking this mold, Forsythe did not hold public group auditions for new dancers. When asked, "Where do you find your dancers?" Forsythe replied, "They find me."[5] Reversing the sorting process was one of many ways that Forsythe negated norms and common procedures in the field of dance. Forsythe relied on dancers to choose *him*. Dancers made this decision after performing Forsythe's work in another company, seeing his companies on tour, and based upon understanding drawn through their professional and social networks.

'Finding' Forsythe was, however, not as easy as it sounds. Although it was clear where he worked, the building at the *Städtische Bühnen* was closed to outsiders, with guards at the entrance. With no publicly announced procedure for how to get a job, aspiring dancers strategically used their social networks to learn from friends how to get into the studio and make contact. Once in proximity to Forsythe, they had to overcome anxieties and ask him personally if he would consider them. In the quote cited above, Forsythe belittles his influence: he did not accept everyone who managed to request a personal audition. Moreover, when expressing to him personally their interest in a job, without the ritual of institutional procedures, dancers were placed in a vulnerable and intimate position. Beyond dancing ability, becoming a Forsythe dancer required drive, determination and the capability to use social resources to navigate the process. These skills foreshadowed competences necessary for work in the company. Thus, rather than being trained in a school for Forsythe's methods, or living in Frankfurt first before joining the company, most dancers moved to Frankfurt upon being granted a position in the ensemble, drawn by their curiosity and attraction to Forsythe's creative work, and desire to take part in it. The auditioning process reveals how, despite the prevailing institutional structure, an intimate pact with Forsythe and significant social capital secured one's access to the company—setting the tone for the cooperation to come.

4 Freelance dance projects are significantly less audition-oriented than classical ballet and municipal theaters' structures of production.

5 Driver et al., "A Conversation with William Forsythe," p. 90.

3.2.2 Soloist Contracts

Within most classical ballet companies world-wide, dancers are organized by rank within a pyramid structure. The hierarchal ballet system reflects the performance of ballet since the 19th century, dividing the labor of artists between ensemble or solo roles.[6] The pyramid has a broad base; the majority of dancers make up the ensemble as the *corps de ballet*. At the top are the highest status dancers called *étoiles* (stars) or principal dancers. Frequently there are multiple ranks between.[7] Corresponding with their status, dancers perform roles that are more or less featured in the choreography, and are compensated with different salaries. Distinctions in rank are internationally respected. A ballet dancer's career is oriented towards the ideal of upwards progression towards solo or principal roles. In contrast, contemporary dance companies are more egalitarian, placing dancers all at the same level.

The contracts of dancers in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company reflected the standardized legal contracts for dancers of different rank working in a private German theater. When Forsythe assumed directorship of Ballett Frankfurt, he chose to convert the company into an egalitarian team. He gave all subsequent new members of the Ballett Frankfurt contracts all of the *same* type and pay level as soloists (*Solomitglieder*). This effectively leveled the hierarchy, making all members share the same status, title and earnings. Through this legal action Forsythe explicitly disrupted the hierarchal ideology of ballet. Translating this status into English terms, some former Ballett Frankfurt artists list themselves as principal dancers of the Ballett Frankfurt in their biographies.

As with all employees in the municipal theater of Frankfurt, dancers received thirteen months' pay a year; the extra month was divided and paid out as a bonus for the Christmas and summer holidays. Despite Frankfurt being a comparatively expensive German city, the salary was enough that they could afford to live well; they were also paid comparatively higher than other ballet and contemporary dancers of equal status.[8]

---

6 See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 34.

7 For example, currently in the Paris Opera Ballet there are five ranks of dancers, who are named, from highest to lowest: *Étoiles*, *Premiers Danseurs*, *Sujets*, *Coryphées*, *Quadrilles*. At the Hamburg Ballet there are also five ranks: Principals, Character Artists, Soloists, *Corps de Ballet*, and Apprentices.

8 Some legendary dancers made six-figure incomes; exceptions like Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolf Nureyev earned even more. Wulff finds that ballet dancers' salaries depended on union rules and national standards. Some dancers were paid only for the weeks they worked (approximately six months a year), others full-time. Considering data from 1993–6, she finds: *corps de ballet* dancers "earned from $400 to $1,048 per week and soloists from $1,125 to $1,200 per month, and the salaries of principals ranged from $1,500 per month to $2,560 per week. Famous principals could also be paid sums like $30,000 for a couple of guest performances with another company." Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 57. In comparison, a dancer of the Ballett Frankfurt in 1994 reported receiving 2400DM per month (before tax), approximately $1450, reflecting soloist/principal status. Their salary was however elevated by additional soloist fees, overtime payments in line with municipal and union regulations and *per diems* when on tour. This was a sizable bonus to their salaries, given the lengthy hours that they worked when creating new pieces and the substantial number of weeks they spent touring. These salaries were also adjusted every two years for inflation. In The Forsythe Company, dancers earned 4000€ per month in 2005 (before tax), with adjustment for inflation over the next decade. They did not earn overtime pay but did collect *per diems* on tour.

Paid vacation was a minimum of four weeks in Ballett Frankfurt and was often longer than this in The Forsythe Company, whose contracts additionally allowed dancers several weeks each year to pursue individual projects, something that was looked on as a period of continuing education or professional development. The employees of these ensembles joined the German state pension system, with their employers contributing equally to a retirement fund. In 1990 Forsythe explains, dancers "can walk out of there [Ballett Frankfurt] with $10,000 or $15,000 if they decide to leave at the end of, say, 16 years."[9]

As with all German citizens, the dancers could choose between public or private health care. Dancers who became pregnant were offered maternity leave in accordance with German law and many returned to work thereafter. In conformity with legislation around workplace injury, dancers who were injured onstage or in rehearsal also received proper paid leave, corresponding to the rules of their insurance plan. Their wages were secure, with rules protecting the dancers from being fired rashly; after 15 years, one achieved tenure status at the theater. While Forsythe had on occasion terminated a dancer or employee's contract, in general members felt secure in their employment, though always under pressure to demonstrate their value.[10] Such support and resources should be acknowledged in terms of how the structure of the ensemble and the legal provisions around work created the framework for long-term stable collaboration: bringing together international dancers, caring for their health and offering financial stability for life-planning. Compared to the low wages common among freelance artists, Forsythe's working conditions allowed for his dancers to be financially secure.[11]

In my fieldwork, I tried to understand the complex ways that the dancers felt themselves 'ensembled' through the production conditions and their occupational culture. Did they feel influenced by the city and culture of Frankfurt? In Wulff's ethnographic fieldwork at the Ballett Frankfurt, she observed that the long hours of touring and performing made local integration difficult:

> […] most people involved found themselves working twelve hours per day. Just like touring, the making of a new ballet takes the form of an intensive short-time communitas that makes the outside world temporarily unreal. (This often put a strain on relationships with family and friends who are not in the production and not in the theatre, let alone those not in the country.)[12]

9 Driver et al., "A Conversation with William Forsythe," p. 87.

10 An exception perhaps was the period of 1998–2004. In an article written in 2000, Midgette writes that Forsythe's "statements about reducing the company's size have reportedly led to some concern, not to say panic, among the dancers; from the present 36, already a reduced number, he speaks of going down to 22, then 16." See Midgette, "Forsythe in Frankfurt," p. 20.

11 For an overview of socioeconomic conditions in Germany, see Sabisch, "For a Topology of Practices," pp. 61–63.

12 Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p 159. Similarly, Klein writes of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch: "The intense work and extensive touring barely allowed for anything else." See Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, p. 158.

Rather than bonding with locals, most dancers chose to live within the enclave of their work and professional ties—which, as Caspersen has emphasized, consisted of a dance network stretched across the cities in which they had lived, worked and performed on tour. Like other dancers that I interviewed, Caspersen recounted, "I felt like Frankfurt itself was where I lived. It didn't feel like home."[13]

Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company were, however, far from "total institutions," to borrow a concept from sociologist Erving Goffman, who coined this phrase to refer to institutions that bar participants from interaction with the outside.[14] Compared to other dance ensembles, they were very welcoming to other dancers, as exemplified in the company's open-door policy for guests. Yet Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company were an intense world in which making and dancing choreographic pieces became the energetic and existential focus of one's life. The dancers reminded me it was also a rewarding lifestyle in which cooperative relations were vibrant.

The institutionalization of their ensembles protected Forsythe's dancers from the precarious economy of the freelance dance market, in which dancers' schedules are organized in line with projects, which frequently overlap, take up all their attention and pay poorly. Freelance dancers often live together throughout creative residencies and tours. Successful artists with abundant international projects may only be home for a few months—or even weeks—each year. Ideally, freelance conditions enable artists to be more flexible in constructing their artistic work outside of the conventions and routines of institutions. However, the poverty and staggering tractability required of freelance artists make this lifestyle as difficult as it is empowering.[15] In contrast, dancers in Forsythe's ensembles were 'home' for greater stretches of time and toured under more lucrative conditions—better hotels, with the privacy of single rooms. The ensembles also evoked a more liberal and creative climate than comparable ballet or German municipal companies and were significantly less hierarchal. In my interviews, the dancers spoke positively overall about their working conditions.

While these communities were fine models, they were not perfect. Many dancers struggled to achieve a good work-life balance. To borrow an adage from sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild "work becomes home."[16] On one hand, these ensembles were an activity site comprised of people who understood and cared for one another—who together appreciated the embodied aspects of dancing lives. Constantly returning to one another for support, the ensemble reinforced the group's beliefs regarding the values of choreographic ventures. Yet the 'home' of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company was not a place of rejuvenation and rest, making stress and exhaustion a common issue.

---

13 Dana Caspersen, videoconference interview with the author, December 19, 2018. This is reported similarly in Pina Bausch's company, see Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, p. 150.

14 See Goffman, "The Characteristics of Total Institutions."

15 Compare to Laermans, *Moving Together*, p. 291; Kunst, *Artist at Work*, pp. 37–38. Kunst critically shows the difficulties of project-based labor in the arts, as "a cheap low-class labour force that should be held in a state of 'experimental precariousness' for as long as possible." See Kunst, *Artist at Work*, p. 158, with discussion spanning pp. 153–75.

16 See Hochschild, *The Time Bind*. In contrast to Hochschild's study, the dancers did not describe the complementary process of 'home becoming work' and few dancers lived in homes with children.

Dancers performing *Duo* since 2015 have aimed to uphold the work standards set by their previous ensemble contracts with Forsythe. They continue to be paid at a high level, touring worldwide as freelance artists in performances, maintaining their training and performance condition on their own, without the support of a company structure. These tours have been organized and promoted by Sadler's Wells Theatre of London, which since 2005 adopted a focus explicitly on contemporary dance.[17] In this new arrangement, like freelancers, they must pay for their healthcare and vacation time themselves. Since 2018, the dancers share the touring profits equally with Forsythe, and refer to themselves as collaborators. Their other work—as successful freelance choreographers, performers and teachers—fills gaps between these performances.

3.3 Transnational Careers

3.3.1 "Ballet Across Borders"

Duo dancer Francesca Harper remembers Ballett Frankfurt was all about "crossing culture, crossing ideas, crossing borders." There she felt, "I have no boundaries. It was a limitless feeling I felt."[18] They were, according to dancer Dana Caspersen, an "international" group.[19] Such diversity reflects wider patterns of transnational mobility, which can be traced back for centuries in the lineages of ballet dancers.[20] The concept of the transnational implies migrants who not only cross borders, but engage in complex "multi-stranded social relations that link [...] their societies of origin and settlement."[21] Ballet history is riddled with transnational contact, weaving a complex exploration of place, meaning, culture and appropriation.[22]

In her pioneering ethnographic research on career and culture in the world of ballet dancers, anthropologist Helena Wulff considers dancers' mobility in their careers: migrating throughout their education, moving between professional companies and traveling extensively on tour.[23] Wulff presents an insightful view of transnational mobility as an active component shaping the careers of dancers, "in a transnational web of ideas,

17 See "Annual Review 2017–18: Sadler's Wells."

18 Francesca Harper, phone interview with the author, September 20, 2018.

19 Dana Caspersen, videoconference interview with the author, December 19, 2018.

20 The ballet tradition, derived from European folk and court dances and professionalized by Louis XIV has flourished in urban centers and followed paths of European cultural exchange. This has led to a "centre-periphery structure." See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 165; for a synopsis of this history, see pp. 37–38.

21 Schiller et al., "Towards a Definition of Transnationalism," p. ix.

22 On appropriation, see Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor." See also Gottschild, "The Black Dancing Body as a Measure of Culture."

23 Wulff notes this is true for dancers as well as choreographers, rehearsal assistants, even technicians. See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, in particular pp. 39–41. In studying the mobility of the contemporary dance community of Brussels, Rudi Laermans also finds exceptional mobility, noting that only a "tiny minority" work for several years with the same company. See Laermans, *Moving Together*, p. 290.

encounters and communications."[24] Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company provided a unique microcosm, which produced alternatives to the procedures and working climates of established ballet centers. In this way, a particular occupational culture was shaped that was also attributable to the specific funding and infrastructural conditions enumerated in the last chapter and the contractual conditions of labor outlined in the previous section.

The ballet centers with the highest international status are the French, Russian, British, Danish and American schools.[25] Germany is conspicuously absent from this list for complex reasons, notably that classical music, opera and theater have held dominance, with ballet frequently serving as a subsidiary of opera. Without a national school to prep his dancers for his particular creative process, Forsythe's companies sourced artists from other places.

In her consideration of ballet's transnationalism, Wulff challenges the overall idea of the ballet world as a purely closed, ideological and traditional aesthetic vocation, entrapped in national centers. Instead, Wulff discovers "a tension between tradition and change."[26] Including the Ballett Frankfurt in her fieldwork allows for her to explore how the company becomes a center, espousing new values and (re)defining a new ballet style. While Wulff characterized the change in the traditional ballet world overall as slow, she concurs that in Forsythe's innovative ensembles it was fast and profoundly challenging to tradition.

3.3.2 Education and Professional Experience

Ballett Frankfurt's members were predominantly highly experienced ballet dancers who had worked with multiple companies and passed through distinguished institutions of ballet and dance education.[27] Some had achieved high international status as soloists or principal dancers. Though there were pockets of common stylistic formation within the company, overall the dancers embodied a plethora of ballet trainings and styles. Forsythe was fascinated and inspired by unusual talent, choosing individuals rather than seeking a common type. This led him to occasionally include exceptional dancers without classical training who had other skills that he valued—such as proficiency in contemporary dance, choreography, hip-hop, tap, dance theater, or even astrophysics. It was all about exceptions: dancers with unusual capabilities, body types and creative proficiencies.

There are few available statistics to compare the international diversity of the Ballett Frankfurt to other companies. Wulff finds approximately 20 percent of the dancers in

24 Wulff, Ballet Across Borders, p. 18.

25 Ibid., p. 41.

26 Ibid., p. 161.

27 Schools such as: the Australian Ballet School, Pôle National Supérieur de Danse Rosella Hightower in Cannes, Mudra School, School of the Hamburg Ballet, the John Cranko Schule in Stuttgart, the Juilliard School, Codarts Rotterdam, Royal Ballet School, School of American Ballet, and the Royal Swedish Ballet School, among others; companies such as: Joffrey Ballet, New York City Ballet, the National Ballet of Canada, Hamburg Ballet, the Stuttgart Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater and the Royal Swedish Ballet, to name a few.

her study of classical companies were foreigners.[28] In western Germany, projects to expand the opera ballets into more independent companies had been steered for decades by international leaders and involved dancers from around the world. In comparison to Wulff's findings, in 1977—when Forsythe was beginning his work at the Stuttgart Ballet as a choreographer—the Stuttgart Ballet reported having dancers of 17 different nationalities.[29] Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch had dancers coming from 20 different nations.[30] In comparison, Forsythe's ensembles had dancers from 28 countries (see section 3.3.3). In the Stuttgart Ballet, bilingual rehearsals were "standard."[31] In Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company, Forsythe conducted rehearsals with his dancers in English, communicating to the technicians and staff in German.

3.3.3 Statistics for Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company

Approximately 155 dancers worked full-time with Forsythe in the context of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company; eleven of these learned and/or performed *Duo*.[32] Overall, these dancers came from 28 different countries, with half of them spending five or more years in the ensembles. Ballett Frankfurt was the larger ensemble, with between 30 and 40 dancers; The Forsythe Company was comparatively smaller with 16–18 artists.[33] Of these dancers, in both companies half were typically men and half women, a practice stemming from classical ballet companies (in total 75 men and 80 women). These artists were 42 percent European (nine percent German and six percent French), 37 percent American, and seven percent dual citizens. Notably, 55 percent were English native speakers (from America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand).[34] Sexuality was not heteronormative, but included vibrant expressions of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality.

Both the Stuttgart Ballet and Forsythe's ensembles had sizeable populations of American dancers—40 percent and 38 percent respectively. In 1977, director Marcia Haydée explained the Stuttgart Ballet's Americanization upon not only artistic grounds but, as I have shown, as a result of the attractive conditions of legal employment that offered dancers German standards of job security, social welfare and consecrated measures of work-life balance. Forsythe, an American, has also justified these proportions on artistic grounds, commenting:

---

28 Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 41.

29 Goldman, "Stuttgart Ballet Comes 'Home' to America," p. 69.

30 Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, p. 10. Klein also describes how the dancers' diversity—not only culturally, but also in terms of age, experience, training, and body type—was central to the company's identity and practice of "translating" differences. See also ibid., p.162.

31 Goldman, "Stuttgart Ballet Comes 'Home' to America," p. 69.

32 See Appendix B. In comparison, 210 dancers worked with Pina Bausch in Tanztheater Wuppertal during Bausch's 35-year direction of the company between 1973–2009. See Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, p. 151.

33 Both were smaller than classical ballet companies, which Wulff reports had 75 (American Ballet Theatre), 80 (Royal Swedish Ballet), 88 (British Royal Ballet) and over 100 dancers (The New York City Ballet, the Paris Opéra Ballet, Kirov Ballet) at the time of her fieldwork. See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 34.

34 For further statistics, see Appendix H.

> American dancers have the unique ability to move with great physical freedom. They can cover space with breadth like no other dancers. The innate sense of syncopation and jazz that the American dancers have has been especially useful to the builders of our repertory. American dancers are less reserved than Europeans and have less reservation about unconventional aspects of their art.[35]

While Forsythe's remarks may be shaded by the context of speaking to an American newspaper, they give important information about how he thinks and interprets the transnational ballet community. They confirm his insider observation of national ballet styles.[36]

3.3.4 Diversity

> This question of, how do we decenter the whiteness of dance studies transnationally? […] One way I want to contribute to this: I think there's a whole new way we have to write the history of ballet, and it's the global history. Of course, ballet was moving between cultures—not just in the twentieth century, but in all those movements, between France and Germany and Italy and England—and so ballet has always been a transnational form, from its inception. And so I think we have to rewrite the whole history of ballet so that we follow all of that migration of the form.[37]

The "crossing culture, crossing ideas, crossing borders" felt by *Duo* dancer Francesca Harper is an expression of the diversity at the core of the ensembles of the Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company. This is highly significant for *Duo*, a dance exploring unison and similarity, as it shows that the central values of the ensembles were *not* the sameness (and whiteness) of classical ballet, but rather an appreciation of diversity and difference.

In both Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company, the dancers had distinct and unique bodies and movement predilections. Typically, in a classical ballet company, dancers of different national origin and training still fit an idealized body image, movement style, and gender representation.[38] Sulcas concurs:

> The sense of the dancers as individuals […] has also to do with the variety of physiques that Forsythe employs: unlike most classical dance companies, there is no one ideal

35 Goldman, "Stuttgart Ballet Comes 'Home' to America," p. 69.

36 Wulff writes: "The idea of national ballet styles can be traced back to the major ballet schools' providing different types of training that have been acclaimed transnationally: the French, the Russian, the British, the Danish and the American schools—the traditional ballet centres, in other words." See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 41; on ballet styles and transnationalism, see ibid., pp. 37–44.

37 Dance scholar Susan Manning, see Clayton et al., "Inside/Beside Dance Studies," p. 22.

38 The norms of ballet dancers being: long legs, arched feet and balanced proportions; that they are athletic and (in particular for women) thin; that they have good line, grace and technical skills such as balance, flexibility and turnout; and lastly that they portray the heteronormative ideal of a woman who is delicate and demure, and a man who is taller than his female partner and capable of lifting, leading and even marrying her.

> body type for the dancers. […] it means that the dance is highly influenced by individual physical possibilities rather than, as is usual for ballet (and particularly for female dancers), by the physical capabilities and lines of the aesthetically dominant body.[39]

Forsythe's environment was enriched by these differences to the traditional ballet archetypes.[40]

Ballett Frankfurt marks an important epoch in ballet history as a company radically open to dancers of different ethnicities and which attracted a high percentage of dancers of color.[41] African American *Duo* dancer Francesca Harper remembered Ballett Frankfurt as revolutionary in its inclusion of dancers with African heritage and portrayal of diversity on stage.[42] Harper understood Forsythe's vision as "pioneering" in that it did not reproduce a world, but explored how exchange and inspiration could do things beyond what was already known. She encouraged me to write about the "cultural shift" and "social impact" of the Ballett Frankfurt—for example, "when something like ten out of thirty people dancing on stage were people of color." For Harper, "Bill really prioritized that. It was really a revolution." The "hybrid ballet language was inclusive."[43]

In our conversation, Harper recollects the role of music in generating inclusivity. Using hip-hop music in Ballett Frankfurt's creative studio process was for Harper, "an acknowledgement of my culture." She felt the same rhythms within Thom Willem's music as well as in Forsythe's musicality. Forsythe was a white man who had learned to dance in the rock 'n' roll era and had moved through Balanchine's appropriations of African American cool, style and rhythm. Forsythe concurs, "black culture has had an amazing effect on our physiques as dancers. It has had an amazing effect on ballet dancers, on everything. That's great. I'm really thankful for that."[44] Harper recalled, "Hip-hop was big in the 90s," noting how the dancers of Ballett Frankfurt would put on music after training and dance around to artists such as Missy Elliott, Busta Rhymes and Queen Latifah. As a Professor at the University of Southern California since 2015, Forsythe has continued his work to build bridges between dancers and dance forms, thinking of dance globally and actively supporting the students' fusion of hip-hop, ballet and other genres.

Pursuing emancipation from rigid ideals and expectations, the environment of the Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company was more open to accepting multiple body images and consequently the many possible ethnicities and identities of a dancer. Thus, the company was a magnet for anyone who had previously been shamed or excluded

---

39 Sulcas, "William Forsythe: The Poetry of Disappearance and the Great Tradition," p. 33.

40 On these traditional roles and types, see Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 102.

41 The term color is used here in accordance with Sharifi's definition of non-white people of African, Asian, Latin American, Pacific, Arab, Jewish or indigenous origin or background. See Sharifi, *Theater and Migration*, p. 328.

42 In addition to Harper, dancers Alan Barnes, Bertha Bermúdez Pascual, Ramon Flowers, Demond Hart, Stephen Galloway, Nora Kimball-Mentzos, Desmond Richardson, and Bahiyah Sayyed Gaines, among others. The Forsythe Company, a smaller ensemble, had one African American dancer, Josh Johnson. There was a higher proportion of Asian dancers, with two Japanese artists and one ethnic Tibetan dancer (Yoko Ando, Yasutake Shimaji, and Sang Jijia, respectively).

43 Francesca Harper, phone interview with author, September 20, 2018.

44 Driver et al., "A Conversation with William Forsythe," p. 94.

by the norms of the ballet world—dancers who were too tall, too short, too colored, too colorful, too fat, too thin, too effeminate, too crazy, too smart, too resistant to authority.[45]

3.3.5 Change and Continuity: Ballett Frankfurt & The Forsythe Company

Dance companies are complex ecosystems. Even those under the constant direction of one choreographer pass through differing phases of production conditions, constellations made up of artistic and administrative collaborators, and different generations of dancers.[46] On average, Ballett Frankfurt was a younger group of dancers than The Forsythe Company. The Forsythe Company had a strong multi-generational structure with new dancers in their early- to mid-twenties, dancers with late Ballett Frankfurt experience, and experienced Ballett Frankfurt dancers aging into their forties.[47] Practices of mentorship enabled these levels to richly synergize—with new dancers learning movement and performance techniques from the more experienced, but also veteran dancers profiting from the skills and creative energy that the new members brought into the ensemble.[48]

Some dancers viewed The Forsythe Company as a break with Ballett Frankfurt, others as its logical continuation. Working in a smaller, multi-generational company meant that The Forsythe Company stopped performing many of the large group pieces and virtuosic ballets that were part of the repertoire of Ballett Frankfurt. Instead, The Forsythe Company focused on new repertoire in which the dancers created their own roles, performing only selected works from late Ballett Frankfurt.[49] In this way, The Forsythe

45 The reality of such norms and the painful way that institutions of ballet education enforced them were recently made public in an advertisement for athletic clothing featuring the first African American principal ballet dancer of American Ballet Theater, Misty Copeland. In it, a rejection letter addressed to the 13-year-old Copeland is read: "Dear Candidate, thank you for your application to our ballet academy. Unfortunately, you have not been accepted. You lack the right feet, Achilles tendons, turnout, torso length and bust. You have the wrong body for ballet." See Goins, "Changing Ballet's Perception Means Embracing Black Bodies."

46 For an examination of generations within the 35-year lineage of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, see Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, in particular pp. 152–59. On generations of dancers in Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (founded 1958), see DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, in particular p. 84, p. 238.

47 Seven of the original dancers in The Forsythe Company, all of whom who had previously been with Ballett Frankfurt, stayed from 2005–2015 (Yoko Ando, Dana Caspersen, Amancio Gonzalez, David Kern, Fabrice Mazliah, Jone San Martin, and Ander Zabala). The eldest, David Kern, was born in 1959.

48 See Vass-Rhee, "Schooling an Ensemble," in particular p. 225.

49 The repertoire of Ballett Frankfurt performed by The Forsythe Company was: *Loss of Small Detail* (June 2005); *Kammer/Kammer* (June 2005, October 2005, May 2006, June 2008, April 2015); *Decreation* (May 2007, October 2007, June 2008, January 2009, April 2009, October 2009, May 2012, November 2014); mixed program with *The Room As It Was*, *Of Any If And*, *N.N.N.N.*, and *One Flat Thing, reproduced* (September 2005 and February 2006); mixed program with *Ricercar* and *Quintett* (November 2006 and February 2007); mixed program with *7 to 10 Passages* (March 2007); mixed program with *Woolf Phrase* and *N.N.N.N.* (September 2010, November 2010); and mixed program

Company pieces markedly shifted away from performance demonstrating balletic virtuosity—such as pointe work, partnering involving lifts and citation of ballet steps. Instead, individuals improvised in relation to one another, coordinating their actions in small groups. The female dancers were no longer dancing in pointe shoes. Many members of the company began experimenting with performing in sneakers, which provided traction and cushioning. Physical therapy and dance science practices also enabled training tailored to support bodies of different ages.[50] Lastly, labor was distributed, so that no individual person would be overly taxed in any one performance or rehearsal phase.

Between Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company, the embodied knowledge and experience that the dancers brought into the ensembles also shifted. While Forsythe had pursued higher education in parallel to dancing at Jacksonville University in Florida, few Ballett Frankfurt dancers had studied at University or an Arts Conservatory.[51] Compared to Ballett Frankfurt, more dancers in The Forsythe Company held diplomas from institutions of higher education.[52] These career paths gave the dancers broader experience in styles and techniques of contemporary dance, in addition to academic competences in reading and writing. I speculate that this tendency more broadly reflects developments within the dance profession internationally in recent decades, in which finishing one's schooling and going on to higher education has become more valued. This impacted the company culture and *Duo*: influencing how dancers trained, communicated and understood what constituted the 'right' way of a rehearsal and a 'good' performance.[53]

3.4 The Dancers' Occupational Culture

> Culture can generally be thought of as the values shared by members of a group (be it a community, organization or sub-unit) that manifest themselves in the practices of that group. Hence, culture can be associated with a nation, region, corporation, department, function or any form of grouping (e.g., a profession or an occupation).[54]

---

with *N.N.N.N.* (March 2014). My sources are casting lists and schedules in William Forsythe's private collection of documents, as well as my own collection of programs.

50 See section 4.2 Training.

51 Comparably more dancers had encounters with higher education than would be found in an equivalent classical company of equally high status. Exceptions include Ballett Frankfurt artists who attended the Juilliard School in New York City, Codarts Rotterdam, Bunka Gakuen University in Tokyo and University of Melbourne. Of the *Duo* dancers, Francesca Harper had taken summer courses at Columbia University before choosing to dance professionally.

52 Including the Julliard School, Codarts Rotterdam, the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts, Palucca University of Dance Dresden, Hollins University in Virginia, Woodbury Institute of Champlain College, and myself at Harvard University/The Ohio State University. Later generation *Duo* dancer Riley Watts was a graduate of the Juilliard School.

53 See Chapter 11: Re-Creating *Duo* (1996–2016).

54 See Johnson et al., "Organizational and Occupational Culture and the Perception of Managerial Accounting Terms," p. 318.

By performing Forsythe's choreographic work almost exclusively, Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company invested in a common occupational culture: a shared set of values underlying the practices in which the team members cooperated and produced artistic artifacts. Here I use the term culture to mean the developed knowledge and resources of a group that enables social behavior.[55] This professional culture differed from, for example, Nederlands Dans Theater's occupational culture, or that of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, or the freelance dance community of Frankfurt, to name a few related scenes. Even the occupational cultures of The Forsythe Company and Ballett Frankfurt, for all their continuity, included difference—changing with the people who were involved, the times and the choreographic activity practiced by the companies.

The intensity, longevity and exclusivity of the dancers' investment in Forsythe's company affected them deeply: constituting their body knowledge, habits, dispositions and perceptions, as learned and acquired through personal histories. Half of the dancers spent over five years as members. Together, they built and shared embodied knowledge and values that enabled them to cooperate. I find it is not a stretch to say that these artists were mutually constituted *with* the artworks and *with* the occupational culture, creating a movement style and a cache of choreographic resources. This would likewise be true for other longstanding dance ensembles: companies such as those of Alvin Ailey, George Balanchine, Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, Ohad Naharin and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, to name a few across historical epochs, national contexts and styles.[56]

Four general conditions affecting the formation of a dance ensemble's occupational culture are the genre of dance, the extent to which the occupational culture is insular, group size and dancer turnover rate. A dance ensemble's culture would also vary according to whether the ensemble performs a mixed repertoire—as in many municipal German dance companies—or one strain, as in Forsythe's. In the case of the latter (that is, in so-called 'choreographer's companies') the intensity of focus on one style creates cumulative and possibly transformative change, in which sociality and subjectivity are

55 The terms *organizational* and *occupational culture*s are common in organizational science, and are well documented in this literature. For a review of different approaches, see Denison, "What is the Difference between Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate." Taking a view that looks at the experiences of the dancers ethnographically, and seeks to understand complex negotiations of their workplaces longitudinally, my work aligns with other vocational studies foregrounding the term culture; see in particular Tomic-Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, p. 107, footnote 7. My aim is to describe the occupational culture of Forsythe's ensembles, which, as I have explained, are complexly linked to the German and Frankfurt scene. In this way, my work explores culture differently than Cynthia Novack's pioneering ethnography analyzing the dance form of contact improvisation, which passes back and forth between the dance form and the socio-cultural frame of American history. See Novack, *Sharing the Dance*, in particular pp. 3–16.

56 A comparative analysis of different dance ensembles' occupational cultures extends beyond the scope of my writing here. Existing sources on the companies, works and working processes of choreographers Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Pina Bausch that could contribute productively to such an analysis include: DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*; Copeland, *Merce Cunningham*; Meade and Rothfuss, *Merce Cunningham*; De Keersmaeker and Cvejić's series of choreographic scores; Guisgand, *Les fils d'un entrelacs sans fin;* Laermans, *Moving Together,* in particular pp. 293–310; Climenhaga, *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook*; Schulze-Reuber, *Das Tanztheater Pina Bausch* and Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater.*

implicated. To further understand the ways that this common culture was developed, I now turn to dance scholar Tomic-Vajagic's writing on dancers' *habitus* and Wulff's discussion of choreographic *style*.

3.4.1 Habitus

What does the dancer contribute to the dance? According to dance scholar Tomic-Vajagic, the answer is complex, pertaining to individual character, physicality, expression, as well as to training and choreographic style. To better conceptualize the "totality of underlying influences" affecting dancers' approaches to performance interpretation, one idea that Tomic-Vajagic works with is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*.[57] For Bourdieu, *habitus* congeals the motivational, cognitive and embodied structures that enable people to *practice*—to learn from personal history and be active in the world. One's *habitus* encompasses the dispositions, strategies, beliefs, perceptions and sensorimotor skills that an individual acquires through their history of interactions. *Habitus* can be observed in humans' implicit or tacit skills, their morals, their subjective tastes, their likes and dislikes, their expectations and anticipations as based upon their histories. Rather than something intellectual or caused solely by discipline or rules, *habitus* is embodied and experienced as "feel for the game."[58]

For Bourdieu *habitus* is improvisatory, generative and changing—but not mechanical or automatic.[59] His writing explores how humans are regularized in their commonsense actions, without ever being forced by rules. He observes: "a given situation brings into play a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts […] and, at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the *ethos* which […] determines 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' conduct for every agent subjected to those regularities."[60]

Tomic-Vajagic takes *habitus* as a tool for helping to think further about factors that affect a dancer's interpretation of choreography.[61] According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is constituted through one's familial upbringing and education.[62] Tomic-Vajagic therefore considers each dancer's particular set of movement-proclivities and professional

57 Tomic-Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, see in particular p. 87.

58 Bourdieu: see Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 12. *Habitus* is Bourdieu's term for *modus operandi* and common sense: why we do what we do in practice. See ibid., pp. 120–41; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 72–87; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 52–65; Wacquant, "Habitus as Topic and Tool"; Wacquant, "*Homines in Extremis*." Dance scholars Friederike Lampert and Einav Katan also work with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to analyze dance improvisation. Katan notes that in Gaga dance technique, *habitus* does not stay at the level of doxa, "an ideology embodied in behavior that might hinder perception." Rather: "the process of gaining a habitus and the inner reflection on its values constitute an access to understanding, as a genuinely critical skill." See Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance*, pp. 163–68; here p. 166. See Lampert, *Tanzimprovisation*, pp. 118–25.

59 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 78.

60 Ibid., p. 77.

61 Tomic-Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, pp. 86–108; see in particular pp. 105–7.

62 In that way, *habitus* may be said to belong to an individual person—in Bourdieu's terms a "singular habitus"—standing for a unique way to navigate a process that is collective. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 86.

disposition to be based upon his or her embodied history—from movement allowances in childhood to various contexts of discipline and formation. She particularly focuses on the impact of dance schools, which shape the dancer's body (and self) into a tool used to perform a certain work. She emphasizes not only the embodied aspects of training, but also the dancers' understanding of their roles. Additionally, she considers the cultural frames in which the dancers were raised and in which context they currently dance. Given all these factors, Tomic-Vajagic takes the view that dancer agency is "multifaceted and multilayered." She finds that these aspects, both conscious and unconscious, have a substantial impact on the performance of any choreographic work. In total, she observes "that a significant depth of information about the choreographic work itself emerges through observation of what it communicates when it is embodied by different dancers."[63]

Habitus, I understand as a process of subject formation. Though *habitus* can be misunderstood to be reflexive behavior that repeats, I concur with Bourdieu that the concept is of a dynamic process that produces regularity—a process that is emergent and evolving, in which reflection and change are possible.[64] Like Bourdieu, I find the structuring capacity of humans to predict is not purely intellectual, but also affective and embodied, pertaining to strategies and beliefs. My understanding of subjectivity dovetails with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, as well as with Tomic-Vajagic's approach to looking at dancers' practices of interpretation.[65] I differ from Tomic-Vajagic in that I look more into the relational aspects of dancing together, by choosing the case study of a duet and not solo interpretation. By calling attention to the relational impact of dancing together in my case study, I suggest how *habitus* links individuals—in a community where dancing together builds beliefs, dispositions and capacities to create.

3.4.2 Choreographic Styles

A choreographic style is one manifestation of a dance company's occupational culture. Wulff's multi-sited ethnography, *Ballet Across Borders*, emphasizes the comingling and crossover of ballet styles in her case studies. In her view, "younger dancers are increasingly learning not only to change ballet style, but also to switch back and forth between different ones, as well as between old national styles and new choreographic styles like the one developed by William Forsythe."[66] Clearly within the Ballett Frankfurt, the 'new' was at issue, not reproducing old national styles. In contrast to occupational cultures of ballet's key centers, in which normative climates and pedagogical institutions maintained traditional ballet technique and interpretation practice, in Forsythe's ensembles,

63 Tomic- Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, p. 287.

64 Bourdieu writes: "One of the reasons for the use of the term habitus is the wish to set aside the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or performed programme, as Hegel does when in the *Phenemonology of Mind* he speaks of 'habit as dexterity.'" See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 218, footnote 47.

65 Here I have not considered *habitus*, as Bourdieu would, within the triad of field and capital; nor do I in my analysis of *Duo* foreground competition as a means to acquire status, which is a major concern of Bourdieu's.

66 Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 41.

creativity, change, even rebellion and revolution were vital forces.[67] In this way—and in contrast to the blending and mixing that Wulff observes—the choreographic style and occupational culture contested and transfigured the normative operations of ballet.

Diversity was central to this innovation. As I have described previously, the ensembles of Ballett Frankfurt and the Forsythe Company prized diversity. Dancers of different national origin and career paths came together and adapted, producing the Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company style. When asked about how his dancers from different backgrounds adjust to produce his style, Forsythe provided the following explanation:

> We talk about all kinds of dancing. We think about dancing. There is a lot of theoretical discussion. And we're very arm conscious. I think that's for us the key to our style. One *tendu* [ballet step, stretching one leg] is perhaps someone else's *tendu*, but our *port de bras* [style of arm movements] is really indicative of what we do.[68]

Stressing that the style is not purely physical, Forsythe emphasizes communication and sharing ideas. Wulff adds another insight, underlining that these were long-term processes. She writes:

> It can, however, take a very long time to learn a certain choreographic style properly. When William Forsythe's productions are danced by companies other than his own, they tend to do it with great success, but not always as articulately as his own dancers. Forsythe's own dancers have (in most cases) been practising his steps and concepts for years, some for more than a decade, whereas other dancers usually only have about a month to learn them. And this shows in their respective performances.[69]

Wulff emphasizes here the difference between short-term learning and long-term changes that happen when dancers become part of a choreographic community—the latter a change in *habitus*, including social and intellectual components, which produces a style in performance.

Though my informants did not want to criticize other dancers on record, they spoke fervently and nostalgically about the distinctions between interpretations of Forsythe's works—about a visible distinction of intelligence, freedom, coordination and expression that distinguished *their* ensembles. The dancers' differences were their strength—gaps and misunderstandings becoming fruitful. As one example illustrating this, dancer Antony Rizzi has observed:

---

67 In such centers, conformity to aesthetic values and style is upheld. Dancers almost exclusively pass directly from school to company (i.e., producing *habitus* at a young age that is not confronted with other new styles). Still no technique is completely rigid. Tomic-Vajagic observes the plasticity of training practices within such centers, finding there are "stylistic and pedagogical shifts […] with new teachers interpreting technical requirements in their own ways." Tomic-Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, p. 92.

68 Driver et al., "A Conversation with William Forsythe," p. 91. This practice of *port de bras* is also called *épaulement*. Considering this in detail, see section 6.1 *Épaulement*.

69 Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 42.

> I loved it when dancers, like Jone San Martin, whose mother tongue was something other than English, sometimes would not fully understand Bill's ideas and words, but then conjure up incredible material from those misunderstandings.[70]

The dynamic negotiation of dance practices shifted with waves of new dancers arriving and experienced dancers leaving. In fact, across Forsythe's diverse repertoire and four decades of work, his choreographic signature and the dancers' practices varied extensively. The work was much more about grappling and negotiation, misunderstanding and compromise than conforming to rules, conventions and norms. Togetherness in this context was not competition for reputation, but exchange through learning and inventing together. Before joining these ensembles, most dancers had already passed through many contexts and adapted to many styles, creating a rich set of resources for their shared investment in making new choreographic pieces together.

To specify how the occupational cultures of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company were different to that of other ensembles, here I draw out five characteristics: First, as Forsythe himself has emphasized, their balletic coordination of *épaulement*, the usage of the upper body. I shall explore this further in chapter 6. Second, a shared rhythmical and musical sense (*entrainment*), which will be the focus of chapter 8. Third, a common reliance upon strategies of improvisation and composition shaped through extensive discussion and conceptual terms. Fourth, attaching importance to the cooperative aspects of creating new choreography and the gains of working together. Lastly, a complex of shared beliefs encompassing diversity, creativity, curiosity, optimism, adventure, 'nothing-against,' learning, freedom and change. Conversely these could also be expressed as an aversion to uniformity, prejudice, tradition, rote repetition, negativity, inertia, ignorance and stasis. Their multiplicity was their strength.

3.5 *Duo* Dancers

Duo dancers were predominantly women—nine women and two men—and one-quarter (27 percent) were dancers of color (Gaines, Harper and Scharafali). The chronology of *Duo* partners is visualized in Appendix C.

The eleven dancers that have learned *Duo* in the context of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company are of Albanian, American, Canadian, Dutch, and German nationality (45 percent European, 36 percent American, 18 percent Canadian).[71] They exemplify dancers of high artistic pedigree.[72] Most *Duo* pairs involved persons of different national origin and training. Therefore, it can be concluded that shared cultural background or identical training prior to joining Forsythe's ensembles were not necessary for dancing *Duo* well.

---

70 Translation by the author. Rizzi, "Die Bühne als der Ort, an dem ich mir im Reinen bin," p. 91.

71 In comparison, between 1976–2013 over 300 dancers have learned Pina Bausch's *Das Frühlingsopfer*; eleven dancers have danced the seminal role of the *Opfer*. Klein does not provide statistics on nationality or biography. See Klein, "Die Logik der Praxis," pp. 131–32.

72 See the artist biographies in Appendix D.

The example of *Duo* pointedly demonstrates how an ensemble's occupational culture and diversity may influence the aesthetic of a choreographic work. *Duo* is a dance in which the dancers' motion vacillates between similarity and difference—a dance of counterpoint. In this, the dancers resist unison in which creative difference suffers. They contest unison produced through rote repetition and putative discipline. They are not, in themselves, similar—in appearance or character. *Duo* pairs are dancers of different national origins and career paths: a Dutch woman paired with a Canadian, two Canadian dancers, both raised in Toronto, who went on to explore different ballet lineages and careers; other pairings between American, Dutch and Italian dancers; and most recently, an American man paired with an Albanian. These differences were part of *Duo*'s richness and movement aesthetic.

Duo dancers explore the movement that they inherit. Coming in and out of unison, they negotiate difference. They become sensitive to qualities of dissonance. They develop refined perception of moving and being together—or not. In dancing *Duo*, variations and micro-differences are queried to explore the limits of sameness. The dancers recognize that they are two distinct artists, carrying individual cultural and occupational histories, often both. Regina van Berkel concurs: "Two dancers cannot be the same."[73]

The broader demographics of the ensembles have been the focus of this chapter, showing how the *Duo* dancers worked within a rich community of distinguished dancers who valued their uniqueness and what they became—through working *together*. To Forsythe and the dancers, *Duo* was interesting because of the individual nuance the performers brought to it: their capacities to analyze, criticize and invent the movement together. This kept the performance evolving. The practice of choreography indeed *built* shared understanding—each pair requiring time to do so.

While the choreography of *Duo* cites the balletic convention of perfect unison, the unity of *Duo* is not a convenient or easily achieved unity. Contrary to what she observes in the Ballett Frankfurt, Wulff finds that ballet companies generally exhibit a homogeneity of practice; this, for example, allows principal dancers of different nationalities working in different dance companies to substitute injured artists in a performance of *Swan Lake* with very little rehearsal—having never performed with one another or in this company's version of the choreography.[74] Something like this could not happen in Forsythe's ensembles; it could never happen in *Duo*. Rather, adaptation to Forsythe's ensemble takes time, as Wulff herself remarked. And learning *Duo*, as we shall see, also requires negotiation and extensive practice.

The term "contact zone" emphasizes this. Developed by Mary Louise Pratt during her studies of language communities to consider the critical limits of cooperation and shared understanding, a contact zone defines the following; Pratt writes:

> I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colo-

73 Regina van Berkel, interview with the author, Frankfurt, April 22, 2017.

74 Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 39.

> nialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.[75]

In Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company, the dancers grappled and negotiated many vectors of power within ballet practice and ideology: gender hegemony, systemic racism, disciplinary working regimes and controlling aesthetics of movement. The ensembles were contact zones: alternative social spaces enriched through aesthetic encounter. To encapsulate this, the dancers understood their work at large as creative enabling—not preserving the past, but generatively exploring *what else* they might discover. Reifying what I propose here, a succinct summary of the occupational culture is provided by dancer Dana Caspersen below.

"What else is this?" Phone interview with dancer Dana Caspersen, December 19, 2018

> LIZ: What were the values of Ballett Frankfurt?
>
> DANA: What I notice now, working elsewhere, is that when people start working together, the process can get clamped down—ossified. It's really hard to keep things moving. I'm more and more valuing what Bill [Forsythe] was able to enable there [in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company]: this environment where we kept researching, we really kept looking at things, questioning things and redoing things. And there was a big value around curiosity. People were supportive of each other, you know, it was really a working situation where there was always people saying: look at this, what do you think of this? So, it was a lot of back and forth and there was always a teaching element, people were teaching each other—both parts and also ideas. There was obviously a lot of collaboration in a lot of different ways. Let's see, what were some of the other values. (*pause*) A big value was to always take a thing and re-see it, that was like a major part of it. "What else is this?" was a question that I think Bill kept posing over and over and then the company took this on, as kind of a fundamental question. Not like: Let's throw all this out, what else can we do? But given the material of the situation, what else is there that might be emerging that we haven't paid attention to yet? Or that we might enable?

***

Duo dancers' testimonies underline the manner in which the dancers learned *together* and *from* one another, as well as the importance of their heterogeneity. This chapter has developed a portrait of the 155 dancers who worked with Forsythe, examining the community within which *Duo* dancers worked. This background research is required for understanding *Duo* as a dance that highlights pairs of dancers who commit to research of what they share in common.

75 See Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," p. 34.

This chapter has outlined the complex relations between place, career, migration, touring, identity and cooperation in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company. Section 3.1 focused on the topics of place and nationality in the context of international Frankfurt am Main, drawing upon census data from the city. Section 3.2 considered documents in Forsythe's private archive and interviews with the dancers to discern the legal aspects defining the dancers' understanding of their work. Section 3.3 explored the transnationalism of Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company based on demographic data of the dancers who have worked in these institutions, analyzed with regard to Helena Wulff's prior research on transnationalism in ballet companies. Section 3.4 examined the ensembles' movement styles and occupational culture—drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and prior study by dance scholar Tamara Tomic-Vajagic of dancers' contributions and Wulff's analysis of dance styles. Section 3.5 congealed these arguments by returning to the case study: I investigated the diversity of the artists involved and the seminal role of difference in the enactment of the *Duo* project. In total, this chapter has clarified features of continuity and distinction between Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company. Through investigation of these topics, I have argued for a dynamic understanding of occupational culture, in which the dancers' subjectivity and labor are as important as the works of art they create.

What has not yet been dealt with extensively in this chapter are the dancers' working practices. In the next chapter I consider these, exploring the following questions: What practices comprise the dancers' choreographic labor? How were these practices institutionalized or congealed through teamwork? To what extent were these stable and routine, as opposed to pliant and changing? Were they distinct for each choreographic work? Did the dancers' diversity and the unpredictability of Forsythe's creative process in any way subvert totality or challenge the notion of what a practice *is*?