Chapter 4: The Dancers' Practices

The documentary film *Just Dancing Around*, made by filmmaker Mike Figgis *ca.* 1994, follows the Ballett Frankfurt through three weeks of activity making a new piece. In footage titled "three weeks before first performance," a large group of dancers led by a rehearsal director are busy working on a dance phrase, the studio awash with movement, music and laughter. According to Figgis, "Billy [Forsythe] makes his first appearance" on the third day of rehearsal. Figgis shows Forsythe working on his own in the studio, dancing as the other dancers self-organize their rehearsal around him. One dancer watches while resting on a stool; others cluster busily, speaking and moving with each other.[1] Forsythe explains in an interview with Figgis:

> I like dancing. […] In a situation when the whole company is working on something and there's about ten groups of three people or whatever, organizing some little thing. I like working there because everyone is busy, and that means I can concentrate. I do not have to concentrate in a (*emphasizing each word*) room by myself. I don't have to have complete isolation to think. I like just the idea that everyone is working on movement, and you pick up on that. So, I can feel pretty, what is it (*pause*), undisturbed in a room full of people.[2]

In this statement, Forsythe describes his enjoyment of the "pick up" and relay of choreographic practice: the way a group of people can help to focus his attention.

The general scope of the dancers' activities in the realm of choreographic labor is the subject of this chapter. Figgis's glimpse of the dancers' practices, shown through the camera lens and editing matrix, conveys a complex ecosystem—a shared logic of being busy and enabling a choreographic piece to emerge. The ensemble dancers appear to share a common purpose and understanding of what is going on in the studio that swings from being directed by Forsythe and rehearsal directors, to being self-organizing. Without insider experience, the logic is likely to be puzzling. The dancers swarm with activities: inventing, teaching, rehearsing, watching and discussing movement. Forsythe's quote makes clear that these are social practices. Even when one is working

1 See Figgis, *Just Dancing Around*, 4:00–8:00.

2 See ibid., 6:00–7:00.

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alone, as with Forsythe at the side of the studio, one still shares the space. Other people's movements and activities get picked up on, people cluster up to get something done. One dancer called it a "hive" modality.[3] In addition to sharing the space and comfortably partitioning the room with labor, the artists share—as Figgis's film makes clear—a progression of time ticking down towards the deadline of performance. The ensemble members share understanding and engage *with* and *through* an array of activities pertaining to their sense of dance and choreography. This field of "doings and sayings" is the focus of this chapter, beheld through my autobiographical history amidst these practices, as well as the theoretical framework of the "practice turn."[4]

The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory (2001) marks an academic movement that has cultivated a pragmatic understanding of the social, rooted in what emerges *between* people and *through* activity itself.[5] The focus of this scholarship is human practices. While scholars' definitions of practice vary, they generally consider it to consist of embodied and contextually situated human activities, organized through common understanding of actions and their effects. Practices are not isolated strands of doing, but interlaced and spread over time. What holds them together is one matter of debate: whether context, material factors, a shared understanding or goals are more significant. Practice theorists also take different views about the importance of routine and regularity versus the effects of disruption and error; they place differing emphases on the role of materials and non-human interactions.[6] They differ in their thinking about how human reflection and speaking shape practices, and thus what sort of relationship they imply between mind and body. Scholars of practice take distinct approaches to theorizing the ways that subjects are formed through repetition and interaction *via* practice as well as of course the sense of the social that accumulates through practicing together.[7]

Based upon my case study, I understand the term *practice* as follows: practicing *Duo* involves repeated and enduring activities pertaining to the dancers' shared understanding of the choreographic, coupled with their desire to make an artistic work emerge. Practicing *Duo* is spread across different sorts of activities: making the choreography, daily training, teaching or learning the piece, rehearsing the piece, going on tour and performing the piece. Although many practices are specific to *Duo*'s choreographic microcosm and the dyadic context that shapes their enactment, they are also woven into the practices of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company more generally. They are also enmeshed with the dancers' personal and cultural practices, enacted within and

3 Tilman O'Donnell, work meeting via videoconference, February 4, 2020.

4 Schatzki, *The Site of the Social*, p. 73. See Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. See Waterhouse, "Dancing Amidst."

5 See Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. As with most academic movements, this turn marks a reaction against other styles of thinking: "including intellectualism, representationalism, individualisms (e.g., rational choice theory, methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many strains of humanism and poststructuralism." Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice Theory," p. 2.

6 In review see Reckwitz, "Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken"; Schatzki, *The Site of the Social*.

7 Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice Theory." See also Kleinschmidt, *Artistic Research als Wissensgefüge*, in particular pp. 105–12.

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outside their professional field. In this chapter I consider how the ensemble's teamwork congealed occupational practices. The following sections take a look at the "generative routines" of training, rehearsal, performance and touring.[8] I show how the dancers' artistry and creativity is maintained within an institutional frame, giving form to routine that is rife with invention and exception.

4.1 Seasonal Rhythms

The working schedule of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company was organized by *seasons* which, like government or school schedules, began in late summer. The details of the schedule were planned around choreographic works: creating these performances, rehearsing existing pieces or repertoire, and performing them at 'home' and on tour. The different team members held separate working hours, based upon the specific tasks and constraints of their jobs.[9]

The dancers' schedules had various rhythms. When rehearsing in Frankfurt, they came closest to a regular 40-hour week: Monday to Friday, or else Monday to Saturday, roughly 10 am to 5 pm each day. When performing and touring, their working hours centered around the evening show, with intense nighttime hours and rest scheduled in the afternoons. When creating a new piece, they worked additional hours. Aside from Christmas and New Year, they typically disregarded public holidays, working to their own rhythm.

The labor involved in performances varied, depending on whether the work was for a full-length evening piece, or a performance composed of short pieces, such as *Duo*. Generally, the organization of labor in The Forsythe Company was focused on full-length pieces, in which all the dancers participated. In contrast, the labor of the Ballett Frankfurt more commonly varied between production of full-length works and mixed evenings of short works; within this there were likely to be multiple sets of dancers ('casts') learning the roles.[10] By comparison, the dancers in The Forsythe Company were typically involved in all the pieces and Forsythe was present for all rehearsals. This created a more regular tempo and rhythm of routine, growing greater commonality of working practices.

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8 This focus on generative aspects of routine is emphasized in the scholarship of Michel Foucault and Karin Knorr Cetina; see discussion in Kleinschmidt, *Artistic Research als Wissensgefüge*, p. 108.

9 Each team entrained to its own particular rhythm. The technicians' work was not always aligned with the dancers' as the former often needed to operate when the dancers were off the stage—including the tiring job of removing (i.e., 'striking') the set and packing materials after a tour finished. The administrative team had the most canonical schedule, with evenings and weekends free, following the schedule of public holidays. The administrative team did not tour with the company; select members were sent, as needed, for short stays.

10 This distribution of roles among 'casts' allowed more artists to participate and share experiences of the same roles, creating networks of people who had shared parts. It was seldom time-efficient, requiring doubling of rehearsals—one for each cast. But it did distribute the particularly rewarding and exhausting labor of performing more evenly among dancers, and distribute choreographic knowledge among them.

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The distribution of labor was influenced by the size of the ensemble: Ballett Frankfurt had nearly twice the number of dancers as The Forsythe Company. Not all Ballett Frankfurt dancers were in each performance; the individual dancers' schedules varied based upon casting. *Duo* dancers remembered occasionally having gaps of free time when they were not involved in rehearsal, in particular when a dancer was new and had fewer roles. Similarly, it was common that a dancer might get 'called in' to a rehearsal, or alternately 'cut' from a new piece in the making. Despite requiring his dancers to always be 'on-call' for rehearsal, Forsythe encouraged them to maintain artistic projects outside the company, which many dancers pursued during these gaps. Unpredictable shifts in the rhythm of the creative work were part of the excitement and intensity of these ensembles—irregularity *supported* by the routine in their training practice, which helped maintain their physical readiness to perform and create.

4.2 Training

Generally, across genres of western dance from ballet to contemporary, training is the starting point of most professional dancers' daily practice. Forsythe chose ballet as the principal form of training for his companies. The dancers were provided with a daily ballet class of approximately 75 minutes, five or frequently six times a week. While their rehearsal and performance activities might vary considerably, training was a stable keystone. It was also an inherited one: the regularity of disciplining the body—known to be effective in ballet—gained through repetition of exercises and strict, physical labor.

How this routine was 'performed' in Forsythe's ensembles deserves attention. The class was taught by either a full-time ballet master/mistress or a guest teacher—not by Forsythe. It varied in its style: from the Russian Vaganova method, to what was often referred to as 'French style,' to classes taught by dancers from the Ballett Frankfurt lineage, and even (in The Forsythe Company) a class hybridizing principles from ballet and modern dance. Forsythe encouraged but did not regulate or police the training, allowing for dancers to decide whether or not they attended. This respected that dancers might choose alternative modes, as well as individual frequencies of training that might better suit their body, the repertoire they were performing, or even their needs in recovering from an injury. Dancer Dana Caspersen notes that, given the diversity of repertoire of the company, dancers valued the regularity of ballet training to enable them to feel strong and prepared.[11] This shows how training provided a generative basis, supporting more diverse movement activity in rehearsal.

Furthermore, the ballet class was a format for rehearsal and performance of identities, in which persons were constituted and norms transgressed. In a more traditional context, ballet training (also called 'class') follows a standardized form of exercises and codes of practice which are internationally reproduced, with emphasis varying

11 Caspersen, "It Starts From Any Point," p. 26.

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among different technical, expressive and musical elements.[12] Forsythe dancers were well versed in these practices, reflecting "embodied and cultural knowledge that the dancer acquires and internalizes throughout their whole career."[13] Codes of ballet training support the performance of ballet repertoire by teaching dancers to perform *en masse* and to self-regulate with discipline. Traditionally dancers arrive early to prepare, wear the proper attire and do not speak or socialize. In training, they memorize and reproduce the exercises that the teacher demonstrates accurately, doing so in unison with the music and other dancers. All the while, the dancers strive to perform to the best of their ability and to improve their individual technique.[14] They do so through strategies such as studying their reflection in the mirror, learning from others and incorporating the teacher's corrections.

The ballet world is well known for enforcing a strict regime of training. One *Duo* dancer described her work before joining Forsythe's company as follows: "If I was sick or my corn between my toe was hurting me too much, I'm not gonna take a day off. I'm gonna cut a hole in my pointe shoe to stick my toe out so I can continue dancing." She added, with regard to the pyramid structure in which everyone is always trying to climb: "You never missed anything 'cause then you'd lose your spot."[15] Ballet is notoriously oppressive toward women around maintaining a lithe physique. The dancers' testimony in my interviews reflected knowledge that eating disorders are common.[16] The rigor of idealized appearance was forcefully imposed by those in power—implicitly through casting but also through direct controls. One dancer recounted, "you gain two pounds and, you know, you're called into the office." In contrast to this, *Duo* dancers remember Forsythe and themselves speaking out against such damaging behavior, wishing dancers to be empowered, healthy and respectful of their bodies. The dancers never 'weighed in' before putting on their *Duo* costumes. Instead of shame, *Duo* pairs admired and acknowledged the beauty and diversity of one another's bodies—though not all *Duo* dancers could wear their own costumes with confidence. One female dancer spoke about her different attitudes to her "many bodies"— reflecting her monthly changes with menstruation and her body's transformation during the years that she performed *Duo*. Collectively contesting the strict coupling of an ideal body type and training in ballet, overall these dancers found Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company—and *Duo*—to be liberating contexts.

Dancer Allison Brown remembers how surprising she found the class environment when she first joined Ballett Frankfurt. In contrast to environments like the New York City Ballet, she recounted, "You had Amanda Miller with her wild haircut, but she had pointe shoes on, and she was like doing her own version of the combinations at the

12 Exceptional teachers, such as George Balanchine and Stanley Williams, were known to break from these molds. For a detailed example of one of Balanchine's classes, see Maiorano and Brooks, *Balanchine's Mozartiana*, pp. 10–16.

13 Tomic-Vajagic, *The Dancer's Contribution*, p. 90.

14 A technique that is individual-collective, as I shall show further in Chapter 6.

15 Forsythe dancer, anonymous interview with the author.

16 One *Duo* dancer told me in confidence, she had gone a decade without menstruating during her career as a ballet dancer. Two female *Duo* dancers described having eating disorders in their careers before working in Ballett Frankfurt.

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barre and everyone just had their own … you were just free to be free; they were just free. It's all about exceptions."[17] Brown recalls the contradictions with an emotive swell of her voice: Miller's pointe shoes, yet an atmosphere of freedom.

Through bending classical conventions, the climate of the ballet class in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company was generally spirited and fun. The dancers wore playful clothes.[18] Particularly in The Forsythe Company, the dancers changed the teachers' exercises to do what they needed or preferred to do—sacrilege in a classical context. There was openness for men and women to cross the gendered technical zones inherent in classical ballet. Additionally, the musicality was rousing. Despite performing difficult exercises *en masse* in groups, synchronized to the music, the dancers found their individual approach. They remembered enjoying the music and feeling the groove, sometimes (with liberal teachers) singing out-loud and making jokes with one another.[19] On the whole, the ideology of ballet norms and discipline were challenged through this engendering of exceptions.

Pointe shoes featured prominently in Brown's memory, as they were still a necessary tool for Forsythe's repertoire in the Ballett Frankfurt. Because of the technical demands of pointe technique, a skill requiring daily maintenance, Brown explains: "You had to take class. You had to take the time to get the pointe shoes on, you had to break them in, get ready for that whole performance. You could not slack."[20] This changed in The Forsythe Company, as the repertoire no longer relied on the technical skill of dancing *en pointe*, as well as other aspects of classical virtuosity. Accordingly, it was no longer necessary to train as extensively in ballet, and many dancers stopped attending class.[21]

One consequence of this was that, at the time when *Duo* was reconstructed in 2012, the ballet inflected movements of *Duo* proved challenging to reconstruct (that is, the line of turning out the legs, the attenuated extensions, and the stamina for performing these musically). To prepare themselves, the dancers enlisted with a personal trainer, handselected by Forsythe.[22] This enabled a new sort of readiness—supported by weightlifting and sports science principles. Increasingly, dancers in The Forsythe Company had mixed feelings about the ritual of ballet class: enjoying, but sometimes also resenting, the 'daily grind.' This reflects that not all dancers felt satisfied by ballet training as a basis for contemporary work. Being a dancer was finding a way to stay positive and make the training routine a resource for rehearsing creativity.

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17 Allison Brown, interview with the author, Frankfurt, September 23, 2016.

18 This pageantry is also a part of classical ballet companies, though often repressed in schools that require participants to wear standardized colors of leotards.

19 A pianist always accompanied the exercises. Pianist David Morrow described his work as improvising on Jazz standards, J.S. Bach, Tango, Bossa Nova, film themes and Broadway musicals. David Morrow, email to the author, October 10, 2018.

20 Allison Brown, interview with the author, Bern, January 24, 2017.

21 This is different to the dancers of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, in which Klein observes "the training and the habitus of the younger dancers […] have become much more 'dancerly' than those of earlier generations." See Klein, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theater*, p. 156.

22 Patrick Rump, who had begun in 2007 as 'Director of Sports Science' for the company. Rump was also enlisted to train the dancers for Forsythe's program *A Quiet Evening of Dance* in 2018, which would include the most recent version of *Duo*.

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4.3 Rehearsal

Rehearsals in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company took many forms. The schedule was planned by Forsythe and his rehearsal assistants, through consideration of the upcoming performances and prioritizing what needed to be done. Space and time were partitioned accordingly, the dancers split into subgroups as necessary. Rehearsal was run by Forsythe, an assistant, or the dancers themselves—with Forsythe taking increasing authority as the performance came closer. In contrast to the regimes in ballet companies in which dancers submit to authority or rehearse the same section of a choreography ad nauseum, the dancers in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company learned to be proactive in shaping what was done in rehearsal, based upon their needs and interests in the work at hand.

Rehearsal rhythms were built upon the foundation of the morning training. On days without a performance in the evening, training would be followed by rehearsal, a lunch break, and then a second set of rehearsals. When creating a new piece, in the weeks immediately prior to performances, the dancers rehearsed long hours. The dancers remember this work being tough, using the words *exhausting* and *stressed* copiously in interviews, and talking about the work as an existential challenge to survive.[23] Despite this, while it was sometimes not evident from my transcripts, when listening to audio recordings of these interviews I could hear tones of pleasure and pride in the dancers' voices; the dancers also *enjoyed* working so intensely. Working together on making performances emerge was an immersive and thrilling project in which the dancers were roused by making pieces come to life.

Their rehearsals were anything but repetitive. Because of the shortage of rehearsal time to learn Forsythe's complex choreographies, the dancers had to work quickly. Also, Forsythe was notorious for being unpredictable—changing his pieces and his demands on the dancers. The dancers felt like anything could happen in those rehearsals. The intensity of their labor created an insular occupational culture and engrossing bonds between the team.

The institutional spaces of the Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company were a dwelling place, enabling the practices of working choreographically to cohere. The dancers described being profoundly affected on a sensory level by the spaces of their daily rehearsal regime, itself constrained by the materiality of the buildings. On rehearsal days, the dancers shifted from the dressing rooms to the studios, between the smokers' lounge and canteen (in Ballett Frankfurt), then perhaps onto the stage for a rehearsal. Constantly on the move, busy in the studios, they rarely sat down at a table and meetings were few. Betweentimes, they rested, lying down on the floor or with legs propped up on walls and chairs—their bodies layered from head to toe, trying to stay warm and ready to move.

Forsythe's leadership and artistic vision was constitutive and seminal: the motor and regulator for how and why everyone came together. The schedule of training and rehearsal provided a stable framework, making the unpredictability inherent in their creative work possible.

23 Compare to Forsythe's similar testimony; Midgette, "Forsythe in Frankfurt," p. 17.

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4.4 Performance

Performance is a nocturnal practice. Performances, like rehearsals and trainings, are also serial. Dancers in Forsythe's ensembles often performed five consecutive nights in row; 50–60 performances in total each year. The dancers continued to train and rehearse throughout these performance periods.

There is extreme physical effect upon the body in performing Forsythe's pieces. Each morning after a performance, dancers would wake up with something akin to an 'athletic hangover'—a biological soup of chemicals in their flesh: lactic acid, stiff neck, aches and pains. Training was often delayed an hour to compensate for the late hours worked performing a show the previous night and to allow time for bodies to recover; the emphasis switched from building technique to recovery. Rehearsals, led by Forsythe, would focus on improving the show (always a work in progress) or—in the times of Ballett Frankfurt when pieces were learned by multiple sets of dancers—giving a new group time to rehearse. Rest before a performance was deemed necessary by most dancers, who treasured downtime to recharge and unwind.

Performing repeatedly does not eliminate nerves but it does, over time, enable one to cope with pressure. A performance day was typically more elevated in tension and expectation than a regular rehearsal day, with time ticking along toward the designated hour of the show (typically 8pm).[24] Each dancer had his or her own personal routine before the performance. Some arrived two hours early, others a mere hour (less was seen to be unprofessional). Their costumes underneath an extra layer of training clothes, they would go through the process of getting ready. In The Forsythe Company, Forsythe encouraged the dancers to look like themselves and not transform their appearance for the stage with makeup and complicated hairstyles, so less preparation for hair and makeup was needed. Assisted by a hairdresser ready to comb, spear and spray, female *Duo* dancers' hair was bound into an elegant French twist (using professional pins that gave it the resilience of a helmet, a style affectionately called a 'banana'). In the makeup room, which served as an oasis, the mood was relaxed. Warmly lit by the makeup lights and sweet-smelling, coffee was poured and snacks eaten.

Before a performance, dancers would 'warm-up' for a second time that day, either through a simplified ballet class or individual practice. During this preparation, excitement or nervous jitters were contagious. Shared motivation climaxed and doubts were dispelled. Far from sullen and serious, warming-up was convivial with surges of activity and jokes. With a friendly 'hello' from Forsythe and frequently some last-minute corrections, the dancers would sense that the performance was 15–20 minutes away. Hydrating, primping, playing and reviewing, they would develop the mode they needed to feel ready. In the minutes before performance, *Duo* dancers in Ballett Frankfurt remember holding one another, side-by-side, and singing while walking synchronously—effecting a sort of rhythmic entrainment.[25]

24 Matinee performances were unusual.

25 Jill Johnson, videoconference interview with the author, October 21, 2016. Allison Brown, studio session, dancing in Frankfurt, September 23, 2016.

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With so much experience of performing, most dancers learn to be effectively nervous in performance. Forsythe dancers describe this as state as '200 percent intensity,' high pressure and high adrenalin. Dancers learned to perform well under this high stress through individual techniques: rituals such as their timing of arrival and espresso, their favorite music, certain breath or physical exercises and social ways of blowing off steam. But more than this, over a lifetime of performing they acquired experience that allowed them to manage stress and fear, converting these into focus, energy and flow. The stakes were high for every performance, with the ensemble's reputation and one's individual display of competence always at stake. Critically, one's nervousness was never one's alone but collectively felt, based upon shared sensing of the upcoming event and complicity in the outcome. Each performance was unique, surprising, intense and exhausting.

With the nocturnal dictates of performance keeping dancers busy until 10 pm or later, performing could feel like a chronic loop of arriving and leaving the theater, with little interaction with the outside world. One's private clothes would remain clean; one's costumes would become sweaty. After performance, the dancers would focus on their bodies by rehydrating, showering and eating. They would also typically talk about what had happened with their peers to try and grasp the ephemerality and nightly variation, and the links between rehearsal and the evening performance. Some were celebratory, some critical—a factor of personality and style. Dancers frequently performed to 'anonymous' audiences, with whom they made no contact after the event. They also received small tokens of appreciation: a drink at a premiere or a rose from the theater.

4.5 Creation

In the ebb and flow of company life—of performances and rehearsals, tours and recuperation at home in Frankfurt—"creation" was a coveted time in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company in which new pieces were made.[26] Periods of creation involved a higher intensity of work, literally measured in overtime hours in Ballett Frankfurt, with days extending late into the evening.[27] The duration of the creative process varied. Pressured by the institutionalized statute restricting creation to 21 days in The Ballett Frankfurt, Forsythe expanded this into four to eight weeks in The Forsythe Company.[28] The creative process entailed contingency, risk and speculation, and the awareness of the ensemble cohesively registering time moving forward, toward the deadline of the premiere. The dancers took professional satisfaction in knowing that they were contributing to the field by making challenging works. Creating also enabled them to develop personally and receive recognition (from Forsythe, their peers and the audience).

26 On the term "creation" see Introduction to Part III: Creation.

27 In the Ballett Frankfurt, these hours were more extreme than in The Forsythe Company: a dinner break was added and the dancers worked until 10:45 pm. Dancers in The Forsythe Company were not paid overtime.

28 Midgette, "Forsythe in Frankfurt," p. 18.

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Many dancers auditioned for Ballett Frankfurt or The Forsythe Company because they wanted to take part in the process of making new pieces with Forsythe. *Duo* dancer Jill Johnson likened this to an activity of "research."[29] In contrast to the strongly directive process of ballet making, Forsythe assumed the authority of a "semi-directive regime." For Rudi Laermans, this mode of making dance "hovers between the overtly hierarchical style known from ballet and the 'flat' collaboration typifying the functioning of genuine dance collectives."[30] Without this rigid hierarchy, some dancers were frustrated and disoriented by the complex process—even choosing to leave the ensemble. Yet the majority wished for these intense periods of research.

There was no recipe for making a new work. While Forsythe would reuse movement material and movement-making methods, the expanse of creative practices was enormous. This work involved the dancers not only learning movement from Forsythe, but also inventing and improvising their own movement. They collaborated upon developing movement systems, often entangling notations, drawings, objects or media. They also conceived texts, songs and textual dramaturgies and worked with objects as sound sources. Sometimes they brought material that might become part of costume, film or scenic elements.

The dancers described Forsythe's style of creativity as valuing 'not-knowing' what would take place—this means not having an image, or plan for what *type* (style, structure, concept, and so on) of choreography would be made as well not knowing *how* it would be made. They shared an understanding that their work contained greater possibility than any one structure, set idea or any one final performance could convey. Forsythe explains: "When I'm making a work, the dancers and I are involved with a network of ideas that are resonating at that time, that possess a kind of inner logic for us. But the reasons for the actual choices are hard to pin down. It's like a huge cloud of events around the work."[31]

Among the dancers that I interviewed, most associated not-knowing with the feeling of excitement and potential rather than failure or incompetence. The community believed not-knowing was a communal practice—it was not that the dancers were excluded from knowledge that Forsythe or someone else might possess. Together, they sensed the unknown as generative, because of their tolerance and common strategies for emergent cooperation. Their methods opened up possibilities: such as doing the opposite, looking at the material from a different position, working with a restriction (backwards, upside down, and so on), changing the setting or making an exception. They acquired patience for the ambiguity of the process, with the multiple sources of information and fluidity which with Forsythe might change direction. While they looked

29 Jill Johnson explained: "I liked doing classical ballets. I was brought up here [The National Ballet of Canada] in the system. It was a choreographer's company too, so we were exposed to all kinds of work and I liked that, I wanted to have range. But when Bill came, the way he was making was just like artistical. I just—that was it. I knew I wanted to go and continue that research." Jill Johnson, videoconference interview with the author, October 21, 2016.

30 Laermans, *Moving Together*, p. 295.

31 Forsythe in an interview with Roslyn Sulcas, cited in Vass-Rhee, "Distributed Dramaturgies," p. 97.

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to Forsythe as the leader to make final decisions, it was understood that experimentation also took him beyond his limits of knowledge and ability to predict the future. The team valued not-knowing what the new creation would be like until the piece finally materialized—with the audience—for the premiere.

Yet creation also continued after the premiere. Forsythe was notorious for continuing to revise his methods and pieces, for throwing out drafts or making changes at the very last minute. Observing this, Siegmund writes:

> For all the continuity of his thinking about dance and movement, Forsythe has always understood how to change the use of his pieces in such a way that they do not exhaust themselves in the mere repetition of a formula. Favored ways of working are thrown overboard as well as solutions once found. He is almost infamous for changing pieces before the premiere, literally until the last minute before the curtain rises. […] When the Ballett Frankfurt premiered two parts of *Slingerland* in 1990 in the presence of Queen Beatrix in the Muziektheater in Amsterdam, the start was delayed by more than half an hour because Forsythe made changes on the stage until the very last second.[32]

While in other dance ensembles such capricious behavior would have been viewed as irritating or incompetent, Forsythe's ability to galvanize the team and follow creative impulses was legendary. Not only did the team trust Forsythe's choreographic direction, the ensemble had acquired experience that changes and reversals, especially under stress, could lead to innovative performances.

This does not mean the process was without dynamic moments of strife or struggle. Among the dancers there were often contested motives and strong emotions as a piece was in creation—such as when the dancers or Forsythe did not feel confident about performing a work, or perhaps a piece did not feel radical enough or there was still searching to be done. Negotiations of the conventions and values of the work happened internally within the production team before it opened up to the external world of audiences and critics.[33] Forsythe's vibrant power as a leader capable of motivating group support for a piece—or contrary to this, destroying the team's confidence—was considerable. Yet Forsythe's leadership could only shape his team so far.

Typically, until the piece was actively valued by the ensemble members, the process of creation would continue. This meant that creative practice was not isolated but could become part of rehearsing and performing. Occasionally, when circumstances changed and if the piece was no longer fitting the performers, it was likely to enter a stage of revision. Forsythe and the team might discard aspects of the existing work or even try something new. Although seldom, sometimes a piece would be abandoned after a short

32 Translation by the author. See Siegmund, "William Forsythe: Räume eröffnen, in denen das Denken sich ereignen kann," p. 22.

33 In Csikszentmihalyi's view, which is similar to Howard Becker's, creativity is not only that which pours out of creative individuals, but that which "leaves a trace in the cultural matrix" and is dependent on the field's acknowledgement of the change made in the domain. He writes: "It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it." Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, p. 27, p. 28.

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run of performances following the premiere. Thus, the constitution of a piece was not purely directive, nor democratic, but influenced by a complex social chemistry in which leadership shaped group tendencies.

Because of this common understanding that the creation phase might continue after the premiere, each subsequent performance of an existing work became another opportunity, motivating reflection and artistic innovation. Creative processes did not stop entirely but shifted dynamically—winding up and down. When a creation was finishing there would be a change in rehearsal style, signifying a piece was more formed that *in* formation.

Overall, the atmosphere of creation was remembered by the dancers in terms of its special social and affectual aspects, which they described as different from professional rehearsal cultures that they had known in other ensembles—especially within ballet companies. The process was vertiginous. The group cohered in facing the challenge of making a new work together. There was an abundance of horizontal sharing with one another, as much as with Forsythe. It was also playful and fun—replete with laughter, humor, enjoyment and spontaneity. Yet because creative work was the opposite of routine—highly irregular and unpredictable—the ensemble's creative practice was stressful and tiring. Dancers described the stress from maintaining a nervous system ready to adapt and invent in the moment. Creative practice with Forsythe thus moved across a matrix of different intensities and affects.[34] Making choreography, I would like to argue, was the ethos of the dancers' labor, infiltrating their approach to training, rehearsal and performance.

4.6 Touring

Touring is an important aspect of the professional culture of many dance companies.[35] While highly glamorous to outsiders, the realities merit greater scrutiny. Season plans in Forsythe's archive document performances in Frankfurt and elsewhere within Germany—cities such as Stuttgart, Munich and Hamburg. They also detail extensive locations abroad: in western Europe across capitals such as Paris, Amsterdam, London, Brussels, Rome; and to other continents, visiting the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Japan and Brazil. From 1990 to 1998, Ballett Frankfurt had a one-month residency in Paris each year, giving approximately 20 performances at the Théâtre du Châtelet.[36] The Forsythe Company had a one-month residency in the Schauspielhaus Zürich for the first three seasons of its operation.

Traveling impacted the artists and repertoire. Touring generated new contexts, stimulating variety and fresh textures in performance. Receiving world-wide attention

34 Csikszentmihalyi has also highlighted the satisfying aspects of creativity as well as the troubles; Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, pp. 73–76.

35 On ballet companies, see Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, pp. 145–49; on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, see DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, in particular pp. 66–67 and pp. 93–94; on Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, see Klein, "Die Logik der Praxis," pp. 129–31.

36 Sulcas, "Watching the Ballet Frankfurt, 1988–2009," p. 4.

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increased the ensembles' status, reputation and cultural capital. The organizations also profited from revenue earned on tour—which Forsythe stressed in public interviews was essential to his company making profit.[37] It was not unknown for the dancers to be on tour for three months a year (comprised of multiple trips), accounting for 30 or more performances.[38]

4.6.1 The Cost of Touring

Touring deeply impacted the bodily life of the dancers, as they shifted locations quickly and were asked to adapt to local contexts. There was a rhythm to this jet-set lifestyle: on trains and airplanes, packing up, arriving at the next hotel, experiencing jetlag, gaining orientation, attending dress rehearsals, waking up then rehearsing the next day, performing, performing again, going elsewhere, unpacking, recovering, and so on. While the dancers traveled all together, individuality was maintained at a high cost to theaters—with each member of the team receiving their own hotel room and *per diems*.

Traveling to perform internationally offered a sense of purpose and fulfilment to the dancers—having exchange with diverse audiences, seeing cities around the world and also enjoying some luxury when staying in four-star hotels. Yet despite the glamour of the touring schedule, with the professional work ethic of Forsythe dancers, being on tour was primarily dedicated to working. The hotel and restaurant services made it possible to retreat: to focus exclusively on the show. One dancer summed it up to me: "You know how a tour is. You're mostly going from the hotel to the theater."[39] Another explained, touring is "the greatest and also the worst part of the lifestyle."[40]

The nomadism can lead to depletion.[41] After the end of the 2014–2015 season of The Forsythe Company, Forsythe resigned from his post for reasons of health; a new artistic director was selected to take his position.[42] After closing negotiations, Forsythe commented to a reporter: "With only 16 people, we all burnt out. I should have rung the alarm sooner, but you always wonder if it is an anomaly or a trend." Traveling was not the only reason—there was increased workload and the aging of the team too.[43]

Outside of Forsythe's groups, a rising number of high-status artists are also beginning to protest about the damaging environmental aspect of touring—with Jérôme Bel,

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

38 See Appendix I for an example, illustrating the 1995–1996 season in which *Duo* was made.

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

40 Riley Watts, interview with the author, Bern, January 11, 2017.

41 Supporting my experiences as a former Forsythe dancer and the accounts of *Duo* dancers such as Riley Watts, Wulff writes about her experience touring as an ethnographer with the Royal Swedish Ballet. She notes that while dancers describe touring as something "they enjoy," it also presents challenges: homesickness, "extra-intense" schedules, little time for exploration of the cities where they were working, and especially after a long time on tour, stress from the closeness of working together. See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 147.

42 Italian choreographer Jacopo Godani, former dancer of the Ballett Frankfurt.

43 Forsythe cites the overwork due to the numbers of premieres required and the smaller team size. Cappelle, "William Forsythe Dances to a New Tune." Seven dancers from the Ballet Frankfurt stayed the full ten years of The Forsythe Company, aging from their thirties into their forties. Forsythe grew from 55 to 65, leaving his work when many people would retire.

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Tino Sehgal, Katie Mitchell, and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker all having omitted plane travel from their artistic practice.[44]

Building upon this sketch, the details of *Duo*'s touring history are the subject of the next chapter.

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This chapter has examined the dancers' practices and contextualized these within the "practice turn."[45] Describing these activities in vivid detail, I investigated the dancers' seasonal rhythms (4.1), training (4.2), rehearsal (4.3), performing (4.4), creation (4.5) and touring (4.6); this analysis has drawn extensively from interviews with *Duo* dancers, as well as my own experience as a former Forsythe dancer. Two cumulative aspects of my argument are as follows: First, the chapter explored the tension between how the dancers' practices were, on one hand, generative, creative and variable, and, on the other hand, repetitive and routinized. In contrast with other studies that take an either/or approach, I have considered the possibility that routine and unpredictability are *paired* as entwining aspects of practice.[46] Second, the chapter also highlighted the existential impact of this labor for the artists: veering between intensities of positive eustress and negative distress. Overall, my discussion canvasses the importance of movement exchange and creative process, clarifying how choreographic artefacts, social bonds and Forsythe's leadership held together a riveting nexus of activity.

44 Sulcas, "When the Choreographer Won't Fly, the Dancers Rehearse by Skype," p. 2.

45 Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory.*

46 Reckwitz, "Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken," in particular pp. 294–95.

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