

## Chapter 5: Duo's Art World

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Works of art, from this point of view, are not the products of individual makers, “artists” who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence. Artists are some subgroup of the world’s participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work, and thereby make it art. [...] The world exists in the cooperative activity of those people, not as a structure or organization, and we use words like those only as shorthand for the notion of networks of people cooperating.

—Howard Becker<sup>1</sup>

Howard Becker’s now classic sociological study, *Art Worlds* (1982), poignantly draws into view the span of cooperative activities that produce artistic works and ascribe them with artistic value. To debate the ‘essential’ contribution of the artist author, Becker takes a deliberately provocative position. Even when an individual artist works alone—such as a painter, poet, composer or choreographer making a solo—Becker emphasizes that they rely on cooperative links, materials that they did not find or produce themselves, common conventions and frequently also on legal and institutional support. With reputation being a critical power locus affecting whether or not an artwork is accepted, artists are also dependent on their social ties. An “art world” is Becker’s term for a network of cooperation that produces art: people whose choices, small and large, contribute to an artwork existing and being meaningful.

Becker’s view is particularly insightful for considering the work of William Forsythe and the example of *Duo*. This perspective helps to interpret the impact of production conditions on choreographic artefacts, as well as to highlight the choreographer’s interdependence with his or her team. It avoids deifying the choreographer and oversimplifying the social processes through which the author’s vision becomes manifest. While Becker recognizes the “unique and indispensable contribution” an artist makes to his or her work, Becker concludes that an array of activities support art making. Becker

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1 Becker, *Art Worlds*, p. 35.

stresses: the artist “works in the center of a network of cooperating people, *all of whose* work is essential to the final outcome.”<sup>2</sup>

Becker clarifies that the concept of an art world is a metaphor he uses to consider concrete realities: “A ‘world’ as I understand it [...] consists of real people who are trying to get things done, largely by getting other people to do things that will assist them in their project.”<sup>3</sup> Comparing his thinking to Bourdieu’s field theory, Becker distinguishes a field as a concept of a *limited* space governed by forces that distribute rationed things that people want (reputation, resources, money, status, etc.). A world, for Becker is not spatial; rather, it has to do with the “flesh-and-blood” of people.<sup>4</sup> An art world is a practical location opened *through* cooperation: people paying attention and gradually shaping their activity in relation to others.<sup>5</sup> Different from Bourdieu’s theory—which focuses on limitations, competition and advancement through the acquisition of various kinds of capital—Becker’s vision of cooperation is less mired in competition, though it does not preclude it. Becker sees the art world as an unlimited space of potential. In this, he echoes Forsythe dancers, with their generative emphasis on ‘What else?’

For Becker: “The basic question of an analysis centered on ‘world’ is who is doing what with who that affects the resulting work of art?”<sup>6</sup> Here I follow this lead, returning to my case study. Who is doing *Duo* with whom, when and where, is the focus of this section, tracing the performance history of the project from 1996 to 2018. Having already indicated the extent of infrastructure, people and practices supporting *Duo*, now I look at the performers’ lineage in greater detail. I highlight how the distribution of performance through touring affected the choreographic work, showing how the project is held together through cooperative links, material conditions, shared spaces and the investment of a small group of artists. Looking chronologically at these interweaving activities, I chronicle how the piece has been produced over twenty years—a braiding together of efforts. Where possible, I draw comparison from an existing study of Pina Bausch’s seminal piece *Das Frühlingsopfer* (*The Rite of Spring*), made by dance scholar Gabriele Klein.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.1 Touring

Between 1996 and 2018, *Duo* was performed by Forsythe’s dancers approximately 148 times—in 41 cities, in 19 countries and on four continents (see Figs. 15–16).<sup>8</sup> This rhythm

2 Becker, *Art Worlds*, p. 35, p. 25, emphasis mine.

3 Ibid., p. 379.

4 Ibid., p. 374.

5 Ibid., p. 375.

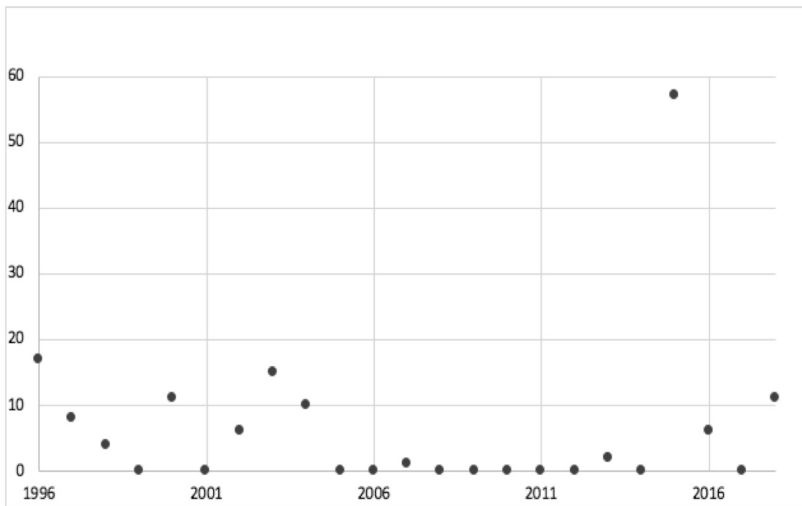
6 Becker, *Art Worlds*, pp. 384–85. Dance scholars Helena Wulff and Rudi Laermans both give serious consideration of Becker’s ideas in their studies of ballet and contemporary dance, respectively. See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*; in particular pp. 33–35. See Laermans, *Moving Together*, in particular pp. 274–83.

7 See Klein, “Die Logik der Praxis.”

8 This figure counts performances of *Duo*, *DUO2015* and *Dialogue* (*DUO2015*). It does not count performances by companies/dancers outside Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company. For compari-

of repetition and displacement shows two waves of activity. In Ballett Frankfurt, *Duo* was performed 72 times, with the highest frequency of performances within the first year and during the tours of the final season of Ballett Frankfurt. Throughout the period of The Forsythe Company, *Duo* was primarily dormant. *Duo* resurged in a new form, under the title *DUO2015*, as part of the *Sylvie Guillem – Life in Progress* tour during which there were 57 performances in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 15. Number of Performances of the Duo Project per Year (1996 – 2018).



The data visualized in Figures 15 and 16 was developed from study of archival documents in Forsythe's and the dancers' private archives (programs, tour plans, archival videos of performances, personal notes). The process of triangulation between these documents and interviews with the dancers and musicians gives confidence to the completeness and accuracy of these findings. Yet the history is not without ambiguities and indications of missing elements. To reach a more in-depth understanding of the cooperation on *Duo*, I studied videos of *key performances*.<sup>10</sup> These provided broader evidence

son, between 1976 and 2013 Pina Bausch's *Das Frühlingsopfer* was performed by the Bausch company more than 300 times—in 74 cities, in 38 countries and on four continents. See *ibid.*, p. 131. Forsythe's touring, by comparison, centers on Europe and North America, with no reach to South America and little touring in Asia.

9 For a complete list of the *Duo* project performances, see Waterhouse, "Supplements to Processing Choreography."

10 See the section titled Key Performances in the Introduction of this book for discussion of the criteria and selection process. See also Appendix F, section 2.

Figure 16. Locations of Duo Project Performances (1996 – 2018).



of *Duo* not just as an original to be repeated, but a process of continual collaboration, shaped by new contexts and performers.

## 5.2 Reconstructive Chronology of *Duo* Performances

The first performance of *Duo* took place on January 20, 1996, on the stage of Frankfurt's Opera House. The video archives reveal a piece that is freshly-made and fragile. (As one indication of this, a dancer's hair falls down from her upswept 'banana' hairstyle during a performance.) In the previous three weeks, Forsythe had worked closely with the dancers Regina van Berkel and Jill Johnson to create the piece: inventing the movement, developing the choreographic structure and choosing the right music, lights and costumes. The premiere of the piece in January (a run of six performances) was followed by tours to Paris, Rome and Bregenz in Austria. *Duo* appeared as the second work in a program of six short pieces, under the title *Six Counter Points*. Ballett Frankfurt *répétiteur* Margot Kazimirska played Thom Willems' score for solo piano.<sup>11</sup>

When dancer Jill Johnson left Ballett Frankfurt at the end of the 1995–1996 season, a new member of Ballett Frankfurt—Canadian dancer Allison Brown—was coached to take her part. Brown learned Johnson's part from van Berkel. Their first experience dancing *Duo* was a gala performance for Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark. Over the course of the next season, Brown performed *Duo* on tour in Leverkusen and again in Frankfurt, gaining confidence and receiving valuable feedback from her peers. On May 8, 1997, a key performance of *Duo* in Frankfurt shows Brown's early adjustments

11 The works on this program were, in order: *The The*, *Duo*, *Trio*, *Four Point Counter*, *Two Ballets in the Manner of the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century* 1. *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* 2. *Approximate Sonata*.

to her new role, with van Berkel at her side. Unlike the premiere—danced upon a black floor—Forsythe choose a light gray floor.<sup>12</sup> Optically this drew attention to the movements of the dancers' lower bodies, effectively changing the atmosphere. This performance also marked the entrance of David Morrow as pianist, playing a new version of Thom Willem's score.

At the end of the 1996–1997 season, new dancers began to learn *Duo*: Bahiyah Sayyed Gaines with Francesca Harper.<sup>13</sup> *Duo* was no longer featured in the program *Six Counter Points*, but instead placed within other evenings of mixed repertoire. Bringing in new dancers to the work was pragmatic, given the possibility of injury. It was also a means of refining the piece, and further enabling its impact upon the ensemble.<sup>14</sup> In the beginning of the 1997–1998 season, Brown performed with Gaines on tour in Helsinki. In Spring 1998, Brown returned to dancing with van Berkel on tour in Antwerp.

*Duo* was not performed in the 1998–1999 season. Upon Jill Johnson's return to Ballett Frankfurt in 1999, and with Regina van Berkel's departure from Ballett Frankfurt in 2000, Brown switched roles to perform with Johnson, with whom she would perform together for the next three years. In a string of seven performances in Frankfurt in early March 2000, van Berkel and Johnson began, followed by Brown (in her new role, taking on the part of van Berkel) with Johnson. Next, the dancers toured to Mulhouse, France. At the end of the 1999–2000 season, performances of *Duo* took place at the Montpellier Dance Festival, in conditions remembered as difficult—by the dancers and pianist Morrow—for finding the right balance of music and movement, consonance and dissonance.<sup>15</sup> The program does not list the performers, but the dancers confidently remember van Berkel and Johnson performing together, celebrating van Berkel's last shows and subsequent departure from the company to pursue future work as a choreographer.

Brown is one of the few dancers with knowledge of both parts in the duet; she is also the Ballett Frankfurt dancer who has danced the most performances of *Duo*. A video of a selected key performance from March 9, 2000, though of poor resolution, reflects the important partnership developed between Brown and Johnson. This recording is also significant in that Forsythe chose to authorize this video as a reference to stage the piece on CCN – Ballet de Lorraine in 2015. As such, this source signifies a standard reference for transmission of *Duo*—suggesting Forsythe's aesthetic preference to emphasize a more recent version rather than the original rendering of the piece, and to acknowledge the artists who gave the piece a strong and stable identity, rather than those without a longstanding history of interpretation.

There was a respite from performance of *Duo* in both the 2000–2001 and 2001–2002 seasons. In the final two seasons of the Ballett Frankfurt, other dancers also became

12 The light gray floor was used for the first half of the program of *Six Counter Points* (i.e., *The The, Duo* and *Four Point Counter*). The work *Trio* was not performed.

13 Unfortunately, there are no documents (programs or videos) showing Harper performing the work. The dancers speculate that perhaps because of injury she was unable to perform, or quite possibly a performance record has been lost.

14 This point is developed in section 11.1, Learning *Duo* in the Ballett Frankfurt.

15 Independent confirmation by David Morrow, interview with the author in Rüsselsheim, July 25, 2017, and Jill Johnson, videoconference interview with the author, October 21, 2016.

involved with *Duo*. These included Cora Bos-Kroese, who had joined the Ballett Frankfurt in 2001 after a career in Nederlands Dans Theater, as well as Italian dancer Roberta Mosca and American dancer Natalie Thomas. In November 2002, *Duo* was revisited with a series of six performances in Frankfurt, with Johnson and Brown performing. Six months later, the piece toured to three cities in Italy, performed by Bos-Kroese, Mosca, and/or Johnson. At this time, a shift occurred in the musical accompaniment. Willems replaced Morrow, performing his own piano score, again modified for the occasion—a role that Willems then kept in later performances. The new program of four works would tour extensively for the next two years before the ultimate closure of Ballett Frankfurt in summer 2004.<sup>16</sup>

One month after the Italian tour, *Duo* was performed in Cologne, with Brown and Mosca together. Brown selected the performance on June 29, 2003 as a key performance. Without the background curtain—used to bring forward the piece to the apron of the stage, as close to the audience as possible—the stage here is much larger than those of previous *Duo* performances. This changes how the dancers move in the space, to cover and project across greater distances. This performance still follows the original sequence of the 1996 version of *Duo*, with agogic stretching according to the musical phrasing particular to Mosca and Brown.

In the final season of the Ballett Frankfurt, *Duo* toured extensively: in the fall to Brooklyn and Montreal, and in early summer to Lille, in France; then Berkeley, Orange County and Washington, DC. In this final tour, Thomas stepped in to perform Brown's role with Johnson.

After the closure of Ballett Frankfurt at the end of the 2003–2004 season, Forsythe continued working with a smaller set of dancers in his subsequent ensemble, The Forsythe Company. The repertoire of the latter did not include *Duo* until 2012.<sup>17</sup> Aside from Roberta Mosca, no other *Duo* dancers had continued from Ballett Frankfurt to The Forsythe Company.

During and after the time of Ballett Frankfurt, there was a diaspora of *Duo*, which was purchased and performed by other dance companies (see Table 3). *Duo* dancers chosen by Forsythe took active part transmitting (a process called 'setting') the work. In the Batsheva Dance Company and Ballet de Lorraine, pairs of male dancers as well as female dancers were chosen as performers. The work was also taught to dance students at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts in 2015 with Brown and Forsythe dancer Cyril Baldy teaching.

16 This program featured, in order: *The Room As It Was*, *Duo*, *N.N.N.N.*, and *One Flat Thing*, reproduced.

17 One gala performance of *Duo* in 2007 was performed by Ballett Frankfurt *Duo* dancers Jill Johnson and Allison Brown, with the dancers taking responsibility for their own rehearsals.

Table 3. *Duo performances by companies outside Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company*

| Company                  | Date of Acquisition | Ballet Master      |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Batsheva Dance Company   | 2000                | Johnson            |
| Lyon Opera Ballet        | circa 2003          | Johnson/Bos-Kroese |
| Nederlands Dans Theater  | circa 2007          | Johnson/Bos-Kroese |
| Gauthier Dance           | 2009                | Bos-Kroese         |
| CCN – Ballet de Lorraine | 2015                | Baldy              |

The Forsythe Company repertoire foregrounded new works, often for the entire company. Repertoire evenings with smaller pieces were infrequent. In January 2012, a small group of Forsythe Company dancers participated in initial rehearsals of *Duo* for a program of small works intended to include *The The, N.N.N.N.*, in addition to a new piece.<sup>18</sup> Male dancers Brigel Gjoka and Riley Watts, and female dancers Roberta Mosca and Parvaneh Scharafali, were chosen and paired by Forsythe to continue to rehearse with Brown in order to further reconstruct the version of *Duo* performed previously by the Ballett Frankfurt.

Scharafali had learned and performed Johnson's role in *Duo* as a dancer in Nederlands Dans Theater, receiving coaching from Johnson and Bos-Kroese and an award for her performance. Mosca was also a *Duo* veteran. The inclusion of male performers was seen as natural and unchallenging to the history of the work. The planned performances of *Duo* in 2012 at Frankfurt's Bockenheimer Depot did not however take place as designated, with Forsythe choosing to change the program.<sup>19</sup>

After this incubation phase of rehearsing *Duo*, partners Watts and Gjoka danced *Duo* for the first time in 2013 in two gala performances.<sup>20</sup> By this time, Mosca had left the company, leaving Scharafali without a partner. Although these performances were far from what Gjoka and Watts would come to understand as "their *Duo*," they were an important occasion of learning.<sup>21</sup> In them, the two dancers interpreted the Ballett Frankfurt structure of *Duo*, wearing their own practice clothes. Aside from Forsythe's choreographic decision to revise the beginning of the piece, Gjoka and Watts perform the choreography they inherited in sequence, albeit with percussive breath and speed that is different from prior versions. Their interpretation is also three minutes shorter.<sup>22</sup> Finding a very different sense of effort, they are faster, vocally louder and more grounded than the prior performers. There is also a refined musical approach, with Willems playing at the piano with exceptional sparseness—the acoustics added only to the rising action of the piece, about two-thirds through the dance.<sup>23</sup>

18 Dancers Cyril Baldy, Brigel Gjoka, Josh Johnson, Roberta Mosca, Parvaneh Scharafali, Yasutake Shimaji and Riley Watts took part in these rehearsals.

19 This critical moment is diagnosed further in section 11.2 Reconstructing *Duo* in The Forsythe Company.

20 In Darmstadt and Weimar.

21 Conversation with Riley Watts and Brigel Gjoka after a performance, April 2, 2016.

22 See Appendix F, section 3.

23 The Darmstadt performance is without musical accompaniment; here I describe the Weimar gala.



Continuing their experience with *Duo*, Forsythe asked Gjoka and Watts to work with excerpts from the choreography as sources for improvisation within the collage piece *Study#3* (2012). Movement phrases from *Duo* also appear as short points of reference within performances of *The Returns* in The Forsythe Company's 2014–2015 season.

In 2014, Forsythe was asked by renowned ballet dancer Sylvie Guillem<sup>24</sup> to include *Duo* in her international farewell tour titled *Sylvie Guillem – Life in Progress*, sponsored by Sadler's Wells Theatre of London.<sup>25</sup> For this context, Forsythe expanded the Ballet Frankfurt version of *Duo* into a longer work of twenty minutes, which he retitled *DUO2015*. Willems also changed the score, creating a more minimal composition of electronics (without piano). The suspended flageolet tones were recycled from Forsythe and Willem's piece *Sider* (2011), creating a hypnotizing yet suspenseful sonic atmosphere. New costumes were chosen, in which the dancers wore sweatpants and tank tops. Despite the dancers referring chronologically to the version of *Duo* that they had learnt, this adaptation involved more sections of improvisation and solos in which the dancers had greater freedom with *their* choices of sequence and motifs. According to the dancers, Gjoka and Watts found "*their Duo*" in this version and context.<sup>26</sup> They also acquired expertise through extensive performance in 52 cities internationally between April and December 2015. Supported by the infrastructure of Sadler's Wells Theatre of London, this tour took the work beyond Forsythe's institutional structure; the dancers performed for the first time without Forsythe's presence, organizing rehearsals and the presentation themselves.

In the two years following this tour, dancers Watts and Gjoka maintained their connection, despite living on different continents. After eight months apart, they met in Paris in August 2016 to perform *DUO2015* in the church of Saint-Eustache, in the context of the French festival *Quartier d'Été*. They took decisions, in dialogue with Forsythe, about how the audience and sound would be installed in this space. The video I studied of the key performance reflects one of four shows over the course of two nights, which were timed to be performed with the changing of the evening light through the church windows. The chiming of the church bells was spontaneously incorporated into the dancers' musicality, and the staging was modified to address an audience seated on three sides. After these performances, the next month the dancers flew to Philadelphia to perform the piece twice as an installation at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with Forsythe present. Wishing to keep evolving their partnership, the dancers met with me

24 French ballerina Sylvie Guillem (b. 1965) was celebrating her retirement from the stage with this performance tour at the age of fifty. She had forged a relationship with Forsythe when he created a feature role for her in the piece *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, made at the Paris Opéra Ballet in 1987.

25 Sadler's Wells Theatre was founded in 1683. Currently it is operating courtesy of fundraising, individual donors, organizations, trusts and foundations. The project *Sylvie Guillem – Life in Progress* was credited as a Sadler's Wells London Production, in co-production with Les Nuits de Fourvière, Shanghai International Arts Festival and Sylvie Guillem. The program featured, in order: *technê* by Akram Khan, *DUO2015* by William Forsythe, *Here & After* by Russell Maliphant, and *Bye* by Mats Ek. Guillem performed in every work except for *DUO2015*.

26 Conversation with Riley Watts and Brigel Gjoka after a performance, April 2, 2016.



in October 2017 to teach a *DUO2015* workshop together—at Gjoka's educational program in Bologna (Art Factory International). Gjoka and Watts were given permission by Forsythe to perform *DUO2015* again in April 2018, in an event 'taking over' the communal theater of Bologna.

Most recently, in the summer 2018, dancers Gjoka and Watts met again with Forsythe to prepare *DUO2015* for a second Sadler's Wells tour, *A Quiet Evening of Dance*.<sup>27</sup> Beginning with rehearsals near to his home in Vermont, USA, Forsythe assembled former dancers of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company to build a new program with *Duo* as its keystone. Before the premiere, Forsythe described the evening as "an essay on the baroque," another important exploration of the potential and contemporaneity of ballet.<sup>28</sup> The piece *Duo* was again adjusted. The work was retitled *Dialogue (DUO2015)* to reflect the continuity of the four pieces within the first act. Exploring a new sonic landscape, Willems' music was changed to bird calls; the dancers received new pants and T-shirts (designed by Dorothee Merg) and lighting (designed by Tanja Rühl), both adapted in collaboration with Forsythe. Furthermore, the performers allowed their recent investigation of hip-hop (with cast member Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit), and ballet (in the final act *Seventeen/Twenty One*) to influence their interpretation. Until the suspension of the tour due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the piece continued as a work in process within this context.

The practitioners understand *Duo* as both a manifestation in the present and a forward-moving journey. *Duo* dancer Brigel Gjoka explains: "So it's the journey. I wanna live the journey. [...] It's something that never stops and it doesn't become like an archive. So, I don't feel with *Duo* it's like an archive and I have to talk about memories."<sup>29</sup> Yet *Duo* also manifests *because of* and *through* its history, without inertia to hold the dancers' creativity back. Each performance of *Duo* manifests the lineage of information passed down, from pair to pair. The dancers have learned the same movements and sequence, and developed a style of dyadic communication particular for their way of interpreting the dance. They invest in Forsythe's curation of short works for each tour, and his new adjustments of the stage elements. Not any duo is *Duo*. Nor will any communication or set of movement principles shared between *Duo* dancers manifest the piece. The dancers are partaking in one adventure and one journey, which is a complicated bundle of people, practices and contexts: an art world.

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Throughout Part I, Howard Becker's perspective has informed my layered approach analyzing the institutional features of Forsythe's ensembles—considering Forsythe's lead-

27 The project *A Quiet Evening of Dance* was credited as a Sadler's Wells London Production, in co-production with Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, Théâtre du Châtelet and Festival d'Automne in Paris; Festival Montpellier Danse 2019; Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg; The Shed, New York; Onassis Cultural Center, Athens and deSingel International Arts Campus, Antwerp. The two-act program featured, in order: *Prologue*, *Catalogue*, *Epilogue* followed by *Dialogue (DUO2015)*, and in the second act *Seventeen/Twenty One*.

28 See Crompton, "A Different Focus."

29 Brigel Gjoka, interview with the author, Bologna, October 25, 2016.

ership, the ensembles' infrastructural conditions, the dancers' practices and the ensemble's teamwork. In this chapter I have arrived at a detailed, chronological analysis of the institutional enmeshment of the *Duo* project, following Becker's question for the art world: "Who is doing what with who that affects the resulting work of art?"<sup>30</sup>

By attending to this question, I have shown that the performances of *Duo* reveal traces of the contexts and cooperation that have produced it. Based upon study of archival documents and interviews with *Duo* dancers, in this chapter I reconstructed the performance history of the *Duo* project from 1996 to 2018—enumerating the touring history (5.1), and analyzing key performances spanning 20 years (5.2). *Duo* is thereby demonstrated to be a plastic work, shifting with the pairs of dancers and contexts of performance, strongly influenced by the constraints of artistic distribution. What becomes evident through this analysis is the richness by which Forsythe's choreographic projects engendered cooperative worlds. Forsythe's choreographic works are not just made and then distributed; rather the distribution process impacts and affords opportunities for the development of these pieces. The choreography of *Duo* emerged longitudinally through a network of people's activities in cooperation, shaped by their contexts of working and histories of working together. The concept of an *art world* helps to illustrate how Forsythe's choreography was an emergent and enduring process, shaped through contextual cooperation.

Following the longitudinal enactment of *Duo* in practice brings new consideration of how choreographic works are extended through history and sustained through cooperative links. This challenges our historiographical process as dance scholars seeking to write their histories. My analysis has highlighted the role of movement and creativity in this longitudinal process. Both warrant further inspection and will be the focus of the following two sections of this manuscript.

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30 Becker, *Art Worlds*, p. 385.