Introduction to Part III: Creation

> For me, the Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company was pretty much a continuum. […] I see it as one line of work. I think the more I am away from it—the more I'm doing my own projects out in the world and you know, being in charge of things—I recognize how unusual the level of (*pause*) constant re-creation is. Constant re-creation that really has a true line of work that everybody is involved in and everybody is thinking about.
> —*Dana Caspersen*[1]

When the dancers recalled the ensembles' creative process they often lapsed into compelling moments of narration—speaking with fervor, reverence and tenderness—as exemplified by Caspersen's remembrance above. They enjoyed telling me *how* pieces were made and changed. They embellished their stories, knowing that, as a former colleague, I shared their excitement. Recounting their surprises, they explained twists and turns. They laughed, sharing personal fulfillments and disappointments. The intensive labor was engrossing and open-ended. "We were working consistently toward something, with something, around something," explains Johnson: "That social contract and non-verbal research was pretty extraordinary."[2]

Their specific proclivities for movement invention differentiated Forsythe dancers from performers in other groups: constituting their perception of bodies, their sense of selves and their facility to interact. Yet I garnered from these testimonies that even more significant was a common sense of choreographic labor—as a processual and relational understanding of emergence. Caspersen calls this collective "thinking" and highlights the embodied components in her writing.[3]

In this section I will explore the practice of *creation* in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company; I will delineate *how* the community cultivated open-ended processes of making and re-making choreographic pieces. Through this labor, the dancers learned to produce organization. They became trained to sense agency through contrapuntal emergence. From firsthand experience, I know that this very specific sort of creative labor was transformative, changing how one sensed value between people, materials and

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1   Dana Caspersen, videoconference interview with the author, December 19, 2018.
2   Jill Johnson, videoconference interview with the author, October 21, 2016.
3   See Caspersen, "Decreation," in particular p. 94.

contexts. By this means, the ensemble cooperatively produced dance pieces with precise aesthetic properties and bodies with special proclivities: bodies of work (repertoire) and human bodies (dancers, choreographer, team) entwining constitutively. In bringing this labor into focus in this section, I aim to decipher this activity and make seminal points clear for the reader. For dance studies, I deliver a practice-focused account of choreographic making, of which there are unfortunately few in the literature. Without trying to reduce *Duo*'s creative process to a singular narrative that would belie its genuine complexity, I aim to reconstruct the entwined perspectives of the participants and cogently draw out their meaning for the reader.

My introduction to creation practices in Section 4.5 has already highlighted how phases of *creation* interwove within the array of the dancers' institutionalized practices—infusing training and rehearsing. The term *creation* is native to these ensembles, where it is a synonym for making, choreographing or devising new dances. For example, the word "creation" designated a rehearsal in which a new work was being made; the process of being "in creation" meant making a new piece. As an American dancer arriving to join the Ballett Frankfurt in 2004, the usage of the term "creation" within this community was understandable to me, but not familiar. Within my history, "making," "choreographing," and "composing" had been more common vocabularies.[4] Dance scholars also use the terms "devising."[5]

The methodology of choreography—of making and redefining dances—is of primary interest in the field of dance studies. Lack of access to sources, to the private and often fragile process of rehearsals, makes this still an understudied field—though there is a growing abundance of new media online that provide access to choreographic techniques and knowledge.[6] The scholarship on Forsythe's choreographic practice relies extensively on interviews with the choreographer and Caspersen, the dancers' writing and Forsythe's research projects documenting his methodology.[7] The ethnographic accounts of Wulff and Vass-Rhee, based on their firsthand observations, as well as the writings of dramaturg Heidi Gilpin, are outstanding in this respect. The creative process they witness is far from linear. Wulff's study of the creation of *Sleepers Guts* (1996) in the Ballett Frankfurt describes the intensive pressure of "changes" and the contribution of technology within Forsythe's process. Wulff writes:

> The entire work process was defined by changes. Dancers, music and choreographic sections were taken out of the production by Forsythe as a matter of course, and some

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4   I suspect that within multilingual European dance contexts, the term *creation* is used because of the commonality between the English (creation) and Romance languages: French (*creation*), Spanish (*creación*), Italian (*creazione*). Initially, I was hesitant to adopt this expression, which I associated with cosmology (i.e., the creation of the universe), mythology (creation myths), and religious belief (creationism). But after acclimatizing to the choreographic culture of Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company, it became second nature.

5   See Butterworth, "Too Many Cooks?"

6   See the Online Artistic Resources section of the bibliography.

7   See in particular Boenisch, "Decreation Inc."; Hartewig, *Kinästhetische Konfrontation*, pp. 51–73. Siegmund, "The Space of Memory"; Sulcas, "William Forsythe: Channels for the Desire to Dance"; Spier, "Inside the Knot That Two Bodies Make"; "Engendering and Composing Movement"; "A Difficult and Lovely Work."

put in again and taken out again. Stuck in the creativity block that seems to be a necessary phase in all artistic (as well as intellectual) projects, the voyage from chaos to order was not over when the day of the premiere came. The production was still in progress, and it would take a number of performances before it suddenly came together.[8]

Vass-Rhee—relying on her longstanding insider position as a dramaturg with The Forsythe Company—demonstrates that the ensemble's methodology does not rely solely on methods of movement invention, but also on cultivating and choreographing the dancers' and audience's perception.[9] Based on retrospective analysis of The Forsythe Company's process making the piece *Whole in the Head* (2010), she underscores the importance of collaboration, noting the dancers' "complicity" and how Forsythe deliberately attends to communal aspects.[10] Gilpin, interpreting the creation of *Limbs Theorem* (1990), demonstrates how Forsythe's methods of movement generation employ iteration, chance and malfunction: "a process whose failures offer up previously unanticipated possibilities."[11] We can gather from these accounts that Forsythe's complex choreographic process proliferates authorship and instates a creative field of action, beyond one person's comprehension and control.

On the whole, Forsythe scholars have foregrounded the collaborative role of the dancers in the choreographic process, observing the decentralization and added responsibility of dancers within the labor.[12] Scholars have also considered the influence of Laban and architectural thinking on movement invention,[13] and the importance of practiced strategies of improvisation.[14] Forsythe is known for the complexity of dramaturgical sources that may influence the choreographic process, making the work according to Vass-Rhee a sort of "distributed cognition" involving the dancers' "danced dramaturgies."[15] *Duo*, with its focus on the microcosm of moving together, helps us in particular to look at how cooperation upon movement took place and changed over time.

My contribution to this literature is the richness of a dancer's case study analysis: adding description that follows one creation from its start until 2016—across iterations

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8   See Wulff, *Ballet Across Borders*, p. 159; following the creation see ibid., pp. 157–60.

9   Vass-Rhee, *Audio-Visual Stress*.

10   Vass-Rhee, "Schooling an Ensemble," p. 221.

11   Gilpin, "Aberrations of Gravity," p. 125.

12   Sulcas, "William Forsythe: Channels for the Desire to Dance," p. 55; Sulcas, "William Forsythe. The Poetry of Disappearance and the Great Tradition"; Siegmund, "William Forsythe: Räume eröffnen, in denen das Denken sich ereignen kann," pp. 13–15; see also Spier, "Engendering and Composing Movement," pp. 140–42.

13   See Hartewig, *Kinästhetische Konfrontation*, pp. 51–71; Maar, *Entwürfe und Gefüge*, pp. 47–56; Spier, "Engendering and Composing Movement," pp. 138–39; Lampert, *Tanzimprovisation*, pp. 192–95; Baudoin and Gilpin, "Proliferation and Perfect Disorder." As a dancer educated in Labanotation, I can testify that in my work as a dancer with Forsythe, I did not encounter Laban terminology, symbols or methods. Nor did I engage with the media or tasks from *Improvisation Technologies*. This is evidence of change in Forsythe's methodology and a gap in the scholarship regarding Forsythe's later methods, which have primarily been researched by Vass-Rhee and myself.

14   Lampert, *Tanzimprovisation*. See also Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*; Kaiser, "Dance Geometry."

15   Cf. Nugent, "William Forsythe, *Eidos:Telos*, and Intertextual Criticism," see pp. 26–27; see also Vass-Rhee, "Distributed Dramaturgies," in particular pp. 90–94.

spanning over two decades. Differently than Wulff and Vass-Rhee, I focus explicitly on the dancers' accounts of working with the choreographer, from my position of having elicited this peer-to-peer testimony. I also link analysis of the initial phase of making *Duo* with my review of the processes of *re-creation* through which *Duo* continued its creative proliferation. Recognizing that each creative process, like each piece, was unique, I carefully generalize to explicate facets of the labor and its aesthetics of production that could be useful for comparative study.

My choice to highlight *creation* is thus motivated because of its central importance to the ethos of the *Duo* project and its occupational culture; it was not because of the ubiquity of the term and its central place in capitalism,[16] which Andreas Reckwitz diagnoses as both a "wish" and "imperative."[17] In my writing, I significantly choose to position myself aside from genius clichés—understandings of creativity that have themselves already been critically worked through and re-thought in scholarly literature on creativity in anthropology, psychology, sociology and organizational studies as well as in dance and performance studies.[18] Rudi Laermans concurs about contemporary dance: "In line with the increasingly predominant collaborative work ethic, artistic heroism or an overly glorifying approach towards individual artists is generally dismissed as an out-dated remnant of modernism."[19]

The "genius" label is however common in Forsythe's reviews and the popular press. Peggy Phelan observes that it even influences theoretical discussion.[20] Though Forsythe's dancers occasionally use the word *genius*, the term did not appear once in my fieldwork notes or interviews with the artists.[21] Consequently, I wished to understand how the dancers and Forsythe worked together to create and re-create *Duo*, and how

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16   Cf. Florida, *The Rise of The Creative Class*.

17   Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity*, p. 5.

18   Anthropologist Karin Barber writes: "The idea that innovation and creativity are necessarily the results of departures from convention by gifted individuals has also been comprehensively revised." See Barber, "Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick," p. 33. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes: "Therefore, creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context. It is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon." See Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, p. 23. In organizational studies, Neil Thompson summarizes: "Scholars adopting a relational ontology of organizational creativity have shifted attention away from a preoccupation with individual minds towards that which is enacted, emergent, shared, unpredictable and contingent." Thompson, "Imagination and Creativity in Organizations," p. 245. As developed at length in Part I, Howard Becker dispels the notion that an artifact is produced solely by the intentions of one person. See Becker, *Art Worlds*.

19   Laermans, *Moving Together*, p. 352.

20   See Phelan, "Performing Questions, Producing Witnesses," pp. 10–11. For example, in a recent *New York Times* review from 2019: "On Thursday, when Mr. Forsythe came out to bow, he smiled sheepishly and had to be pushed forward. He looked not like a *genius* or a scourge but like a happy man." Emphasis (*genius*) mine. Seibert, "Review: William Forsythe Brings a New Playlist to Boston," p. 2. See also the editor's introduction in Spier, *William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography*, p. 1.

21   Caspersen, for example writes: "[Forsythe] has a joyous physical *genius* and an extraordinarily fluid and ungrasping mind in his working, which allows both the sublime and the grotesque to move through him. He trusts himself, but he never assumes that he knows." Caspersen, "It Starts From Any Point," p. 39. Emphasis (*genius*) mine.

this understanding of their practices could give a deeper sense of what choreography entailed.

The approach I took to answering my questions about creative process cycled from my ethnographic analysis to readings on creativity within social anthropology. These texts outside of dance studies were appropriate reference for my concerns, as they consider constitutive interplays of sociality, materials, economies and ownership. These studies of creativity have dispelled the notion that creativity is one essence—significantly, creativity is shown to take many modes.[22] Overturning some lingering approaches, the process of making has been demonstrated to be far more complex than materializing a preexisting idea of form—the so-called "hylomorphic" model of Aristotle. Rather, anthropologist Tim Ingold advocates seeing making as a generative emergence, in which there is interplay of relations, forces and materials.[23]

Comparing modes of creativity across Melanesia and Euro-America, anthropologist James Leach has interrogated "how the concept of intellectual property is embedded in a matrix of Euro-American thinking, in suppositions about being and doing, subjects and objects, agency and personhood."[24] In the Euro-American understanding of creative authorship he finds there is a presumption that persons are creative and things are not—and that persons can be separated from things. In Melanesian communities, in a relational way similar to the sorts of bodies that Dana Caspersen describes, people and property are instead multiply authored and amalgamated. Ingold elucidates further: creativity is not "an internal property that *resides* at all, or that either persons or things *possess*, whence it causes 'effects' in their vicinity."[25] In my view, *creation* in Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company names a sort of process where attunement to potential contributes novelty and change. Drawing from process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, Ingold concludes that creativity can be better understood through Whitehead's concept of *concrescence*—in which there is "continual formation."[26] Concrescence as a "growing together" and "creative advance."[27]

Whitehead views creativity as generic to every event unfolding: part of nature, life and the buzzing of its creatures. Creative is not an aesthetic adjective used to designate certain events or people as more or less creative. It is process itself, which Whitehead defines as an ultimate fact of the universe—as ultimate as the tension between the many and the one. Creativity he explicates as "the principle of *novelty*," and concrescence, as the "production of novel togetherness."[28] For Whitehead, creativity is not

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22   See Leach, "Modes of Creativity."

23   On hylomorphic thinking, see Ingold, *Making*, p. 37. Ingold writes about making a handaxe: "This is not an imposition of form on matter but a bringing out of forms, more topological than geometrical, that are latent in the variations of the material itself, in its energetic lines of tension and compression. [...] to borrow the words of Deleuze and Guattari once again, it is a question of 'surrendering' to the material and then 'following where it leads'." Ibid., p. 45.

24   Leach, "Modes of Creativity," p. 152.

25   Ingold, "Introduction Part I: Modes of Creativity in Life and Art," p. 52.

26   Ibid.

27   Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 236; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 21.

28   Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 21 (italics in the original). Isabelle Stengers qualifies that in the case of Whitehead: "creativity, which is neutral, is not to be celebrated." Stengers, *Thinking with*

something that people or things possess. Rather: "Each task of creation is a social effort, employing the whole universe."[29] Importantly—different than other practice theorists—for Whitehead, the social is not based on a sense of self that is ambitious or competitive.[30] Overall, Whitehead's philosophy, like the *Duo* dancers', is optimistic. For Forsythe dancers, *creation* might not always improve or evolve a performance, but their efforts will continue to spiral around and reinvestigate emergent and contextual possibilities—and they view this as a good and worthy way to live life.

Through conjoining performance and creativity, the dancers' work is performative in the sense meant by Judith Butler, as a practice that is always refashioning: repeating with difference.[31] In the article "Problematizing Performance" (1998), Edward Schieffelin observes the interrelationship of the terms *creative*, *improvisatory* and *performativity* in anthropology. He deciphers that with practice theory's focus on the regular and habitual aspects of practice as well as their contextual improvisatory character (Bourdieu), when the term *performativity* was brought into anthropology, it was advocated to examine at the edges of practice that were not just regular and habitual. In his words:

> The relation between performance and practice turns on this moment of improvisation: performance embodies the *expressive dimension of the strategic articulation of practice*. The italicized expression here could stand as our definition of performativity itself. […] performativity is located at the creative, improvisatory edge of practice in the moment it is carried out—though everything that comes across is not necessarily consciously intended.[32]

This philosophy resonates with the testimonies of Forsythe dancers and their specific sense for bodily creativity and relation, enabling improvisation. These dancers even advocate that their learned attunement to creativity can be applied not only to performance projects but to other ventures (whether conflict resolution, designing a café, or landscape gardening—to name some of the recent projects that the dancers have invested in).

Discerning how the dancers' practice creating and re-creating *Duo* cultivates a performativity of creation—relying on conventions, beliefs and practices—will fill the following two chapters. In particular, the relationality of *Duo*'s creative process is seminal and generative. These are not relations that exist between *fixed* entities but relations contingent and emergent to processes and processual bodies, *becoming* through creative activity. The relations are also between people and things: with the stage walls, the

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Whitehead, p. 258. In this chapter, Stengers discloses Whitehead's creativity with regard to Kant, Deleuze and the question of God; see ibid., pp. 254–76. Whitehead's creativity coheres the past, present and future, and is conditioned by the past; Deleuze's view is more a break or rupture with the past. On differences between Deleuze and Whitehead's notions of creativity, see Robinson, "The Event and The Occasion."

29   Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 223.
30   Compare to Goffman; See Schieffelin, "Problematizing Performance," p. 195.
31   See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."
32   Schieffelin, "Problematizing Performance," p. 199 (italics in the original).

dance floor and the distant piano.[33] Illustrating theses relational components through my analysis of the case study should help make this cooperation comprehensible.

Notably, in the writing that follows I will distinguish between the key concepts of cooperation and collaboration. I understand collaboration to be when people work together to achieve a mutual goal, sharing interest in and ownership of the outcome. Collaborative projects, by contrast, are more democratic, involving equable decision-making, authorship and responsibility: the artists co-initiate and revise this shared goal. In my view, a dance-devising project—in which activities vary from collaboration to cooperation—is not, in sum, a collaborative project, and the discourse on Forsythe's practices has largely disregarded this. Forsythe's practice of making dances in Ballett Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company typically did not involve sharing decision-making on the final outcome of performance. It also required differentiation between the tasks of the choreographer and the dancers, as I shall show for *Duo*. For that reason, I prefer to use the term to *cooperation* to describe this project. I understand *cooperation* to be when people work together in a distributed fashion, in which their interests and responsibility within the project may be different, yet together they make "an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter."[34]

As noted by dance scholar and sociologist Rudi Laermans, by 2005 collaboration was an "omnipresent buzzword" within the Flemish dance world, in part because *collaboration* had "succeeded 'conceptuality' as one of the key signifiers in European contemporary dance, thus solidifying a change in the field's self-understanding, away from performance-as-text or the art-work-as-artefact to performing as collective labour or joint artistic work."[35] Studying the creation of the piece *Verklärte Nacht* by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker[36] in 1995, Laermans considers the paradoxes of the "semi-directive mode" of choreography; he observes the dancers are not docile facilitators, but rather "co-create" material for and with the choreographer, who then makes the final decisions.[37]

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33   The way that I develop the concept of *relation* here takes influence from anthropologists Marilyn Strathern and James Leach. The concept of relations pervades the language of anthropology, from the realm of relatives/kin to the broader field of social relations involving humans, animals, ecologies, things, materials and places. As noted by Marilyn Strathern generally, and pertinent to *Duo*, relations may both connect/link/merge as well as split/separate/divide; see Strathern, "Kinship as a Relation," p. 48. Relations occur not only between humans, but also materials, media and contexts. Relations may also vary between modes: from relations produced through bringing together/separating entities to relations that are constitutive of the entities themselves. Discussing the difficulty of translation of the term *relation* into English, Strathern distinguishes between marked (mode 1) relations and unmarked (mode 2) relations: Mode 1 is relations external to pre-existing terms. Mode 2 are relations constitutive of the terms themselves. See Strathern, "Re-making Knowledge," p. 11. In my writing on *Duo*, I emphasize mode 2 relations. See also Leach, "Kinship and Place," pp. 213–14. I am grateful to Leach for these suggestions and references.

34   See Sennet, *Together*, p. 5.

35   Laermans, *Moving Together*, p. 20, p. 33. See also Ruhsam, *Kollaborative Praxis*; Basteri et al., *Rehearsing Collectivity*; Kunst, "Prognosis on Collaboration"; Cvejic, "Collectivity? You mean Collaboration."

36   De Keersmaeker, like Forsythe, is a contemporary dance choreographer with high international status and reputation. She has worked with her ensemble Rosas in Brussels since 1983.

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

He finds: "My conversations show that within the world of contemporary dance, performers expect to be given the chance to say 'I' or to singularize their potentials and to become co-authors in their own right."[38] What is paradoxical for Laermans, is how the dancers are *dependent* on the choreographer to do so.

Overall, Laermans takes a more critical view than I have of Howard Becker's sociological theory of art worlds. He radically promotes the view that scholars should not omit study of the specifics of composition and their "immanent logics," through which the core members of art worlds interact.[39] Within these logics of practice, he suggests there may be explanation of why artistic investment produces feelings of expression—particular to bodies that are singular, moments that are singular, and histories that net them in links and chains. He finds: collaborators discover "the always contextually embedded, at once partially realized and still virtual potential to co-create."[40]

The subsequent two chapters return to close review of the *Duo* case study. Chapter 10 reconstructs the rehearsals in which *Duo* was developed in 1996, studying the factors shaping the emergence of the piece and the dancers' memories thereof. Chapter 11 explores the processes shaping the transformation of *Duo* as a project from 1996 until 2016. Through interpreting the testimonies of Forsythe and the dancers and examining existing archival video of rehearsals, I show how the practice of re-creation defines the continual emergence of the choreography. The reader will finally arrive through this concluding section at a rich practical understanding of the dancers' activity and their experience of the choreographic.

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38   Ibid., p. 35.
39   Ibid., p. 270.
40   Ibid., p. 387 (italics in the original).