

# Dancing Amidst The Forsythe Company

Space, Enactment and Living Repertory

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**Abstract** Dieser Beitrag gibt Einsichten in die künstlerische Arbeit der Forsythe Company, welche die Autorin, die der Company seit mehreren Jahren als Tänzerin angehört, »von innen«, aus der Praxis heraus »für weitere theoretische Forschung zur Verfügung stellen« will. Gemeint sind damit allerdings keine Theorien über den tanzenden Körper im Raum, welche Raum als geometrisch organisierte, isotrope »Gegebenheit« begreifen, in den Körper und Dinge sich einordnen. In Anschluss an Maurice Merleau-Ponty, der Raum als eine »Form« der Erkenntnis« beschrieb, werden vielmehr die Räume der Forsythe-Produktionen wie auch die Arbeits- und Lebensräume der Company als prozessuale und komplexe Phänomene eines spezifischen, geteilten »Raum-Wissens« diskutiert: Raum ist nach dieser Auffassung bzw. Erfahrung etwas, das leiblich hervorgebracht, »gemacht« wird, und zwar durch kreatives, intelligentes Handeln. Auch der Beitrag, in mehreren Sektionen und zum Teil dialogisch angelegt, führt gleichsam durch Räume. Die Arbeit der Forsythe Company, so die These, lässt ein »lebendes Repertoire« entstehen, das sich – auch im Austausch mit dem Publikum sowie den unterschiedlichen Kontexten, auf die die Company auf ihren weltweiten Gastspielen trifft – ständig variiert und in Bewegung befindet.

This essay offers insight into The Forsythe Company's art through description of the living context of our art making. The Forsythe Company is a collective of people who *live, dance, and perform* meaningful spatial relationships. The intertwining of these categories gives the company's work compelling force – producing states of embodiment that are of artistic and philosophical significance. Choreographer William Forsythe has developed visionary pedagogical media to share aspects of his spatial methodology with the public: the CD-ROM *Improvisation Technologies* and the website *Synchronous Objects*. My task in this paper is to contextualize the spatial ideas already in public circulation by describing the company's activity. I offer a portrait of

how my colleagues and I work, and propose some theoretical concerns that are raised by our dancing.

My intent is to write broadly – to open discussion of artistic practice for theoretical inquiry. Rather than offering a theory of the dancing body in space, I apply space as a thematic to illuminate facets of The Forsythe Company’s process. As a performer with the ensemble I engage with space both as an abstract realm for thought and as a real context for dancing. In this case study of my creative niche, I develop space as a cooperative phenomenon, imparting spatial knowledge as the distributed and embodied experience of an ensemble in which I am part.<sup>1</sup> From my point of view, choreographic space is human: an environment for intelligent, creative, and meaningful action. My writing uses space as a device to address the relationships of mind and body, self and world, individual and community.

This essay is composed in six sections, with an intermission and an ending. I begin by surveying the meaningful spaces that are felt by my community. These spaces of involvement include bodily spaces, working rooms such as theaters and studios, as well as spaces that extend the self through memory, imagination, and representation. After naming the places, I question how I have learned to embody dancing in The Forsythe Company and describe the skills that I have acquired. Invoking phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, I find that I am *of* space. I propose that I dance *amidst*. From perceptual theorist James Gibson’s definition of the environment, I rethink space as a context for creative, collective action. I end by proposing that the company’s repertory is not static, nor constructed from elements – from bodies, text, or movements – with fixed meanings. Rather meaning is created. It lives amidst spatial coordinates.

By writing in the first person about a topic in which I am entirely embedded, this essay implicitly questions my history and identity. My premise is that I exist as an individual amidst an artistic community – that the members of The Forsythe Company are mutually defined by sharing a habitat or world. Through the solitary act of writing, I take distance from my work and articulate, even ground, my position within it. While I enjoy writing as an act of individualization, the author-