

***Processing Choreography: William Forsythe***

Dr. Elizabeth Waterhouse

William Forsythe (b. 1949, New York) is arguably one of the most significant and controversial dance makers of the last century, who has taken the aesthetic practices of ballet in groundbreaking new directions. Director of Ballett Frankfurt (1984–2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–2015), Forsythe collaborated with these ensembles to forge his own innovative working methods. Although most pieces from this past are no longer performed, repertoire like *Artifact Suite* (1984) and *One Flat Thing, reproduced* (2000) still circulate today in ballet companies worldwide. Forsythe also continues to make new ballets and “choreographic objects.”

This course will familiarize students with the wide-ranging artistic work and dance scholarship on William Forsythe, curated from my close perspective as a dance scholar and former Forsythe dancer. The classes will interweave practice-based exploration, with close study of choreographic pieces/installations, and discussion of texts responding to this challenging repertoire.

Students will gain from this course practice-based performance skills, as well as theoretical ideas from critical dance studies. We will consider Forsythe’s ballets from a historically and culturally situated perspective, observing the many tensions raised within them (from 1976 to the present time). We will examine how Forsythe’s works incited debates: regarding choreographic authorship, intellectualism, dance and politics, techne and technology, dance music, virtuosity, black dance appropriation, queerness, and gendered bodies. Students will leave the course with new concepts and physical practices for thinking about dance and choreography.

***Course Goals:***

- Develop knowledge of William Forsythe's works and their historical, cultural, theoretical, and aesthetic context
- Study the creative processes and praxis of Forsythe's ensembles; embody strategies from the dancers' working methods
- Analyze examples of William Forsythe's performances and choreographic objects
- Situate arguments within critical dance studies and performance studies debates/concepts
- Gather embodied experience in Forsythe's practices of ballet, improvisation, and counterpoint; begin to critically link practical study to theoretical questions/reflection

***Grading:***

- Presence (no more than three missed sessions) (10%)
  - prompt
  - engaged
  - respectful
- Quality of Verbal Participation in Class Discussions (30%)
  - close preparation of course readings
  - contribution of ideas and questions
  - respectful engagement with other students
- Quality of Embodied Participation in Class Activities (30%)
  - development of skills named in the practice modules
  - respectful engagement with other students
- Assignments (30%)
  - homework assignments (10%)
  - final paper (10%)
  - group composition assignment (10%)

***Contact:***

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***Semester Plan:***

Course meetings: two modules a week, ideally two two-hour sessions

<b>Date</b>	<b>Module 1: Discussion/Viewing</b>	<b>Reading Due</b>	<b>Works/Video</b>	<b>Module 2: Embodied Inquiry</b>
Week 1	Welcome Review Syllabus		Forsythe, <i>Solo</i>	Warmup and Jam
Week 2	Creating Ballet Anew?	Foster, “Creating Ballet Anew,” pp. 1–13.	Ballet Excerpts ( <i>Artifact, Second Detail, Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude</i> ) Forsythe, <i>Playlist EP</i>	Ballet
Week 3	Ballet Frankfurt (1984–2004)	Sulcas, “Watching the Ballet Frankfurt, 1988 – 2009,” pp. 5–19.	Forsythe, <i>Eidos : Telos Part I (Self Meant to Govern)</i>	Points in Space
Week 4	<i>Improvisation Technologies</i>	Kaiser, “Dance Geometry: A Conversation with William Forsythe,” pp. 1–7.	Forsythe, <i>Improvisation Technologies</i>	<i>Improvisation Technologies I</i>
Week 5	Forsythe Reception	Soloway, “Review: Is it Dance? Maybe. Political? Sure.”  Franko, “Splintered Encounters,” pp. 38–50.		<i>Improvisation Technologies II</i>
Week 6	<i>From A Classical Position</i>  Mid-Semester Feedback/Checkin	Spier, “Inside the Knot That Two Bodies Make,” pp. 49–59.	Caspersen & Forsythe, <i>From A Classical Position</i>	Partnering
Week 7	Counterpoint: Synchronous Objects	Groves et al. “Talking about Scores,” pp. 91–100.	Forsythe, <i>One Flat Thing, reproduced</i>	Cues, Alignments, Counterpoint
Week 8	The Forsythe Company (2005–2015)	Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” (available in French, English, Italian)	Forsythe, <i>Heterotopia</i> ,	Entrainment

Week 9	“Distributed Dramaturgies”	Vass-Rhee, “Distributed Dramaturgies: Navigating with Boundary Objects,” pp. 87–105.	Forsythe, <i>Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time</i>	Vocal Choreography
Week 10	Choreographic Objects	William Forsythe, “Choreographic Objects,” pp. 90–2.	Forsythe, <i>Black Flags</i> Caspersen and Forsythe, <i>White Bouncy Castle</i>	Composition Assignment
Week 11	Back to Ballet	Crompton, “Interview with William Forsythe.”	Forsythe, <i>Playlist (Track 2), Blakeworks</i>	Composition Assignment
Week 12	Closing Discussion	Groves, “Review: William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography: It Starts from Any Point,” pp. 117–121.	Forsythe, <i>Duo</i> project	Composition Assignment

### **Works Cited:**

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- Crompton, Sarah. “Interview with William Forsythe: ‘I Want People to Look Forward to Ballet, Not Endure It.’” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2022, sec. Stage.  
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