

## **Report to LISA ULLMANN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

**Visit to The Forsythe Company during the performances of William Forsythe's  
Kammer:Kammer, Bockenheimer Depot, Frankfurt Germany, 15-19 April 2015**

**By Tamara Tomic-Vajagic**

### **COVERING LETTER:**

Dear LUTSF Secretary,

I wish to express my gratitude to the Fund for the award which I received just in time to travel to Frankfurt, Germany in the period of 15-20th April 2015. The purpose of the trip was to research the final week of The Forsythe Company's performances of William Forsythe's choreography *Kammer/Kammer* (2000) at their principal Frankfurt performance venue, Bockenheimer Depot. The week powerfully marked\* the Company's transformation and was, therefore, a particularly important moment to witness and understand.

In my research I consider the nature of dancers' artistic contribution in the context of the Forsythe choreography. The performers of The Forsythe Company are particularly interesting as an ensemble with a unique working and creative culture. Being in Frankfurt during this historic week allowed me an important access: I viewed four consecutive performances of *Kammer/Kammer* (15-19th April). In conjunction, with the support of the Company and the Forsythe Foundation I saw several rare archival documents of the earlier performances of this work. Very importantly, I had great conversations with very interesting people -- the company dancers and collaborators, many of whom I met during several informal social events during that week. Unsurprisingly, therefore, my research trip to Frankfurt was very exciting, tremendously rich and profoundly inspiring.

My aim for this stage of the research was fully achieved. Please accept my report about it, enclosed below. I look forward to using the findings from this very special research trip to develop a self-standing output which will illustrate my contemplations about *Kammer/Kammer*. I envision a journal article about the spectator's encounter with this dance work as a specific outcome of this particular research journey. Additionally, I shall continue to develop a wider project on the theme of agency and emancipation of dancers who collaborated with Forsythe in The Forsythe Company.

Again, thank you very much for your kind support which enabled me to spend an absolutely extraordinary week in Frankfurt.

Best wishes,

Dr. Tamara Tomic-Vajagic

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\* Although these are final performances of Forsythe's repertoire as performed by The Forsythe Company, it is important to clarify that the company's seasonal programme actually included one more set of performances in June 2015. This time, however, the venue was comparatively smaller (Frankfurt Lab); also, rather than showing the existing Forsythe's repertoire, on display was the performer-led new work *In Act and Thought* (2015) also commissioned by The Forsythe Company. The work is choreographed by the company artist Fabrice Mazliah, with the significant input and contributions of several other performers and ensemble members. These performances in June 2015 in fact are the final shows of The Forsythe Company under that name and with the participation of the current dance ensemble.

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## **REPORT:**

During my previous research, I studied the choreography of William Forsythe with aim to understand the nature of the performer's creative contribution in his repertoire. In this respect, my doctoral study (Tomic-Vajagic 2012) concentrated on Forsythe's works from an earlier period -- the era of Ballett Frankfurt, between 1984-2004. During the course of that research I also understood the ways in which Forsythe with his ensemble managed to alter the institutional culture of a big opera-house ballet ensemble, and how this action was particularly integrated with his choreographic ideas. That finding pointed me toward the further possibilities for research of a group collaboration and emancipation of the dancers within the Forsythe collective. The Forsythe Company, founded in 2005, is particularly important in this respect. I had learnt much about it from several of its prominent performers whom I interviewed for my phd study. Subsequently, I collaborated with several of these dancers and since then have organised two public events in London (in 2013 and 2015).

Now, in 2015, The Forsythe Company is changing profoundly. Forsythe himself is embarking to explore new projects set outside the institutional context of a resident, his authored dance troupe. The ensemble members of The Forsythe Company are also transitioning into new, mostly independent projects. The moment of this transformation is thus particularly significant, as yet again, Forsythe sets a precedent for the trajectory of a choreographic dance company. Viewing the final week in which The Forsythe Company in

its current structure performs Forsythe's work thus makes a powerful historic moment. For my research it is particularly exciting to find out the ways in which the dancers' collective may adapt and take on this change as a productive shift.

According to my research plan, the purpose of the trip was to spend an intensive time at the Bockenheimer Depot and with the members of the Company, to learn about the performing approaches and methods of preparation for the performances. Owing to the support of the LUTSF, I was able to witness the final week of the company's performances of *Kammer/Kammer* (2000). This is a full-evening choreographic work which Forsythe composed through an integration of dance movement material, literary pretexts for the spoken narratives and film sequences, with live feed and pre-recorded scenes as interventions. The ensemble of performers dances and acts; several dancers also have speaking parts. This dance work creates an extraordinary visual, aural, sensory and thinking experience. Furthermore, the interesting setting of the Bockenheimer Depot -- a venue not built as a traditional theatre -- makes an additional layer of this extremely complex work.



Bockenheimer Depot, the audience space prior to the show.

It was particularly exciting to be able to view the four performances of *Kammer/Kammer* in a compressed time. The performances offered a rich stimulation and there was plenty to see, which I kept discovering each evening! I was glad that I could see the choreography as many times as I did, because of the plentitude of details. I think that I could also fathom the complexity of the choreographic structure. Observing and being surprised by how much there was to see had a powerful effect on me -- it made me wonder what else I missed, or failed to notice during those four shows?

In addition to the performances, owing to the Company's courtesy, I was able to observe the daily pre-show preparations by the ensemble. During the afternoons I was able view the dancers warm up, have a ballet class on stage and receive notes in preparation for the evening performances. With the kind support of The Forsythe Foundation, there were also

opportunities to view some of the archival films of the previous performances of *Kammer/Kammer*. I met with The Forsythe Company's Artistic Associate Director Christopher Roman who also showed me some archival documents, including rare copies of the programme notes from the time of the original performances of *Kammer/Kammer* in 2000. While in Frankfurt I was able to have informal meetings with several company dancers and to discuss ideas for possible future collaborations.

It was simply indispensable to be there during this special week. I could really understand what the company meant to so many people. Numerous supporters and fans, just like me, travelled to be there and see those performances; many dancers and various collaborators, some of whom worked with Forsythe during Frankfurt Ballet period (1984-2004), travelled internationally to attend the week's events. It was lovely to meet some of them for the first time in person. In this sense, being there helped me to understand a deeper context of the performances, and revealed plenty about the company's history and its social cohesion



a kin to an artistic 'family'.  
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Bockenheimer Depot, Frankfurt 15-19th April, William Forsythe's *Kammer/Kammer* (2000): arriving to the show and the audience at intermission.

Beyond the immediate research plans, I used my spare time in Frankfurt to visit new art venues which always help me generate ideas for future research. For instance, I visited the

Museums für Moderne Kunst's new gallery MMK2, which hosted a contemporary visual art exhibition of female artists, titled *Boom She Boom* (2015). An earlier trip to Frankfurt during MMK's art retrospective show of Rineke Dijkstra's art helped me to conceptualise an article on the topic of the performer's identity in dance, as a study of self/portrait effects in performance, published in the journal *Performance Research* (Tomic-Vajagic, 2014). Similarly, this time the exhibition *Boom She Boom* brought me a great



pleasure and stimulation. Particularly the work *vb68* (2011) by Vanessa Beecroft intrigued me to consider other possible ties between the performance as a provocation and the identity of the performer in popular visual culture and performance art.

Overall, this trip to Frankfurt was extremely important for my research of the dialogic interaction between performers and spectators through verbal conversations, observation, as a convergence between visibility, choreography and performance. Again, none of this would have been possible without the support of Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. In a short term and most directly, I hope that my further work on the analysis of *Kammer:Kammer*, in the context of the spectator's experience during its Bockenheimer Depot's finale, will help me to articulate these observations in a written research output soon. Indirectly, and in a long term, in many ways this journey was an inspiration upon which to draw in my future projects. In particular, witnessing a unique moment in dance history -- The Forsythe Company's point of transformation, certainly makes this visit to Frankfurt a research trip of a lifetime.

Tamara Tomic-Vajagic