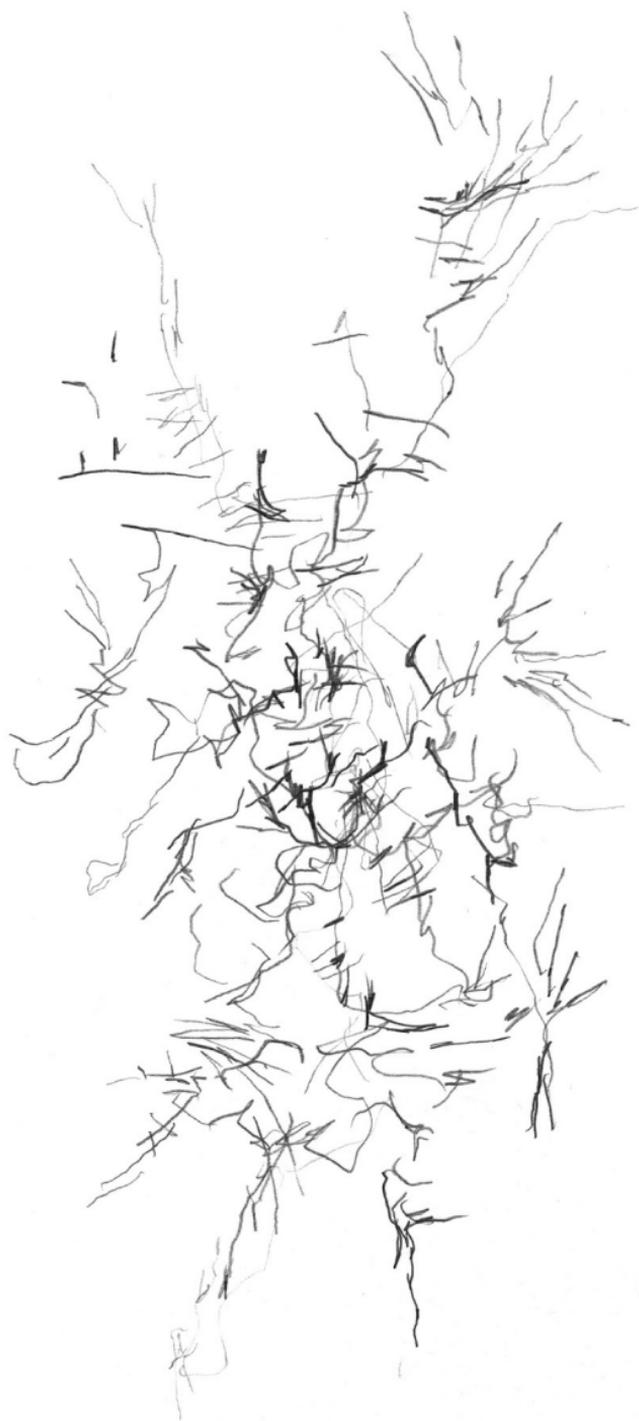


book of
recommendations

choreography
as an aesthetics
of change

michael kien
steve valk
jeffrey gormly



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Book of Recommendations

Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change

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*Choreograph (v.): to arrange relations between bodies
in time and space*

*Choreography (v.): act of framing relations between bodies;
“a way of seeing the world”*

Choreography (n.): result of any of these actions

*Choreography (n.): a dynamic constellation of any kind,
consciously created or not, self-organising or super-imposed*

*Choreography (n.): order observed . . . , exchange of forces;
a process that has an observable or observed embodied order*

Choreograph (v.): to recognize such an order

*Choreography (v.): act of interfering with or negotiating
such an order*

Prologue

Patterns are everywhere. Patterns are in between, ephemeral but real. They are only visible to us under certain conditions, on certain wavelengths for us to grasp. The fact is that these patterns govern our lives. Routines, solar systems, ordinary days and conversations — all governed by patterns of some sort . . . the patterns we live by. This is a search for patterns; the sort of patterns, that, as Gregory Bateson reminds us, connect the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all of them to me and me to you.⁺ A search that aims to imagine and formulate a vivid awareness of the profound and deeply ambiguous structures and dynamics working in man and nature.

Patterns are flexible and fluid constellations, appearing and disappearing, crystallising and dissolving, being born and dying. They are an ongoing dance of creation and de-creation in the world where we have our being, enabling our very own subtle frame of flight, our living. In this dance lies a world full of interaction, relationships, constellations, dependencies, arrangements and ecologies. To enquire into this reality of changing patterns and the forces at play, is to enquire into the choreography of life, examining what makes us dance and why.

Patterns can grow, live, learn and propagate. We might call these patterns an idea, a mug or Wilson. However these terms are only a means of distinction and Wilson, the mug

⁺ Bateson, G., 2002, *Mind and Nature*, Hampton PR

and the idea form parts of other parts, patterns within patterns. We ourselves are parts of larger choreographies and our acts are acts upon them. This requires responsibility and creative action. It requires a thorough exploration into the wider grammar of patterns, their proportionality and their paradoxes, in order to discover the frames that bind us together and subsequently reveal to us the dances we dance. With knowledge will come doubt, shedding light on the illusion of static frames, questioning and exposing the validity of existing frames in regard to a “wider knowing”. Through doubt comes a need for action, for rebuilding and re-framing self; a need for changing and adjusting the way we conduct our lives, interact, love, consume and apply ourselves to the social and ecological sphere.

We are inscribed with the capacity for original thought and the possibilities to bring about change. We can create and facilitate the conditions for something to happen, for patterning and re-patterning to occur. Doing so is the act of the everyday choreographer — the negotiator, the navigator and architect of fluid ecologies we are all part of. This is the work of the choreographer of the bright everyday and everdark night.

Book of Recommendations

Grace,

I am not interested in your notions of choreography, constellations of relations that belong to the world of solid distinctions. My choreography is not about the arrangement of inanimate objects, nor is it about controlling the fate of human beings in the space-time continuum. This work is far removed from patterns of creation solely designed for the pleasures of instant digestion and assimilation. There is no challenge and nothing at stake in creating only for the affirmation and reproduction of an established order. Your truth doesn't interest me, I know nothing of substance and I am stumped by what you call reality.

. . . *new building*

Concrete realities do not exist. I will refuse to choreograph institutions into being, which bury fruitful uncertainty beneath false or sterile assumptions, the lazy dogma of reductionist thinking, illusory perceptions or presuppositions. In the universe I know, there is only the contingency of fluid and free-floating forces. When I conduct the orchestra of space, commanding figments of time in the temporary shelter of my quicksilver ideas, their containers are never erected with the stones of dead builders but are instead undetermined, undecidable, and potentially endless. These vessels might transform themselves or be shed

and forgotten, rediscovered or subsumed. Their skin is the surface of a pataphysical architecture; their choreography a collapsing, spiralling fall from grace. Like dust from the feet of the traveller at the end of his journey, it is from the mucky ground of being that I bring new form to the surface, to imbue life, to create a blossom, to realise potential and flirt with infinity. Perpetuity is a fleeting glimpse: true stability embraces ebb and flow. As an architect of the invisible, I, like you, set entities into relationship with one another. Sometimes this involves no more than the reshuffling of context; enough “re-framing” for an idea-body to get unstuck, rough and tumble, from its habitual pattern of circumstance and repetition.

. . . forgotten landscape

Last night, in sleep, I took part in a profound and massive demonstration against humanity, against the insanity and intrinsic contradictions in individuals and within society as a whole. I was amongst a throng of tens of thousands of people gathered, each holding a candle in their hand. The sense of absolute urgency was highlighted by a deathly silence. No one had any idea of what to say or what to do, no vision whatsoever. Finally, for no apparent reason, a few scattered individuals raised their candles ever so slightly and soon everyone followed. “Look”, I whispered to you, “They are finally doing something!”

. . . *dream — rally against humanity*

“What are the precise actions to be taken in freeing such spirit, Tyrone?” I hear you ask. Naturally, in the language of our human sense apparatus, there is no “precise”. In nature there is only a transcomputational no man’s land of nonrationality and unfathomable complexity. Everything follows similar patterns in the interlinking sphere of the living; appearing, coming into being, growth, change, affect and affection and finally death. All answers are immanent in an object’s life. Sharpen your awareness and listen to communicative procedures of the internal skin, says the sage to the seeker. My secret epidermis, which no violator can take away, is delineated by the outside of the inside, beneath the inside of the outside.

Sometimes I wonder if meaningful creations are possible at all. What forms of deeper purpose has human imagination ever succeeded in giving rise to? Certainly, comforts and convenience of all sorts. But has not our restricted imagination led to a systemically self-inflicted segregation from more profound and wider realities? Enthusiastically, it seems, we have been wildly running: building roads, castles, city-states and constitutions. Is this the meaningful habitat that we have choreographed into being for ourselves to live in? Standing transfixed in historical presence, bound to the reality of our creations, value is rising only in between. In relations. And we all

sense that nothing is rising. Nothing is rising. No candle yet being raised.

. . . building roads, castles, city-states and constitutions

Yes, I lament the poverty of our restricted endeavours. They advance such a reduced understanding of nature's abilities. A crude, simplistic reading of her spectrum of possibility, mapped prosaically on the banal surface of our limiting minds; imprints, relentlessly computed and reproduced in the architectures of our everyday existence. A sorry misfortune, when potent flights are brought crashing to earth by the grave and heavy spirits of mechanistic modelling. All this, dear friend, at the still point of the turning world, when "dance" itself ought to be the new name given to earth for the metamorphosis of dead matter into life.

As hierarchies prevail in the conscious ordering of humans and narrow cause-and-effect thinking rules medicine, sex and urban planning, it becomes increasingly self-evident that the limits of our imagination are intrinsically linked to the limits of our perception. Trapped in linear time, perception takes its bearings from sensation and then maps the landscape of our imagination. The patterns we subsequently perceive become our repertoire for building. But the perceived will always be a reduction, and our reductions are no longer sustainable. Creations like yours, based on one-dimensional simplifications, will al-

ways produce conflict with the a priori environment. We have enslaved our imaginations, limited the world of minds to a world of frozen instances. Imagination draws from perception and this spells out our limits. Never limited by imagination, only by perception.

Our societies serve well as reminders of the monstrosity of our collective limitations. Healthy nations and institutions are not “choreographed” from the blueprints of written laws. Such nations would not be “lawless”, as the bearers of prevailing books would have us believe. Instead, they would rely on the sensibilities for social order deeply encoded in its citizenry. These are the laws of gravity and grace, which are inscribed in, and emerge out of, distributed self-ordering mechanisms and individuals in free association. They find their balance through mutual self-correction, not through laws imposing order on the pack.

What a difference! Nations full of proportionalities, rich in relations, giving the individual space to unfold in full thought. It is time to start playing for real. But time we must take. Time to observe and study the enigmatic glue that has been holding all hives, whether rigid, aggressive or indifferent, together. The nature of this cohesive property, the social glue, has been on my mind for some time. What a balance to be struck! Maintaining a hive, a swarm, whilst catering to the individual. Maximum individual freedom coupled with optimum stability of the collective. This is

the holy grail of choreography. My senses tell me that the alchemic answer to this resides in the idea of “recursive epistemology”: the knowledge of how we, as individuals or as a social grouping, go about knowing; an awareness of our own framing procedures, our limitations and mistakes in the deep interdependence of all with everything else.

. . . *the image of the swarm*

What a complexity of mind we live in. A world of endlessly integrated nested minds. To describe reality in terms of things and objects — as if everything were not subject to a larger flow — is a violation of our senses. Let us bring movement into our language through the concept of dance. Dead matter may come to life when particles interact in a specific configurations. I could talk about the nuts, wheels, bolts and springs that by themselves move nothing, but together, if organised in the right way, they actually produce a clock or a carriage. Unfortunately such rigid models only help to confirm illusions of a mechanical, dualistic reality. There are much finer “clocks” out there that not one single mind had put into order.

Evolution, for example, is the dance of many minds. Systems are an interlocking movement sequence of a number of parts. Elements of manifold systems dance and interweave with other ingredients according to the rhythm of immanent patterns. Systems fuse, morph, retain

information, memorise, learn and find ways to duplicate themselves, notably in the form of a chemical double helix string of exons and introns, which, in another most profound dance, is wrapped around everything that its dance touches. This field of activity plays itself, with itself, plays or is played out, and in that way copies itself forward in time. Such minds, conscious or not, are dancing everywhere. Each atom affected or engaged in the dance of life is part of many minds. Every mind is arising through others, built upon and within an immeasurable quantity of minds. And here we are on our illusionary island, an isolated abstract thinking frame we call consciousness, pretending not to be engaged in this truly social dance of reciprocal entanglements.

The dance of life does not take place in isolation. All these minds form an interwoven conglomerate of subtle balances: stability through constant movement. Every child knows that a simple disturbance in a web sends ripples throughout the whole connecting structure. Our limited consciousness can only be subject to these forces, bound mercilessly into the greater fabric, while effects ripple through us, change or kill us.

All minds that bind the living together recursively validate and define themselves. Yes, recursively. One's context defines who one is. We are all part of each other's context, and so is the oak outside, the field beneath our feet and the worms below. We make each other possible. We enable

or disable each other's elasticity and life. In fact, this could be an elegant description of recursivity. Our minds simply exist through and in others. My assumption is that even the dead are part of this fabric, as a tree needs to be dead at its core to sustain a fragile skin of life around what is non-living. This could serve as a metaphor, binding the living and the dead into an ecology of belonging.

I no longer see in pictures. Patterns are everywhere. They are real. In between, ephemeral but real. That's why I refer to choreography as the invisible art, art of the invisible. After all, it is immanent in relations, force-fields, attractors of all sorts, not frozen into any subject or object. Choreography is everywhere, always, in everything. I no longer see in pictures. I see movement and interrelation, exchange and communication between bodies and ideas. What is the difference between the concepts of body and idea? Isn't an idea a body, when passed on in its entirety? Isn't a body an idea that has been strong enough to prevail long enough to be perceived? . . . to become solid, if described in matter. What rule-based choreography is immanent in the playing out of chemical processes that beget and become life? And what choreographs making love? Can there be a more aesthetic dance than that which extends two selves, wrapping one mind-body around the other, bringing the other to life in a hand, your hand. A choreography of evolution, an intricate order of two people in relation to each other, an ether of mental fabrics being pulled into a dance not

prescribed anywhere — a conglomerate of needs, desires, submission, humility, grace, generosity, tenderness, energy, vitality — an immanent, nameless set of relations within nature, an authorless phenomenon usually made subject to and instantly destroyed by our will-to-order. What frames all these movement processes: mating dances, ant-colonies, evolution? The subtle pathways, attractors, fields? The pulling of movement out of mannerisms of mind into time and space? These choreographies surpass the capacity of any choreographer, any conscious creator.

Yet ignorance still prevails when we flatter ourselves with our pathetic, over-simplified creations, copies of nature, our factories, transport vehicles and theatres that have never learned to dance at all. We stand erect next to our daft work patronising the very source of our knowledge as we force our self-referential, awkward creations onto a larger ecology. To live harmoniously within an ecological system, one must strive to perceive more deeply the structural processes underpinning one's environment. One must glean, integrate and digest them, making them part of one's mental processes and furthermore apply them as structural tools in one's personal creations. Only in this way can we achieve integration and harmony within a larger ecology. To embed one's consciousness free of collision within one's larger mind, oneself within the social, and the social mind within a larger ecology of life and nature, rests at the core of our human desires and survival. It sounds like utopia,

especially in the ears of the far detached, self-righteous world of bankers, artists and cooks.

. . . *the choreographic act*

I have often spoken of the need to gather the village around the fire, to build bridges to the sacred, to the unknown, via dance, acknowledging our limitations as a collective, and situating ourselves in our existential context. I don't know if you are familiar with the story of the polar bear kept in too small a cage. Finally released into a larger enclosure, he continued moving in the same spatial pattern, from left to right and back again, to which he had previously been accustomed. This bear is you, is all of us. Stuck in patterns shaped since birth, your roaming space has decreased ever since. Your enframing walls are still rising, dull in your mind. I presume that all of our primary path or instinct in life is to think oneself closed.

. . . *offering territory*

Consciousness has given you and I the possibility to gain glimpses of our condition. Let us put a stop to, or inject a new step into, habitual movement formed by outmoded frames of awareness. Let us align our being within an ecology of mind and start creating from the basis of such knowledge and freedom. One needs to dance to inscribe

into oneself the possibility for such change. Turning water into words and thoughts into choreography, I wonder what patterns might it take to weave ourselves out of the soldier's role we have reduced ourselves to? My recommendations will resonate only in the light of the raised candles, through the act of shedding light from a different angle, revealing, by a profound shift in perspective, a new reality: a naïve reality of the senses.

Choreography needs to be the word given to the idea of “recursive epistemology”, indicating the essential intrinsic relationship of aesthetic awareness to being, in its lifelong process of world creation — invoking a rich, sensual inclusion of the observer him/herself in reality. Choreography as a way of seeing the world makes the present richer. It infuses into one's being the alchemical ingredients for perceiving new dimensions. These new dimensions of relations, proportionalities, movement and dance make us at once actors and creators in our newfound territory, restoring unity beyond separation. Naïve realism emerges as a new paradigm: sensitive knowing coupled with a deep, subjective observation of nature, so ciety and oneself. Current social frames and self-fulfilling rationalism stand as concrete grey impediments. It is this illusion of concreteness that precise sensorial imagination unassumingly renders worthless.

In a world of minds, the state of dance is of the essence. Dance is a display of elemental life-force. Don't

think Pirouettes. Think of bird flight, digestion and clouds. Dance is an ephemeral state of qualities and properties full of non-committed potential for change: a flexible and nondetermined condition, a specific, excited state of mind where change becomes possible and effortless. The way our culture has choreographed dance has always been reflective of the larger tendencies of how we, as a society, deal with the unknown, the unframable, the foreign, the spiritual and the animal. Conventional arrangements — those of streets, school exams, chains of command and soldiering performers — impose rigid frames upon dance. These systems are the embodiment of fear and the cultural suppression of that which is governed neither by subjective nor collective will. Our premise must not be to constrain movement into a set pattern, but rather to provide a cradle for movement to find its own patterns — over and over again; to preserve a body, whether bound by skin or habits, from stagnation; to enable lightness and primal energy, possibilities only found once relations start dancing. Dance immerses humanity in mind, into the moving dynamic systems, that hold together the world in which we have our being. The world needs dancers — to sweat, to smell, to think in flesh, to copulate and satisfy themselves, to surrender, to be present for everyone else who is not; to be the embodied evidence and knowledge of a soaring mind — beneath and beyond frames of consciousness, on pathways of the unknown. What creates such dance, that is not to

be obstructed by walls and constricted in knots? Maybe it is this “clearing” a choreographer needs be concerned with. Freed from the tyranny of time, perception draws its breath from sensation and then maps out in myriad ways the landscape of our imagination. Choreography as the offering of territory — a physical, habitual, perceptual opening — to the ones who will be dancing: a gesture of submission. Of such nature is a sane choreographic act, respecting the immense presence of unknown trails in the dim light of our collective consciousnesses.

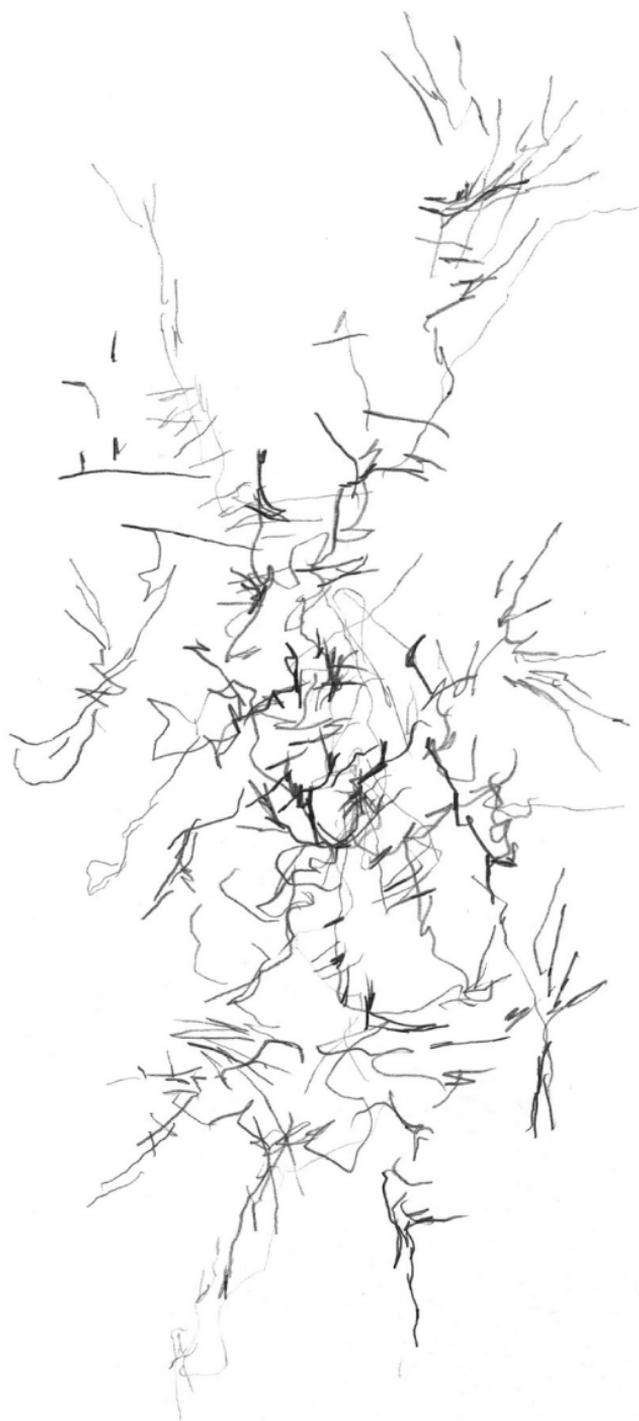
. . . *a perceptual opening*

It is time to stop choreographing Swan Lakes and timetables! It is causing me pain. In your quest for innovation you innovate nothing; only perpetuate breeding ground for the old. When the curtain falls on your Swan Lake, your nation’s walls will be even taller, and all candles will have burned out. All you do is propagate existing patterns throughout the living matrix, taking part in dominant modes of organization. You are the State and your ancestors’ minds: written patterns in your flesh and thoughts. Assume responsibilities for your being and your imagination. You are pattern, you are thought, none of which you have thought yourself. There is a future to be created. Your choreographies build our meaning and your creations — a picnic, a child or a garden — matter to me.

Take time to sense your context. It charts the boundaries of your imagination. Only fools go marching on — the wise ones dance.

Aim — Steer — Hope,

Tyrone



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