

MICHAEL KLIEN / STEVE VALK

## WHAT DO YOU CHOREOGRAPH AT THE END OF THE WORLD ?

3 lectures and more

### A DREAM

*Last night 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 hands. There was a profound sense of urgency made most noticeable by a deathly silence that arose because no one there had any idea what to do, what to say, or what actions to take.*

*Finally, for no apparent reason... some people started to raise their candles slightly, soon everyone followed. "Look", I whispered to my girlfriend...*

*"They are finally doing something!!!"*

Michael Klien 11.02.07

### A POEM

*"These nymphs, I wish to perpetuate them." (1)*

Stephane Mallarme: *"Improvisation of a Faun"*

# 1

## DANCE AS A METAPHOR FOR THOUGHT

EMERGENCE BECOMES VISIBLE  
WHEN THE OUTLINE OF THE PATTERN  
CAN BE SEEN.

**Steve Valk:** In the 1930's the anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson went to the island of Bali and made a film of the "Barong", a 6 hour-long dance / theater ritual in which the whole village participates. (2) This ceremonial "play" is only performed when there is trouble or disharmony, when the dead are seen walking through the village at night etc... The costumes are lavish, the various roles are meticulously rehearsed, the choreographies are precise and are taught at an early age. What is fascinating about this film and this performance is that suddenly, in the middle of it, some of the young dancers start to go into a trance – they fall over, shake violently etc... The trance then seems to spread like wildfire amongst other performers and even a few audience members. Some male dancers who have fallen into trance take their knives and try to stab themselves. Audience members immediately jump on top of them to prevent self-inflicted injury. The film narrator then explains that this state of events is exactly what the Barong is there to bring about. The enactment of the ritual ceremony or "performance" is all a preparation for the moment when it breaks down and falls apart. In this state of emotional and situational conflagration... "the Gods have arrived". In the midst of this mayhem, this outburst of chaos, this orchestrated disaster, the village priest or shaman, sets up his ceremonial apparatus and begins to commune with the gods, to burn offerings, to address the village troubles.

## INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGIES OF THE SELF

*Cultures that emphasize firm boundaries and high personal control tend to view the self as exclusionary or "self-contained". Fluid boundary, strong field-control cultures view the self as "ensembled", meaning that the self is inclusive of other individuals. (3)*

(reading from E. Martin Walker's essay "Experiences in Social Dreaming")

**Michael Klien:** What I would say about the Balinese dance ceremony is that "a psychic structure" would seem to be the prime mover of the piece and that the bodies themselves are not discreet units but they become "caught up in" another kind of structuring process. Of course these bodies correspond or overlap with "individual selves" but during the course of the ceremony these very same bodies are drawn into a different, organizing pattern or constellation. The unknowing participants become part of a wider communicational field or "psychic structure".

## STRANGE CURRENTS OF A SITUATION

On the subject of mind / body relations the anthropologist Gregory Bateson has a profound and revolutionary theory. He describes six formative steps, that I won't go into at this point, that lead to the creation of what he calls "Mind". (4) Mind according to Bateson's understanding, is a certain constellation of a system that is able to retain information. Therefore, a Mind could consist of non-living elements, like a traffic system, or be composed of many organisms, like a school of fish. It may function for brief, as well as extended periods of time and is not necessarily defined by a fixed or firm boundary like skin. If a Mind should have consciousness, then this consciousness is always only partial. Bradford Keeney, a psychologist and admirer of Bateson, has called the mind a 'conversational pattern' and bodies "the participants in the conversation." (5) Each of these kinds of "bodies" also functions as a Mind, in the Batesonian sense, and is engaged in larger conversational patterns with other bodies, which in turn, constitute larger aggregates of Mind.

**Steve Valk:** So one cannot escape the fact, that at least in systems-theoretical terms, there is no distinction between mind and body. Across all fields, all levels are linked. The formal, highly ritualized Balinese performance reaches a critical state at which a kind of rupture of the symbolic order takes place. At the point when the "the gods arrive" there is a radical almost brutal moment of perceptual re-patterning. Bateson refers to this phenomenon as "kinesthetic socialization" in which the individuals are prepared for altered consciousness, for a "temporary escape from the ego-organized world." (6) The Balinese ritual performance is an enactment of Mind, an example of the organism "village" and its capacity to process and respond to information in a self-corrective way. After the chaos, the whirlwind, a new order, a regenerated psycho-social order has emerged.

*"In the science of morphology, physico-chemical processes are detected and analysed. Their ultimate origin and the relationship of all such separate processes are, according to assumption, buried in unfathomable complexity. Thus, organic life is conceived of as a set of centers where the coordination of causal chains is totally lost in complexity. These active centers are what we call organisms. Now this assumption makes for a radical difference from an idea that has always been successful in inorganic science. It is that complex systems can be successfully studied by breaking them down into simples which are easier to analyse. Such a scheme was first described by Descartes in 1637 and is known as the "Cartesian Method". If we accept the concept of an organism as just stated (vague as it still is), we can say that "biology is a non-Cartesian science". Since theoretical parts of all past natural science have been Cartesian in this sense we may conclude that biology is fundamentally and qualitatively different from physical science." (7)*

( from **Walter M. Elsasser's** book "Reflections on a Theory of Organisms")



**Michael Klien:** I have always had a sense that a thought is a physical act and I have always been discontent with people in the dance world who want to get over the Cartesian split by just talking about the body. This is a bizarre notion. You propagate the same idea, just from the other side. You actually widen the gap. How can you only talk about the body when you want to address the whole thing. Conversational patterns are thoughts, they are not just up there. (points to his head) Thought can be everywhere. Thoughts are between us. For things to come into being it is a matter of thought.

**Steve Valk:** Like this plastic water bottle I am holding... this is a 'thought object'. With a sculptural aesthetic, computerized bar codes, with a position in recycling systems. Theoretically, it could be blessed and used as holy water etc...

**Michael Klien:** Gregory Bateson is one of the founders of this kind of thinking. In the 60's he was part of an LSD experiment. During the testing he was shown a rose and his comment was, "It is amazing how much thought went into this rose for it to become a rose." (8) We are closing in on our theme right now, what we mean by "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought". We are not saying that "thought is dance", but we are talking about a certain figure or "vision of dance", whereby the constellations are loose enough to actually reach a state of excitement or play without falling apart, without losing identity. A system such as a society or a state can be dancing, unlike our present-day situation, where the structures are too tightly constrained by rules and laws for a state to dance. As Robert Musil describes Kakania in his book 'The Man Without Qualities' a state can be in flux, where things become possible and great ideas are born where priceless, timeless artefacts are realized, because the conditions are right for the whole system, which in this case is a state, to dance.

**Steve Valk:** *"Why does dance dawn on Nietzsche as a compulsory metaphor for thought? It is because dance is what opposes itself to Nietzsche's great enemy, an enemy he designates as the "Spirit of Gravity". Dance is, first and foremost, the image of thought subtracted from every spirit of heaviness".* (9)

(reading from Alain Badiou's book, "The Handbook of Inaesthetics")

**Michael Klien:** So the notion of dance has to be applied to all systems rather than applying it exclusively to the physical body. In western societies dance has developed along the lines of what Nietzsche maintains is the opposite of dance, what he calls "obedience and long legs". (10) For Nietzsche, dance is about a lightness which opposes itself to the "Spirit of Gravity" which he associates with the military parade, "obedience and long legs" etc... Strangely enough, when one looks at the development of dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in western society, one sees primarily that, "obedience and long legs". One sees the dancing body subjected to choreography. For some reason a kind of perversion has taken place. People have tried to construct

performative architectures to attain a state of dance, whether it be Martha Graham or 20<sup>th</sup> century ballet technique. But along the way, the map has been mistaken for the territory, the architecture for the experience. Maybe that's where it has all gone wrong. The structures are not the dance, they are perceptual orientations for getting there. In ballet for instance, the subjective range of movement is very limited, so only the best people can actually attain a state of dance. Most performers are simply executing movement within precisely defined limitations.

**Steve Valk:** I would like to go back to the story of the Balinese dance / theatre which only achieves its aims when everything falls apart... to look at the certain vision of dance we have been describing...

*"Dance is a metaphor for thought precisely inasmuch as it indicates, by means of the body, that a thought, in the form of its eventual surge, is subtracted from every pre-existence of knowledge. How does dance point to this subtraction? Precisely in the manner that the 'true' dancer must never appear to 'know' the dance she dances. Her knowledge (which is technical, immense, and painfully acquired) is traversed, as null, by the pure emergence of her gesture. 'The dancer does not dance' means that what one sees is at no point the realization of a pre-existing knowledge, even though knowledge is, through and through, its matter or support. The dancer is the miraculous forgetting of her own knowledge of dance". (11)*

(reading from **Alain Badiou's** book *"The Handbook of Inaesthetics"*)

This notion of a void, of everything falling apart... in Time Magazine I read an article about the Irish rock band U2. Their manager described the torturous creative process the group goes through every time they are at work on a new album. "For them to come up with a great song," the manager said, "God has to walk through the room". This is the point for me, in regards to the notion of "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought", where we reach a kind of event horizon, the place where things fall apart, when "the gods arrive" etc... is the point where there emerges a deeper understanding of the certain vision of dance we have been talking about.

## PERSONAL THRESHOLD EXPERIENCE

I remember a performance of "As a Garden In A Setting" in Paris where Jone San Martin was dancing in her first piece for Ballet Frankfurt. That evening, I witnessed one of the best dance performances I have ever seen. It was stupendous, raw and brilliantly danced by everyone. There really was a feeling of all the performers on stage being in a kind of trance. At one point though, I noticed that Jone seemed to slip and fall flat on her back. She got up immediately and continued dancing.



After the show, I went backstage and found her embarrassed and upset about having fallen. She could not explain what happened... just that in the middle of the duet... she had looked at her partner and had been overcome by the feeling that if she were to suddenly throw herself backwards, he would be there to catch her. This of course, could not, and did not happen.

## Michael Klien: A STATEMENT

Dance allows the thought body to show itself, it is the showing of the body in thought, independent of what constitutes such a body, whether its boundaries are made of skin or by constitutions played out in laws. Dance is the forming of certain configurations of thought, expressed in manifold ways by the birth of ideas or the shivering body. That is why evolution, animals and states are said to be dancing at times, because certain conditions are met allowing a system to be flexible and its emerging dancing body to be naked, anonymous and selfless. This is what constitutes dance. Hence dance is a matter of thought pointing towards the possibility of change as inscribed in the body. For the spectator to perceive dance, is an exercise in trust, demanding the audience's absolute gaze, oblivious to representational decor and fully focused on the underlying nakedness of a flexible body in thought.

Our civilization has been turning dance into a perversion of itself, applying to and onto it, everything that will prohibit its existence in the form of predetermined rigid time, space and action. It might be a symptomatic need to resist mortality's grip. Maybe the reasons are to be found in the dominant muddle of language, which in Bateson's words "stops us from thinking straight" and from dancing in general. (12) To govern dance is in itself a misleading conception, a seemingly vain attempt to fence off its mortal nature, putting shackles on what cannot be tamed without turning it into an empty shell, a sign pointing towards something other than what it is. To choreograph dance conventionally sets movement in stone, whilst trying to recreate, it proves to be an illusion. Dance is Dance and cannot be tampered with, just as Bateson reminds us that "God cannot be mocked." (13) Dance has been crippled by conventional choreography for centuries. It is time to release choreography's hold on dance and let it simply be.

## A PARALLEL PROCESS

**Steve Valk:** When I present dramaturgical research for dance or original theater work, I often create elaborate conceptual environments. Rooms covered from floor to ceiling with photocopies, texts, drawings, there are clotheslines hung with found objects, cut-outs etc..., strung across the room. These dramaturgical spaces are something like "thought-jungles". In order to engage with this material, with this research, you have to weed and wander through it, to walk, duck, spy, sometimes to hunt. In this mosaic of associations you may find objects of interest, ideas or thoughts, etc..., or they may find you. There is a term in psychology and anthropology called "total field awareness" which accurately describes this sensibility or quality of perception that is evoked in this kind of transitional space between dramaturgical ideas and dance or performance creation.

*"Discard your memory, discard the future tense of your desire;  
forget them both. both what you knew and what you want,  
to leave space for a new idea" (14)*

(reading from **W. Bion's** book *"Bion in New York and San Paolo"*)

A second important quality or characteristic of these thought-spaces involves the means by which the materials are gathered and selected. The starting point, the guiding sensibility for the research, the gathering of the material and the assemblage of the space, is always a profound sense of "not-knowing". It is difficult to describe how concrete, how rudimentary this feeling, this quality of blindness, is for my work. It is a presence or sensibility one bears during the creative process, a kind of activated void. It is with conscious awareness of this "strange understanding" that I then, very practically, begin work on a new dance, theater or opera production. Badiou would equate this "not-knowing" with a "subject of poetic truth" or as he has also referred to it, "an anonymous obstinacy that finds its metaphor in sleep". In a recent interview, William Forsythe, with whom I collaborated for twelve years, referred to the buddhist concept of "no-mind" having an important place in his work. (15) Dramaturgical process which emanates from this undecided state of consciousness produces a terrain of perpetual interaction and creative engagement, a field of thought where perception becomes a dance of meaning creation.

*"The sensitivity to dance possessed by each and everyone of us comes from the fact that dance answers, after its own fashion, Spinoza's question: What is a body capable of? It is capable of art, that is, it can be exhibited as native thought. How can we name this emotion that seizes us at this point?... I will name this emotion... an exact vertigo." (16)*

(reading from **Alain Badiou's** book *"The Handbook of Inaesthetics"*)

**Steve Valk:** Lets just say the notion of the void, of nothing, “of the nakedness of concepts”, smacking your body on the floor, etc..., this sense of dance has been the underlying and defining current of my work and why I have repeatedly been drawn into the vicinity of this art form.

**Michael Klien:** Maybe it is because dance is always pointing towards the possibility of change... towards the unknown, “silently rewriting your vision”, as Badiou says.  
(17) It never lets you get comfortable.

## THE TWILIGHT ZONE THAT SURROUNDS THE HYPOTHETICAL, UNFATHOMABLE CENTER OF LIVING ORGANISMS

**Michael Klien:** There is an illusive and mysterious way in which dance seems to embody a secret recipe for the creation and maintenance of living systems such as a Balinese village or an arts organization in Limerick. I can feel the presence of the dancing that happens at Daghdha like an invisible fabric that touches and envelopes everything we do, everything that happens. Nietzsche said that dance could be “a new name given to the earth”. (18) For the French philosopher, Alain Badiou it is the embodiment of the principle of “an exact vertigo”. This state between finite and infinite, place and non-place, integration and disintegration seems to be an elemental and subsequently healthy i.e. “regenerative” mode of being in the world.

**Steve Valk:** At Daghdha Dance Company we have tried to cultivate something like a new ecology of the arts: to see a cultural institution, like a dance company, as the initiator of a living process which begins within the company itself, its internal workings etc... and then extends into relationship with its own immediate and not so immediate surroundings. The “vision of dance” we have been referring to in this discussion and the role that “dancing” and “the dance” play at Daghdha is one of a constituting principle. Dance within the ecology of Daghdha is an active power which instills an undercurrent of intimate awareness and interconnectivity, a kind of environmental intelligence, a vision of the health of the whole system that informs and challenges both the company’s everyday affairs and its engagement with its emerging future.



# 2

## CHOREOGRAPHY AS AN AESTHETICS OF CHANGE

*"One of the interesting things that happens is that if you look at your hand and consider it not as a number of bananas on the end of a sort of flexible stick, but if you consider it as "a nest of relations" out there... you will find that the object looks much prettier than you thought it looked. Part of the discovery of the beauty of a biological form is the discovery that it is put together of relations and not put together of parts. This means that with a correction of our epistemology, you might find the world was a great deal more beautiful than you thought it was. Or you might let in the fact of its being beauty in a way that you were able to keep it out by thinking that the world was made of parts and wholes." (19)*

(recorded lecture **Gregory Bateson**: "On Epistemology")

### Michael Klien: STATEMENT

Choreography has become a metaphor for dynamic constellations of any kind, consciously choreographed or not, self-organizing or artificially constructed. It has become a metaphor for order, intrinsically embodied by self-organizing systems as observed in the biological world or superimposed by a human creator. If the world is approached as a reality constructed of interactions, relationships, constellations and proportionalities and choreography is seen as the aesthetic practice of setting those relations or setting the conditions for those relations to emerge. Choreographic knowledge gained in the field of dance or harvested from perceived patterns in nature should be transferable to other realms of life. The choreographer, at the center of his art, deals with patterns and structures within the context of an existing, larger, ongoing choreography of physical, mental and social structures, whereby he/she acts as a strategist negotiating intended change within his/her environment.

As an aesthetics... a sensitive knowing... the discipline of choreography can be applied to inquire into the dance of life, effortlessly merging observation, theoretical writing and philosophy with practical rigor and personal expression to create works of art. The stage becomes a laboratory, the laboratory a stage for the governing and steering of existing mind-dynamics and processes whether physically expressed such as a human body or a flower... or not... such as evolution or learning. Applying the aesthetics of choreography as a purposeful, creative and pro-active tool upon the surface of reality, embodies a healthy disregard for established boundaries which have arisen in fields of human knowledge production such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, education, religion, biology and history. "Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change" engages everyone's perception and knowledge of "how things move",

inquiring if and how individuals can imaginatively order and re-order aspects of their personal, social, cultural and political lives. It examines the role of choreographer as one of ... an active agent of change... within an ever-changing environment.

**Steve Valk:** The perspective you have offered represents a paradigm shift in thinking about choreography bringing it very close to something like “a mode of being” in the world, the choreographer as “an architect of a fluid environment he himself is a part of etc... “. If there has been such a profound shift in its conceptual underpinnings, does this word or concept still have meaning? Is it a useful term and why?

**Michael Klien:** When we first moved into our new premises, St. John's Church, we decided to stop what we were doing and really look deeply and rigorously at our practice. We initiated a public thinktank called Framemakers, examining choreography and dance outside of their traditional cultural framework exposing these disciplines to fields of wider concern. We started talking to theologians, politicians, scientists, cyberneticists, psychologists etc..., to discuss choreography as an “*Aesthetics of Change*”. Who choreographs what in society? Who... if anyone... is constructing the frames and who is living by them. Working under the simple and straightforward assumption that the stage is part of life as such, and that the strategies developed there have a wider relevance, including the ordering of the social sphere, the Framemakers Project began asking questions of how things are ordered and which frames are created for movement to take place. The term choreography was transposed to the field of human relations, as a way of seeing the world, the art of interacting and interfering with the everyday governance of relations and dynamics, expressed in physical movement or ideas.

## SYSTEMIC ADJUSTMENT

For me, there is simply no other or better word or concept than “choreography” to describe an active inquiry into the non-concrete reality that deals with complex relations and connections within the natural world. Many fields of human inquiry deal with elements in a specialized reductionist manner, there is really no field apart from maybe religion that enables us to deal with experiences and phenomena that are so “unfathomably complex”, so far beyond our ability to comprehend that we require forms of symbolic expression. These are things we are only able to apprehend aesthetically, kinesthetically, intuitively.

**Steve Valk:** The theoretical biologist Walter Elsasser in his book on the theory of organisms talks about the concept of “unfathomable complexity” in nature which says that the behavior of living organisms cannot be reduced to physico-chemical causality.<sup>(20)</sup> He comes from quantum physics and has even proposed the notion of creativity as a scientifically admissible concept. Creativity is a term he sees as a “going over point” between the “unfathomable” quantum-theoretical and the more widely practiced mechanistic-biological thinking.



**Michael Klien:** The word “choreography” extends the possibility of understanding and posing questions about the nature of the creative act within living systems. These days choreography has become associated with ordering processes, however the philosophical inquiries into order from chaos theory to complexity theory and cybernetics invite us to rethink the very notion of order as something non-linear / unfixed and far beyond our ability to measure or control. Choreography is not to constrain movement into a set pattern, it is to provide a cradle for movement to find its own patterns... over and over again... to prevent a body... whether bound by skin or habits... from stagnation and enable lightness, a primal energy and possibilities only to be found once relations start dancing.

## ORGANISM AND ENVIRONMENT

*The whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny, and I do not know how long we have to do it in. If we continue to operate on the premises that were fashionable during the Pre-Cybernetic era, and which were especially underlined during the Industrial Revolution, which seemed to validate the Darwinian unit of survival, we may have twenty or thirty years before the logical reductio ad absurdum of our old positions destroys us. Nobody knows how long we have, under the present system, before some disaster strikes us, more serious than the destruction of any group of nations. The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in a new way.” (21)*

(quote from **Gregory Bateson** in the book “About Bateson”)

**Steve Valk:** Lying next to me on the desk here is a magazine called Art Review and this issue’s cover story is entitled “Environmental: Can Art Save the Planet ?” When I showed it to you, you groaned and when I look inside it seems like the world of an alien mind. What is the difference between what you and I have just been talking about and that which seems to be happening in the world of “contemporary art”, in the world of “contemporary dance”?

**Michael Klien:** It must have something to do with closed self-referential loops that are at work when art is validating its own existence. Such loops, when fed by their own history and concepts, create safety zones in which people can stay to avoid confronting the outside. Addressing the issues that humanity is facing within an arts context, separated from a social or political one, is a practical castration of potential and possibility. When Derrida speaks about the political act being “the settings of artificial relations between people”, how can the choreographer, who does exactly that for a living, retreat into a studio and practice his or her “politics” in front of a mirror. (laughs) It doesn’t make sense. I feel that there is a real lack of critical evaluation of the role of art outside its own historical context. This then leads to a closing of the information loop and the maintaining of status quos, of conceptual “safety zones”; theaters, orchestras, dance companies, festivals, exhibitions etc...



The director of one of Germany's most important museums told me recently, in total seriousness, that statistically only 12% of the population participate in the arts. He accepted that as a given fact, and allocated his marketing funds, designed his publicity and advertising strategies in accordance with that "reality".

*"The Fijians say, 'We don't have art.  
We just try to do everything as well as possible.' (22)*

(reading from Marshall McLuhan's book "The Global Village")

**Steve Valk:** The image of the Balinese ceremony comes to mind. This sense of full immersion, involvement, participation etc..., of everyone present. Half the performers breaking out in trance, some people out-of-control, trying to hurt themselves etc..., audience members diving on top of them, others standing and watching. Amidst all of this... the priests setting up their ritual space. In our present-day culture this kind of spontaneous, ungoverned behavior only happens during real catastrophes, floods, earthquakes, storms.

**Michael Klien:** Art and culture are not a factor today in the creation and transformation of society, its laws, etc... despite the critical situations most western societies are facing. That is a sobering reality. There is a schism, a disconnect that prevents co-habitation, information-transfer, sense-making, engagement, participation, immersion in the totality of the social realm. Art and Culture seem unable to respond affirmatively, courageously, to the demands, the complexities, to the richness... of the contemporary situation.

**Steve Valk:** Out of a growing awareness of the ever-widening gap between "the way man thinks and the way nature works," choreography, traditionally understood as "the art of movement in time and space", has found itself being drawn away from "the ideal world" of the stage. (23) At the same time it has been driven to undergo a re-examination of its conceptual language and explanatory systems. Choreography has moved beyond the architecture of its stationary historical universe and has emerged as an embodied act of a human consciousness no longer separate from, but embedded within, the irreducible, unfathomably complex ordering system of the biological world.

# 3

## SOCIAL DREAMING / SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHY

### Steve Valk: STATEMENT

When we look at our present situation as a species, it is clear that the seething surface of our revolving planet is the dance that now most urgently concerns us. The effects our human actions are having on the interweaving patterns of that dance are of the most vital importance. We are faced with learning to overcome what Einstein referred to as "the optical delusion of our consciousness," whereby we experience ourselves "as something separate from the rest," disconnected from nature and the primacy of our own bodily experience.

*"For the human psyche is one of the great forces of nature, and what is most frightening about this space-time technology is that it exposes us to this force within us as nothing else has. We are standing in the storm of our own being. We are standing in a world not created by God, except indirectly, but by our psyches. It is undeniably our fate, so we must face the fact... that it may be... our natural habitat."* (24)

(reading from J. Hillman and M. Ventura's book "We've Had A Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World is Getting Worse")

### STEPS TO AN ECOLOGY OF MIND

Choreography has been adapted and introduced into the fabric of social reality as a kind of perceptual framing device, a self-actuating template for an ecologically reconfigured experiment in contemporary subjectivity. The cognitive scientist Francisco Varela has said, "The blind spot of contemporary science is experience."<sup>(25)</sup> "Social Choreography has opened an arena of cultural interplay between artists and audience, a lived and interconnected world of relationships, patterns and dynamics, a region of new and subtle observational capacities in which a deeper level of interdependence, an implicate order of mind and nature, has emerged as a model for a new and regenerative social reality.

*The dancer (the fragile self) points us in the direction of what the will is capable of learning."* (26)

(reading from Alain Badiou's book "The Handbook of inaeesthetics")

## THE SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHIC ACT

*Negri always speaks of the great creativity of the multitudes (multitude is the new name for the masses, let us admit to this), but where have we seen this creativity? It is not because you're protesting at Genoa that there is a creativity of the multitude. I have seen hundreds of these types of protests over the years and can honestly say that there isn't an ounce of creativity in all of this. Hence, the problem of creativity at this stage is a problem of knowing what creates political heterogeneity. But to create a political heterogeneity supposes very complicated and very novel principles of rupture. I am not saying that all this is easy, on the contrary. But at least we have this idea: we have this experimental idea of seeing how, on a certain number of issues, in a certain number of spaces, we can finally create political heterogeneity. (27)*

(reading from an interview with **Alain Badiou** "After the Event: Rationality and the Politics of Invention")

**Michael Klien:** Is Social Choreography, "playing for real" with the social structures, applying aesthetic sensibilities and subjective realities to the organization of society etc... coupled to a sense of "utopian impulse" or might it simply be aimed at deconstructing existing boundaries and existing ways of doing things?

**Steve Valk:** I like the words "culture" and "cultivation". To cultivate, one could say – is to disturb or rupture the soil – but this is not a purely destructive act. Cultivation means bringing air into the soil, turning things over, for new surfaces to emerge, for water to penetrate. The choreographic act is one of cultivation – as the shifting and changing and digging over of a situation in the social realm which allows for a new awareness to enter into a specific situation. It is participatory, creating conditions for things to happen...

**Michael Klien:** Of course this development and these concepts are not entirely new.

**Steve Valk:** One can go back to the Situationists... who wanted to abolish the notion of art as a separate, specialized activity. They saw the social realm as a realm of creativity, a utopian topography which harbored vital and socially transformative possibilities. Joseph Beuys is another figure of historical importance although, I don't feel I know enough about his work. It is interesting nonetheless, that in the 22 years I have lived and worked in the arts in Germany, Beuys has rarely ever been mentioned, even though so much of the work I was involved in, in places like Ballet Frankfurt, was conceptually close and begging for comparison. I mean, without a political mandate, we transformed a traditional state theater into a revolutionary kind of civic interface whose flexible interior was done entirely in grey felt, Beuys' favorite material. Thousands of people came in, performed, participated etc... no one mentioned Beuys or his ideas. I find that quite astounding.



*"I think the real difficulty is that some readers just do not believe that I mean what I say. I suspect that they think it is all a sort of entertainment and hope to come out at the end feeling refreshed." (28)*

(quote from **Gregory Bateson** in the book "About Bateson")

If you mention Beuys in Germany today the response is, "great sculptor and visual artist, excellent, timeless work, fantastic". If you remind them that he co-founded the Green Party and a University and that he spent thousands and thousands of hours talking with people and lecturing what you get is stammering, sheepish looks and silence. In the same way as Bateson, I think Beuys' thought is still indigestible today. People in the arts and in society as a whole have been actively trying to forget that Beuys actually meant what he said.

*"If faced with the extreme situation affecting us all, and stimulated by the sick condition of the social organism, people together can follow through with the impulse to change things, it will be possible to develop an intuition of a healthy image of this social organism. And as their hearts warm to this social form that still needs to be created, the will of each individual becomes a part of a common and greater will, which may then possess the strength to create something new on the one hand, and on the other, to develop ever new insights into how this path towards a new reality might be travelled" (29)*

(reading from an interview with **Joseph Beuys** "What is Art?")



## NEW MEANINGFUL PUBLIC SPACE A MANIFESTO:

*"We are all in the bowels of this giant machine, the modern global economy, being used as instruments to serve its ends. We have created this machine collectively, but we feel trapped individually. We've shifted the burden so much to the machine that we don't see a lot of options even though they may be really there. We can't go into the woods and live happily off the land anymore. So we "deep freeze" our ability to sense what is actually going on. We deny the larger consequences of what we are doing." (30)*

(reading from **P. Senge, O. Scharmer, B. Flowers, J. Jaworski's** book "Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society")

- Conditions for large-scale transformative innovation in the arts, culture and society are desperate, bordering on hopeless. This is not due to lack of potential funding, talented individuals, institutional resources, project ideas, or of a genuinely concerned and engaged citizenry. What is lacking is an awareness, an expanded sensibility, which could inform, coordinate and bring about the conditions necessary to draw together and actualize capacities for profound, transformative innovation. This sensibility would need a locus, a point of orientation, a place where new domains of meaning can be cultivated.

*an already existing,  
yet still-to-be-created design,  
that you and I are somehow part of*

## PERFORMING CULTURE WITH THE MIND OF WISDOM

- In the current state of deep insecurity and uncertainty, it is essential for us as individuals and organizations to have a place to question our deepest assumptions - assumptions shared by virtually all modern societies - assumptions that are now so taken for granted that it is almost impossible for any of us to realize their impact. What is missing is a place and an infrastructure for motivated citizens and institutions to engage with each other, to immerse themselves collectively in the realities of the contemporary situation.

## THE TIME TO HOUSE OURSELVES... IS NOW!!!

- An infrastructure must be created which would provide opportunities and incentives for city-dwellers and local institutions to suspend their habitual ways of seeing, to talk openly about complex problems, to take stock of their situations, to exchange ideas and find common ground. An interactive field in which to cultivate a new sense of civic consciousness, one that is more fluid and in dialogue with itself, where citizens can detach from their everyday functions and roles and cultivate a wider, panoramic, sense of knowing.

## A GROWING SENSE OF URGENCY

- Complex, interdependent issues are increasingly shaping the context for strategic thinking in our world. Yet the pressures created by these very phenomena tend to keep everyone in a continual "doing" mode, with little or no time for reflection and real thinking. The number of people who believe there are profound flaws in the current process of globalization is growing, yet the environment of trust needed to think about these problems is fragile. Only when people begin to see from within the forces that shape their reality and to see their part in how those forces might evolve, can a vision, a way out of the crisis, become manifest.

## A NEW SOURCE OF INTENTION

- People are searching for ways to develop a new source of action, one that lies beyond preconceived plans or narrow self interest, beyond past experiences. For this to be possible it is necessary to provide opportunities to experience acting in the world, not on the world, to explore places and possibilities, strategies and prototypes for shifting from the past, to opening up to what might be emerging from the future. A place to do what needs to be done, for action as a spontaneous product of the whole.

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### FINAL THOUGHT: THE NEXT EVOLUTIONARY STEP WILL BE CULTURAL NOT TECHNOLOGICAL

*„The schizophrenic split between supersensible conditions and physical conditions is something we have overcome and we can now head towards a new cultural epoch; or you can say: we have a new “cultural epoch.” (31)*

(reading from an interview with **Joseph Beuys** “What is Art?”)

**Michael Klien:** This development that has been going on... social choreography... could it have a real impact in the wider social sphere... or will it remain on an abstract level as a terminology with a lot of potential but without physical effects?

**Steve Valk:** “*We are standing in the storm of our own being,*” as James Hillman says. If the development of these ideas gets stuck somewhere, it will not get stuck in one place but in many different places. Here I have to recall your dream Michael, about “*taking part in a profound and massive demonstration against humanity.*” If choreographers like Michael Klien and William Forsythe get stuck, then Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Betty Sue Flowers and Joe Jaworski, the enlightened business consultants at MIT, will also be stuck. Our good friends Gordon Lawrence and Bipin Patel doing Social Dreaming in London will get stuck. Al Gore and the deep ecologists, Jesper Hoffmeyer and the holistic biologists will get stuck. Cybernetic Epistemology and the Quantum Physics will be stuck.



*"The Cartesian split between mind and matter is no longer sustainable. The bringing forth of a world is made possible through the quality of our mental disposition for being available to connectedness that is made manifest in the matrix and, more generally, in the mental web of life that connects all humanity that is being postulated." (32)*

(reading from **Gorden Lawrence's** book *"Experiences in Social Dreaming"*)

So, not just artists and choreographers would be caught in the no man's land of abstract ideas, there would be a living matrix of people around the world and across many disciplines, unable to act. There is a convergent new reality being postulated on many different levels. If things gets stuck... as they might... it will be a shared stuckness.

## ON STUCKNESS

*"The old idea of a cell being like a sack full of proteins and all sorts of other good things has been supplanted by the contemporary view of the cell as having a complex inner structure that bears more resemblance to **the structure of a city** than to the structure of a sack of flour. But the point at which the true focus of this account starts to become clear is when we discover that it is precisely this freezing of the cell's chemical make-up which institutes a totally new kind of freedom, one which I call...**semiotic freedom**. Because even the single-celled organism knew a little trick which proved most effective in...tempering the growth of predictability. It was able to describe itself - or at least key aspects of itself - in an abstract code embedded in the string DNA molecule bases. Fragments of this coded self-description could then be copied, sometimes wrongly, and traded with other members of the same species - or even on occasion, with members of another species. The never - ending sequence of "mistakes" and "misunderstandings" that put life-forms on earth into a constant state of flux, the sequence which we call... organic evolution, **was set in motion**. (33)*

(reading from **Jesper Hoffmeyer's** book *"Signs of Meaning in the Universe"*)

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