

EVERYONE IS GOING SOLO, TOGETHER

JEFFREY GORMLY

dance
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SOLO

[world building / authorship / authority.
note to self: be upfront]

Before I sit to write my final draft of this essay, I reread 'Counting Capital', Michael Seaver's contribution of last year. Writing in late Autumn 2009, he records 'severe flooding in the west and south' and 'widespread fears that increased cuts in public spending will curtail artistic activity', anticipating 'the most stringent budget in decades'. One year on our worst fears have been realised, plus a savage winter, colossal public debt, and the possibility of 'a lost decade' due to an even more difficult budget. Michael goes on to ask: 'What is a dancer doing in this space?'

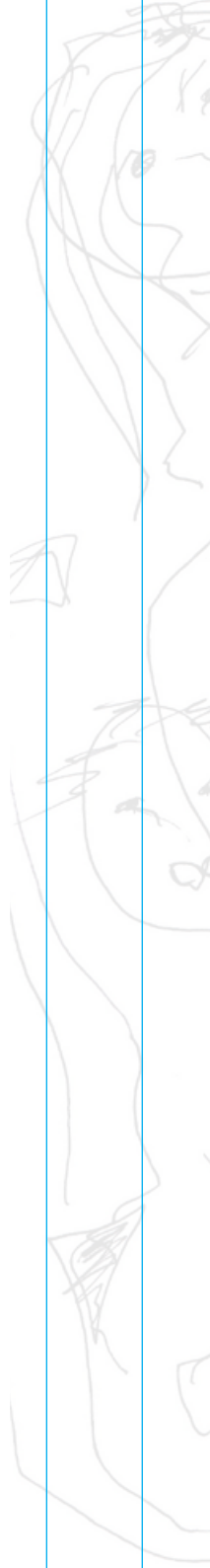
Navigating new/unexplored territories in order to embody and communicate to others a deeper awareness may seem anything but simple, but it is, as a basis for artistic practice, an absolute necessity. ≡

A commitment to entering a space alone, to work on one's own expressive art over long periods of time, to the extent that it moulds identity, shapes the contours of a whole life, and informs all one's occupations – as performer, parent, citizen – defines a solo practice. I love that word 'practice'. Throughout my early years it signified sports practice – training the body, mind and reflexes, developing facility, rehearsing skills. Skills are what you acquire when you take a talent and invest a lot of time and hard work into it.

What skills does a solo dancer practice? Certainly it's something about movement – control of feet and hands and hips; grace, that quality of lightness and rightness in the execution of even difficult movements; and communication, a message overt in the presentation of the piece, or a set of concerns articulated through the body|setting|movement, in the attitude to that body and movement. A chorus of possibility chimes and capers through my experience of watching a dancer at work, but what is the dancer at work on?

She has for material her own flesh, her own impulses intuition inspiration imagination curiosity, her determination and her compulsion. The unique and cultivated presence of the solo dancer, her very being, becomes significant and powerful – pulses, breathes, shines – as if the very act of creating meaning is being demonstrated.

*use of self as a prism . a body dreaming in public . her body . social body .
making connections . computing connection θ*





...the presence of the dancer's lived body has the potential to reveal underlying processes of "being—in—the—world". α

She moves in and through, despite and because of all the contingencies of flesh and effort and thought. But *who is this 'she'?* I am thinking as I watch, *What is she doing? What's going on?* My eye [my 'i' | my mind] jumps around in time with her, trying to keep up, to anticipate, to find out more about her [i], that stillness|movement inside movement, dancing private musics.

Kinaesthetically, bodies talk to bodies by moving them in a form of sympathetic magic. √

Body is all over / in the walls on people's faces / ... / my body is a shared place ∂
my body becomes whole, skinting|listening attention . i remember that it is possible to be this way . it is possible to be alive λ

The kinaesthetic says: *You can do this too. This could be you, here, dancing. I'm just a body, like you,* and the watching [i] is gifted with a desire to dance, following a thread through the labyrinth of her experience, a train of thought unravelled by her body into my mind.

It's a duet, the following of this thread. It animates the relationship between her [i] and mine, discovering and uncovering who we are, building and rebuilding worlds of self; ordaining a unique space inside which a special quality of movement is possible, and a certain kind of risk is acceptable: the risk that something important or radical or incredibly fragile and delicate might be said, in a silent way, and be heard, acknowledged; that despite our selves, and all our baggage, there are possibilities.

GOING SOLO

[freedom, responsibility and the void: solo practice / self-monitoring]

...moving in time and space, witnessing, framing, interfering with and negotiating dynamic constellations of which they themselves are a part... Γ

The solo dance practitioner takes on the roles of both dancer and choreographer. She choreographs herself. She dances her own choreography. She works on both together, oscillating between inside and outside of the performance of her practice and the practice of her performance.

She climbs onto her magic carpet and begins to work out a moment's movement, articulating her here-and-now truth. She is enveloped by the void: the darkness of the black box, the mirrored walls of her studio, the unfathomable mystery of the universe, and whether she is escaping or exploring it, celebrating or escaping it, she is always dancing [with] her self there. What saves her from self-obsession, or madness, is her audience.

...music can be viewed as a consequence of active listening; it is, at some level, through informed listening that music is constructed Ψ

Through the practice of simultaneous listening to our impulses and the other, we work towards cultivating a space where ... we don't need to invent anything, where movement comes about by itself through the act of listening to it... ♥

Writing for me is just a very sustained process of reading. \S

...writing myself into the narrative, where my experiences and selections become the history of the performance... Φ

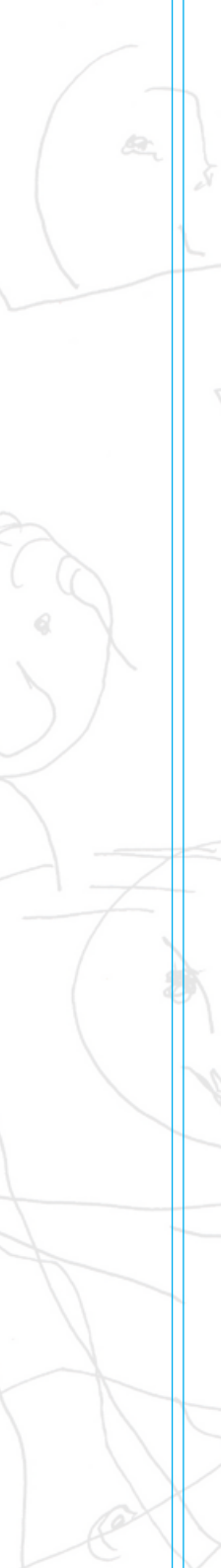
The watchful attention of the audience actually helps form the performance, contain and contextualise the efforts of the solo performer, ground her and make the space safe for her exploration and self expression. The dancer's act of communication requires these two organs: one of expression, and one of perception. Dancer and witness collaborate, but the receptivity of each for the other means the roles themselves dance between stage and audience.

The choreography is also shaped recursively by all the constraints and material facts of the dancer's situation. A process of production is a negotiation between self and 'the-way-things-are'. The [i] as producer seeks to be enabled by social feedback and mechanisms of exchange. The presence of the audience, the admission they pay, the quality of their applause, the direction of their curiosity all form part of this network of exchanges. The framing of this process can be understood as a social form of choreography, an interplay of forces at work|play|rest on the dancefloor of reality. At all stages the production of an artwork can aspire to a state of dance.

working as a solo independent dance artist with no producer, administrator, studio or particular organization to support my work on a continuing basis and with funding/resources dwindling by the day \cong

I am working with negotiation or exchange, as a dynamic, which also holds an aesthetic, aesthetic as the skin of a happening vibrating and glowing and becoming visible. ●





Not just the solo practitioner, with her own artistic agenda and full creative control, is engaged in this process of negotiation, but the dancer for hire too.

...the dancer in the action of performing is negotiating a multitude of variables making rapid in—the—moment decisions in accordance with their perspective of the unpredictability of the situation ...at the level of cognition even very set choreography requires an intensive degree of engagement, negotiation and decision making. ±

TOGETHER

[dancer|artist|entrepreneur]

... what takes place in the space is formed by thought, opinion, energy, emotions, atmospheres, tensions and releases, physical and spatial preferences, imagination, fantasies. Everyone offers different rhythms, different agendas/goals and intentions. And a person is engaged in marking and re-configuring territories: physical, energetic and emotional territories. A person is naturally engaged in a complex set of 'multiplicity in motion'. ♥

...every person continually performs material processes. He continually creates interrelationships. Even when he gives, when he defers to another, or the way he behaves in a crowd, there are always, let's say, form processes at work. Dancers, after all, do nothing but move, on their feet. And people on a crowded street are basically dancers too. !

I have observed that often the people still practicing their art are simply the people who are still practicing it. It's not necessarily that they are more talented, better connected, or luckier, they have just kept going. This quality of persistence extends in space as well as time, as the structures of the life lived become more and more shaped by the choreographic act. The qualities of a state of dance begin to persist outside of the studio|theatre and infiltrate other domains of human activity.

We all navigate shifting choreographies of life work family creativity society. We witness our selves and each other in a dance of communication, negotiation, attraction, and production. My own practice is to write. When [i] watch dance my mind catches fire, my pen moves and [i] let it go. My heroes James Joyce and William S Burroughs followed their own freedom as resolutely solo artists – hardworking, accomplished, and dedicated to a state of dance: a state of mind|body|mind that is in love with movement. The reality they

produced was a simultaneity: a fertile zone where meanings compete and each reader creates their own significance, in their imagination, that theatre for performance of thought.

But both writers had so much help – their writing typed, edited, published, read, reviewed. One needs collaborators. A writer needs readers. To read, to witness, is a collaboration. Read closely, read loosely, but dance it. Don't we all aspire to a state of dance?

EVERYONE IS GOING SOLO

[relating part to whole: recursion and feedback]

In a gift economy, performance is currency ξ

In home, on our little housing estate, picking blossoms to make elderflower cordial, [i] allow my self to be seen, and my acts become a performance. [i] become conscious of a dance of exchange: [i] respect the trees' abundance by receiving their gift and making a beautiful drink, but [i] also model this exchange for the children who watch and ask questions. This careful attention and receptivity offers a model, communicates knowledge – know-how and wisdom – and creates a space for a special kind of perception of self|world|other.

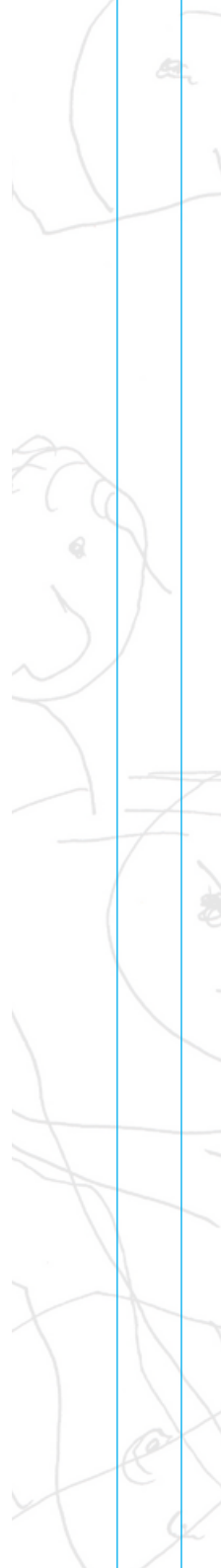
Sharing is sharing: in this light, solo practice becomes a gift performed by a whole self, wholly|holy self, holy agent of a state of dance that is contagious benevolent democratic and optimistic.

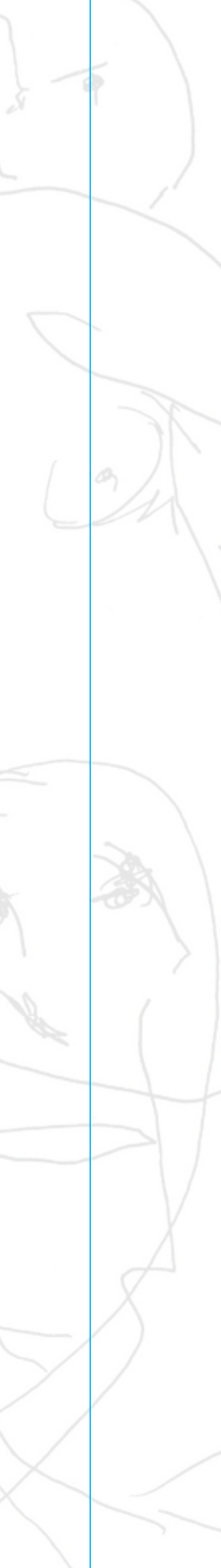
In our new estate, we learn how to share the space. It is the air our bodies breathe. Given enough time and space, everyone will disclose what they want. When a healthy desire to have or make space to express oneself is constricted, frustration will displace the creative force into the pursuit of money status sex stuff, and the state of dance breaks down.

Progress for democracy lies in enhancing the actual freedom, initiative, and spontaneity of the individual, not only in certain private and spiritual matters, but above all in the activity fundamental to every man's existence, his work. □

Much of our future prosperity will depend on how we use our resources, knowledge and creative talent to spur innovation. ←

Some years ago a colleague (+) proposed *an economics of flexibility*, and lights came on in my head. It is a beautifully apt way to think about





dance, suggesting mobility, exchange, work, worth, value, growth, currency. As the centre implodes and our public institutions fail, the margins fold and something spills in. Those who traditionally stayed aloof from politics – seeker, healer, artist, thinker – might now take a step into the void at the centre of civic life today.

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[mutual support / managing change / supporting innovation]

I see a big need for discourse and appreciation... I think that lack of feedback...can make artists feel isolated and wonder who they are making work for and why. 9

Experienced dance artist Cindy Cummings has a story: she encountered one day an ex-student of hers. While this lady had in the end not become a vocational performer, she warmly thanked Cindy for something she had learned in her classes: while having a very difficult labour with her second child she had remembered to 'breathe, and relax my body'. Thereafter the birth went smoothly. As Cindy put it, 'it doesn't get better than that.' u

Capacity: the ability or power to contain, absorb or hold. Δ

In a very real sense, that lady's capacity – her ability to endure hardship and the power to contain her experience – had been expanded. By just remembering to breathe. Inspiration: being filled with possibility, another word for breathing in. Imagination breathing in.

The opportunities of the solo dancer|artist|entrepreneur for movement within their chosen form depends in some measure on the capacity of their audience|public|economy to contain, absorb and hold those radical, profound and fragile utterances of the dancer [we are all dancers] – to hear and accept them without necessarily agreeing or aligning with them, as momentary instances of a moving multiple truth.

Capacity indicates a powerful receptivity: the ability to accept the gift of the other and work with the value it brings into play. How much can my [i] take of love beauty truth inspiration? Capacity is also a measure of power – demonstrated in tolerating that which disturbs us because strange, different, or difficult. And if it is within the dance community, the artistic community, that we are building capacity, what does that say about the balance of power in our society?

Our lives... come to dance in these moments of 'something happening' - moments of catching fire. Through the interface between us we participate in something that inevitably shifts because it relates, in moments of connectivity we are in a constant and infinite state of becoming something different... ●

..the artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist. ∅

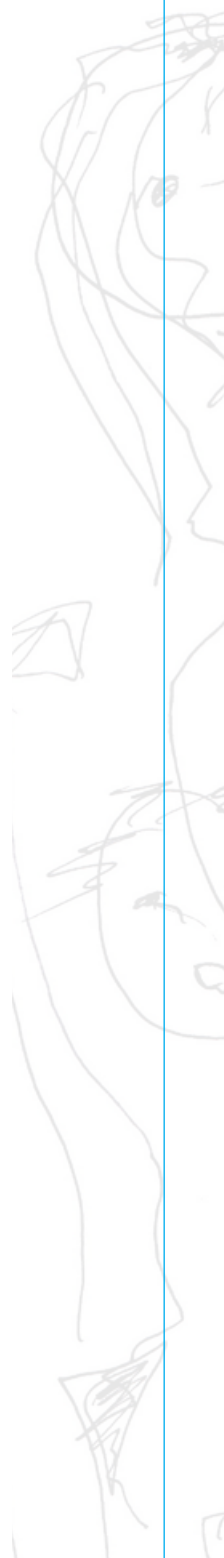
showing the world how beautiful you are . we are . you are a mirror . giving it all back to me . my self . my freedom . my capacity . my hope λ

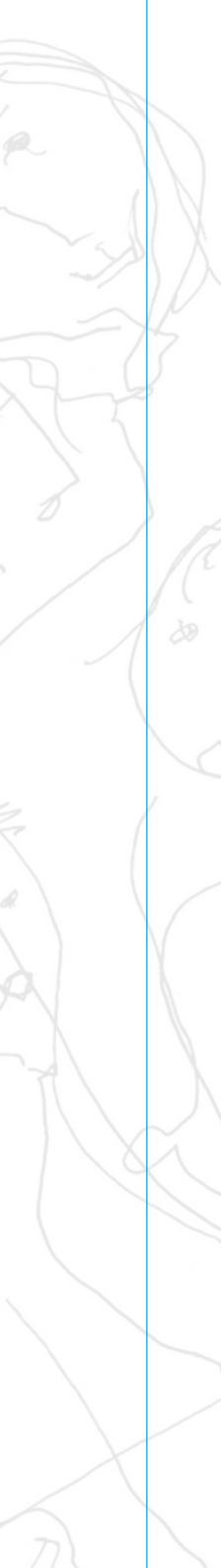
While we as social beings work out how to live with each other, the solo reminds us that the primary task is to live with our selves. Through these efforts at mutual understanding and appreciation we achieve moments of grace, where time slows down or stands still and the laws of gravity and energy are temporarily suspended.

Among the bearers of experience from the margins, dancers move from rehearsal to performance of their economics of flexibility and abundance. [i] am moved and inspired by she who dances out the unique landscape of her person, who articulates in public tiny details and vast volumes of a private life, who continually enters into her self and her oscillating relationship with everything else in order to discover more about her, us and that mysterious 'we'. She exercises our capacity, models the true extent of our being, and offers hope for our being together, speaking to those private worlds that breathe on the insides of people, desiring movement and revelation...

Everyone a dancer? Yes [i] say. People can say 'no' if they want to, but Yes is there for me, at the end. In my secret hopeful science fiction future – a state of dance – the response to a dream of life is another dream, and the solo practitioner asks a question to which the answer is another work of art. It is a dream of capacity, where there is ample space in imagination for all works to exist, breathe, change, or die.

Through this work it is clear for me that 'play' means establishing an instant flexibility and total availability towards the now, here, to allow for re-organisation of a situation to take place. Thus through an economics of flexibility in relation to many different aspects of 'me', what might be taken for granted will paradoxically re-configure and align, shift, spin, and I think come to dance. ●



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- ≅ Cindy Cummings, private correspondence
 - θ Jeffrey Gormly, *Streaming sense and meaning*, choreograph.net
 - × Kirsí Monni, On Sense and Meaning in Dance, in *Framemakers: Choreography as an aesthetics of Change*, Daghdha Dance Company, 2005
 - ∨ Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Dale University Press, 2005
 - ð Elena Gianotti, *notes for Einem*
 - λ Jeffrey Gormly, *Streaming nothing fields*, choreograph.net
 - Γ Jeffrey Gormly, *Choreonautics*, choreograph.net
 - ψ Vijay Iyer, On Improvisation, in *Sound Unbound. Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Paul D. Miller, MIT Press 2008.
 - ♥ Ellen Kilsgaard, 'Notes on 'Experiments in a Relational Field #2'', choreograph.net
 - § Toni Morrison, *The Paris Review Interviews Vol. I*, Ed. Philip Gourevitch, Picador, London, 2007
 - ϕ Emma Meehan, *Witnessing Somatic Experience in Maya Lila*, choreograph.net
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 - ± Jenny Roche, *When is Dancing Improvising?* presented at Dance Research Forum of Ireland, June 2010, including quotation from Cynthia Ann Roses-Thema, *Reclaiming the Dancer: Embodied Perception in a Dance Performance*, Arizona State University, 2007
 - ! Joseph Beuys, *What is Art?*, Clairview, 2004
 - ξ overheard at MOOT IV, Kilkenny County Council Arts Office & Butler Gallery
 - ▮ Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, quoted in *Play, Don't Work in a Pragmatic-Utopian High-Tech Enterprise* by Alan N. Shapiro, choreograph.net
 - ← EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Green Paper: *Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*, 2010
 - + Steve Valk, at Framemakers, Daghdha Dance Company, 2005
 - 9 Jessica Kelly, email correspondence
 - u Cindy Cummings, private conversation
 - Δ Collins English Dictionary
 - ∅ Peter Lamborn Wilson, Ploughing the Clouds in *Dreamflesh Vol 1*, Ed. Gyrus, Dreamflesh Press, 2006

Jeffrey Gormly (editor@choreograph.net) is a writer, editor and producer engaged with ideas of choreographic practice, applied science fiction, and new participatory formats for theatre. He recently contributed text and dramaturgy to *Weaving the Cry* by nervoussystem, and Soul Gun Warriors production of play3Some. He is editor and co-author of two Framemakers books for Daghdha Dance Company: www.daghdha.ie/007/001.htm.

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