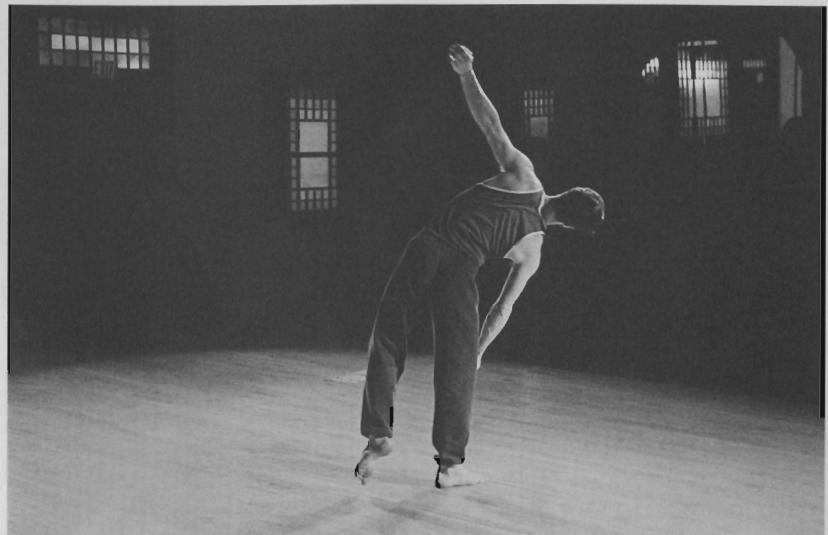


Steve Paxton
Selected Works

selected bibliography

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**Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries
3 Beekman Street Beacon New York
845 440 0100 www.diaart.org**

Dia Art Foundation presents
Steve Paxton
Selected Works

Friday, October 17–Sunday, October 19, 2014, 2 pm
Friday, October 24–Sunday, October 26, 2014, 2 pm

Choreography by Steve Paxton

Performers
K. J. Holmes
Juriј Konjar
Polly Motley
Lisa Nelson
Steve Paxton

Chamberlain gallery

Flat, 1964
Performed by K. J. Holmes, Juriј Konjar, and Polly Motley

Flat was first performed at a Judson Theater Workshop at Judson Church, New York, in 1963. It officially premiered at the State University of New York in New Paltz, in 1964, as part of the Concert for New Paltz, an event organized by Judson Dance Theater members.

Serra gallery

The Beast, 2010
Performed by Steve Paxton

The Beast premiered at Baryshnikov Arts Center's Jerome Robbins Theater, New York.

Chamberlain gallery

Bound, 1982
Performed by Juriј Konjar
Music: Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir, The Canadian Brass, and various soundscapes

Bound premiered at Spaziozero, Rome, in 1982. It was then performed at the Kitchen, New York, in October 1982, which produced video documentation on which this reconstruction is based.

Flavin gallery

Smiling, 1967
Performed by (on a rotating basis) K. J. Holmes, Juriј Konjar, Polly Motley, and Lisa Nelson
Smiling premiered in Portland, Oregon, as part of an evening organized by Jack Eirely.

This program is made possible in part by Dia's Board of Trustees and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Cover: Steve Paxton, performance with David Moss at the Joy of Movement Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 1978.

Excerpt from "Improvisation Issue?" *Contact Quarterly*, 1987

P.S. The artistic forms which seem not to include at least a degree of (probably) involuntary improvisation are the already-recorded forms. Painting, prose, poetry, music, and (with film and video) dance can now all take place in the crypt of set. This change is not necessarily progress. However it is here.

P.P.S. Here's a possible scale. Others might make a different one. I have, myself, at other times:

Free Improvisation:
(theoretical impossibility)

Unconsciously-found Improvisation:
(beyond knowledge)

Manipulated Improvisation:
(self-guided toward taking risks) Rock climbers, surfers, dancers.

Formal Improvisation:
(situation determined) Games, sports, dance. Possibilities, into permutations.

Soft forms:
(repeatable in essence, not detail) Games again, some new music, Jazz, social dance.

Forms:
(details come into focus) The exacting pronunciation, arabesque lines, portamento, tango steps, manipulable chunks, "repeatable"

Fine Forms:
(innumerable exact details, effects carefully calculated) Form rests on precision of execution

Hard Forms:
(details only) Formal quest lost

Elegant Forms:
(form rests solidly on innumerable carefully calibrated effects, the details) This calibration affects form. Thorough analysis sound theory. Mass of information in detailed effects is the 'critical mass'—the proof of knowledge, certification of consciousness, plus the imprint of intuition, taking the form past its widely known manifestations into surprising leaps of its logic, to surprise us with compositional ponder. The burning of archetypes. We cannot shake them.

Perfect Forms: ♦
(our formal fantasy) The music of spheres; Newtonian, then Einsteinian, then quantum sorts of structures. The far limits of a form, all-encompassing, presumably. Rigorously expostulated. Details are new, or re-seen. Mythic and ungraspable.

—Steve Paxton

The Reduction of So Much Into So Little

In over fifty years of creating and performing dance, Steve Paxton's investigation into the essential development of movement has engaged the mystery of the passage from thought to act, and from act to thought. Animating language or visual representation through dance is of little interest to him. His choreography is instead built from a resilient investigation of the practice and process of dance improvisation. While dance improvisation is commonly aligned with spontaneous action or loose frameworks, Paxton's practice focuses on moments of self-awareness that underline both the potential of gesture and the intensity of being beholden to one's body. His work meditates on the body, and the habits, impulses, strengths, weaknesses, and variations of surprise that arise throughout—affects that serve him in translating lived experience.

Most earnestly, Paxton is a choreographic provocateur, creating and defining new movement practices that have influenced generations of choreographers and dancers. His expansive ethos of improvised action, including the movement technique Contact Improvisation, a dynamic, partner-based dance for which he is well known, and his equally radical technique called the Small Dance ("Standing still and feeling your body. Doing absolutely nothing but letting your skeletal muscles hold you upright."), has forever changed the practice of dance. His immeasurable mark continues in the aesthetic and technical pursuits of younger choreographers, including Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Ralph Lemon, Xavier Le Roy, Meg Stuart, and even Mikhail Baryshnikov, among others. To his followers, he is a generous performer and teacher, a revelatory mover who privileges pauses as much as accents, extending outward attributes of our conscious and unconscious selves.

In 1960, Paxton began participating in composer Robert Dunn's composition classes held at the Merce Cunningham studios in New York City, a paramount experience that encouraged him to experiment with new approaches to choreography. "The Robert Dunn classes were a way to get down to what I meant by form or what interested me as form . . . I was interested in manifesting the form and letting the content adjust."² Along with a few peers in the Dunn workshops, including Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, Paxton founded Judson Dance Theater in 1962, a group known for isolating pedestrian movement, routine activities that could not be construed as symbolic. During a workshop held in the basement gymnasium of Judson Memorial

Church, Paxton first performed his early improvised solo *Flat* (1964), which involves walking, dressing, undressing, and extended moments of standing still. In creating *Flat*, he learned to resist "everything that I knew about dance"³ as a means to examine the most subtle gradations in form and time. "My inquiry was not so much about escaping the legacy of dance as discovering the source of it. Where was something pre-legacy, pre-cultural? This was the fascinating question of those days for me. . . . The answer of course was right under my nose. I placed the chair in the space and began to stand."⁴

The 1960s were a prolific time for Paxton. He created conceptual pieces led by prompts, including the duet *Smiling* (1967), in which two people unassumingly stand and smile for five minutes. Other early works incorporated scripts or scores, such as *Proxy* (1961), created from a selection of sports photographs, or "photo-score," a device he later used in *Flat*. He also made pieces that involved spectator engagement, including *Audience Performance #1* and *Audience Performance #2* (1968), which required spectators to walk in a collaborative manner, and the performance installation *Physical Things* (1966), part of *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York, a constructed environment that centered on an inflated tunnel that the audience walked through to encounter props, image projections, sounds, and performers.

By the early 1970s, Paxton turned his focus exclusively toward improvisation in solo, duet, and group arrangements. During this time he cofounded Grand Union, a dance theater collective rooted in improvisation, and began teaching improvisational techniques at colleges and universities. While conducting a student class at Oberlin College in 1972, he created the work *Magnesium*, which involved eight male dancers practicing partner-based and gravity-led improvisational exercises. A few months later, Paxton invited students from Oberlin and Bennington College to collaborate with him in conceiving open-process performances at the John Weber Gallery in New York. This event established Contact Improvisation, which quickly incited an international movement that has remained strong ever since. By the early 1980s, Paxton had shifted his attention toward creating duet work, most notably with choreographer Lisa Nelson, and creating solo improvisations. Since then, his work has been primarily supported and presented abroad, due in part to the popularity of

Contact Improvisation, and as a result American audiences have rarely experienced the instrumental magnitude of his choreography.

The program at Dia:Beacon celebrates Paxton's influential legacy, and the works presented address the varied ways his practice has revolutionized the use of improvisation in dance—prioritizing compositions that are provoked from a bold reliance on gravity, intuitive gestures and actions, naturally sensed time, and redefinitions of choreographic space. Selected with the artist, the program includes pieces from throughout his career, including the early works *Flat* and *Smiling*. His solo work is evidenced in *Bound* (1982), performed by Jurij Konjar, which traces a man's psychological journey through various moments in his life, and *The Beast* (2010), performed by Paxton, a culmination of his dancing life distilled from nuanced movements of his matured body. Evidenced in this program, his investigation into the enigmatic nature of movement continues. "I'm still involved in dance because dance has given me a lot to consider. I'm still considering it. I'll probably go on considering it because these questions don't go away, like what the person is, what it's capable of."⁵

Kelly Kivland, assistant curator

notes

1. Steve Paxton, "In the Midst of Standing Still Something Else is Occurring and the Name for that is the Small Dance." Interview with Peter Hulton, *Theatre Papers* series 1, no. 4 (1977), p. 3.
2. Paxton, in Nancy Stark Smith, "Trance Script: Judson Project Interview with Steve Paxton, conducted by Nancy Stark Smith," *Contact Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (winter 1989), p. 16.
3. Paxton, "The Studies Project: Transcript of Bill T. Jones and Steve Paxton in discussion at Movement Research," *Contact Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (fall 1984), p. 30.
4. Paxton, "Steve Paxton: Extraordinarily Ordinary and Ordinarily Extraordinary," *Contact Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (winter/spring 2001), p. 37.
5. Paxton, in Smith, "Trance Script: Judson Project Interview with Steve Paxton, conducted by Nancy Stark Smith," p. 21.

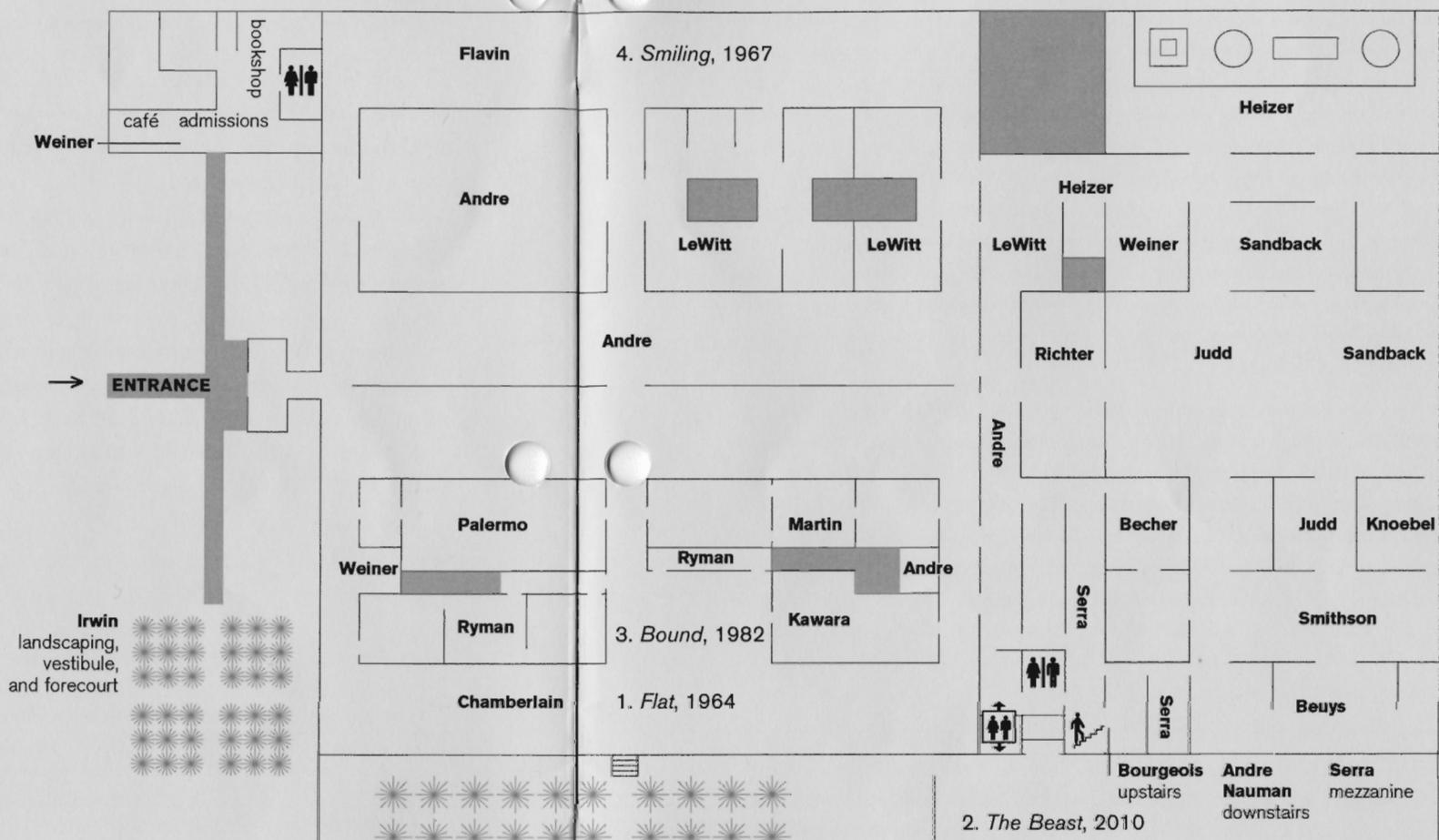
Program Map

1. Chamberlain gallery
Flat, 1964

2. Serra gallery
The Beast, 2010

3. Chamberlain gallery
Bound, 1982

4. Flavin gallery
Smiling, 1967



Lawler
plays continuously throughout the day

Neuhaus
plays seven minutes before every hour

Andre >
Joint
by appointment

biographies

Steve Paxton was born in Flagstaff, Arizona, in 1939. He began his movement studies in gymnastics and then trained in martial arts, ballet, and modern dance. In summer 1958, Paxton attended the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College, where he trained with choreographers Merce Cunningham and José Limón. Soon after, he moved to New York City. He was a member of the José Limón Company in 1959 and a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1961 to 1964. He was a founding member of the seminal dance collectives Judson Dance Theater (1962–64) and Grand Union (1970–76). Throughout his career, Paxton's singular investigation of improvisation has opened new ideas in creating and composing choreographic work. It was during his time with Grand Union that he first formulated Contact Improvisation, a dynamic, partner-based dance that is now practiced worldwide. From Contact Improvisation, he developed the movement practice Material for the Spine in 1986, which examines movement outward from the core of the body.

Paxton's work has recently been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Tanz im August, Berlin (2013); Španski Borci Cultural Centre, Ljubljana (2014); 9th International Contemporary Dance Festival, Venice (2014); and Tanzwerkstatt Europa, Munich (2014). In 2013, Dia Art Foundation presented *Night Stand* (2004), a work by Paxton and Lisa Nelson, at Dia:Chelsea in New York City. Paxton has received two New York Dance and Performance Awards, or Bessies, in 1987 and 1999, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts; Rockefeller Foundation; Contemporary Performance Arts Foundation; Change, Inc.; and Experiments in Art and Technology. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1995 and, most recently, he received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement from the 2014 Dance Biennale, Venice. He has been a contributing editor to *Contact Quarterly* and published the DVD *Material for the Spine* in 2008. He lives in Vermont.

K. J. Holmes is a dance artist, actor, singer, and teacher. She has been exploring improvisation as process and performance since 1981 and has collaborated with Simone Forti, Karen Nelson, Lisa Nelson and Image Lab, and Steve Paxton. In New York her work has been presented in at the Chocolate Factory Theater, Danspace Project, DTW, Movement Research at the Judson Church, Dance Works in Progress at the Kitchen, Performance Space 122, and the Vision Jazz Festival. Holmes teaches at New York University's Experimental Theatre Wing and Movement Research, and she conducts workshops and performs internationally. She is currently developing her new piece *H/C SVNT DRACONES*, which she began as an Artist-in-Residence with Movement Research in 2012–14. She lives in Brooklyn.

Jurij Konjar is a dancer, choreographer, and improviser. He was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he received his first technical dance training. He studied music in London and contemporary dance at Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.) in Brussels. He has worked with Les Ballets C de la B, choreographers Maja Delak, Janez Janša, Boris Charmatz, and Martin Kilvady, and the Tuning Ensemble, a group led by Lisa Nelson. In 2007 he suffered a head injury that shifted his focus toward the potential of the present moment. In 2009, he began to examine Walter Verdin's video of Steve Paxton's *Goldberg Variations*, which inspired the development of Konjar's own personal improvisation practice. In recent years, he created solo works such as *Ulysses* (2007), *Goldberg Variations* (2010), and *For Juliano Mer-Khamis* (2013), and has worked on the reconstruction of Steve Paxton's solo *Bound* (1982). He lives in Ljubljana.

Polly Motley is a dancer and choreographer. Her work has been presented in New York at the Asia Society, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Danspace Project, the Kitchen, Dance Theatre Workshop, Movement Research, as well as nationally at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, in Becket, Massachusetts, Colorado Dance Festival, Flynn Theatre, Burlington, Vermont; Bates College Museum of Art, Lewiston, Maine; and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. She has served on the faculties of the University of Houston, Naropa University in Boulder, and Regis University in Denver. Motley earned an MFA from the University of Colorado with a thesis on the interactive relationships of video and performance. Her intermedia collaborations with film and video artist Molly Davies have been shown in the United States, Europe, and Asia. She lives in Vermont.

Lisa Nelson is a choreographer, improvisational performer, and collaborative artist. Throughout the 1970s she investigated diverse approaches to dance improvisation, including performing with Daniel Nagrin's Workgroup, and has been exploring the role of the senses in the performance and observation of movement ever since. Her intensive practice in dance and video led her to develop an approach to spontaneous composition and performance called Tuning Score. Nelson performs and teaches internationally and maintains long-term collaborations with artists including Image Lab, Daniel Lepkoff, Steve Paxton, Scott Smith, and Cathy Weis. Nelson received a New York Dance and Performance Award, or Bessie, in 1987, and an Alpert Award in the Arts in 2002. She co edits *Contact Quarterly*, a journal focused on dance and improvisation founded in 1975, and directs Videoda, a project that archives, produces, and distributes videotapes of improvisational dance. In 2001, the French-language magazine *Nouvelles de Danse* published an issue about her work, titled *Vu du Corps: Lisa Nelson, Mouvement et Perception*. She lives in Vermont.