

Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton
Night Stand, 2004



Dia:Chelsea
541 West 22nd Street New York City
212 989 5566 www.diaart.org

Dia Art Foundation presents
Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton
Night Stand, 2004

Thursday, October 10–Saturday, October 12, 2013, 8 pm
Thursday, October 17–Saturday, October 19, 2013, 8 pm

Dance, setting, and sound compilation by Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton
Lighting by Carol Mullins

performers
Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton

production manager
Adam Macks

music
Excerpts from *Automatic Writing* (1979), *eL/Aficionado* (1994), and *Dust* (2000)
by Robert Ashley (Lovely Music) and *Zvuki Mu* (1989) by Pyotr Mamonov
(Opal Records).

Dia's presentation of *Night Stand* marks the United States premiere.

Night Stand has been previously performed at Centre chorégraphique national de Montpellier Languedoc–Roussillon, France; Marseille Objectif Danse, France; Side Step Festival, Helsinki, Finland; SESC Belenzinho, São Paulo, Brazil; L'animal a l'esquena, Celrà, Spain; and Spiral Hall, Tokyo, Japan.

This program is made possible in part by Dia's Commissioning Committee: Jill and Peter Kraus, Leslie and Mac McQuown, Genny and Selmo Nissenbaum, and Liz Gerring Radke and Kirk August Radke.

Front Cover: Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton, *Night Stand*, 2004. Performance at L'animal a l'esquena, Celrà, Spain, 2008. Photo © Jordi Bover.

Progress Report: Night Stand

Night Stand is the third collaboration between Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton, after *PA RT*, which they performed from 1978 to 2002, and *Population*, which was performed once in 1988. *Night Stand* was made with substantial collaborative input from lighting designer Carol Mullins at the choreographic center of Mathilde Monnier in Montpellier, France, in 2004. The soundtrack, created by the dancers, includes musical extracts by American composer Robert Ashley and Russian composer Pyotr Mamonov.

Night Stand is defined by a space (about 50 by 50 feet) lit by Mullins's design, and the stage is dressed all in black. The fixity of the space is a reaction to the flexible attitude that is considered normal in mounting choreography on stages of different sizes: Why are the dimensions of a dance not considered as important as the steps, the costumes, or the music that accompanies it? Changing the dimensions or proportions of a work affects the movement in the space, obviously, but where a painting is not stretched over whatever frame a gallery or museum happens to use, dances are expected to do so. Therefore, the floor dimensions of *Night Stand* are considered a fixed part of its identity, just because. The dancing is not set, though certain events recur.

PA RT was a more adaptable work. It fit into most spaces; it accepted the given architecture. The work included a score by Robert Ashley: two scenes from a larger opera (published as *Private Parts* by Lovely Music). It was lush and hypnotic—keyboards, tabla, and Ashley's voice droning a confounding tale of two almost immobile characters. In the dance, divided into solo, duet, solo, duet, Nelson ignored the music and the story; Paxton attempted to embody both. Physically, they blended their discontinuities.

Night Stand's first task is not to be *PA RT*. The *Night Stand* soundscape is austere. The setting is larger than conventional theater spaces and it's black. Everything is black. The bodies of the dancers, packed with the developments of twenty-four years of *PA RT*, are found in the scenic equivalent of a vacuum. In this dislocation, they again test their senses, their memories, their perceptions, their responses—in short, their immediate living dance.

Paxton and Nelson's performing partnership dates back to 1975. Paxton's approach to physical improvisation is sourced in an ongoing investigation of the technique underlying Contact Improvisation, which he initiated in 1972. Nelson calls her approach to dancing Tuning Scores, a practice which she developed through examining the relationship of vision to the performance of movement. While Paxton's work investigates interior sensations, Nelson's work implies a relationship to an environment. Yet Nelson has said she has no use for a division between the exterior and the interior; they are the same. Paxton bows to this characterization.

So their dialogue continues.

They have reached a point where they may exist as figments of each other's imaginations; that is, each is for the other a construct of the exterior, that currently, for both, is seen as a subcategory of their individual yet mutually enmeshed interiors. Or as we say, they have gotten to know each other.

But let us not say the exterior is entirely missing . . . black and bleak as it is, the exterior is being repurposed.

S.P.

biographies

Carol Mullins has been designing lighting for the stage since the 1970s and has served as resident lighting designer for Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery since 1982. She has designed lighting for dance works by choreographers including Douglas Dunn, John Kelly, Wendy Perron, and Elizabeth Streb. In addition to *Night Stand*, she designed lighting for Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton's *PA RT* in 1983. Mullins has received three New York Dance and Performance Awards, or Bessies, and an Obie Award in 2003 for *Painted Snake in a Painted Chair* by the Talking Band.

Lisa Nelson was born in New York City in 1949. She began her training in traditional modern dance and ballet as a child at the Juilliard School in New York City and then Bennington College in Vermont. Throughout the 1970s she investigated diverse approaches to dance improvisation, including performing with Daniel Nagrin's Workgroup, and began her research into vision and the performance of movement through the medium of video. Her intensive practice in dance and video led her to develop the Tuning Scores, a rigorous model for real-time editing and communication for ensemble and solo work. Nelson performs, teaches, and creates dances internationally, and maintains long-term collaborations with other 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 coedits *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.

Steve Paxton was born in Arizona in 1939. He began his movement studies in gymnastics and then trained in 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 Judson Dance Theater (1962–64) and Grand Union (1970–76),

two movements that indelibly redefined dance for the following decades. In the late 1960s, Paxton created work from pedestrian, everyday movement, including such preeminent early dances as *Flat* (1964), *Satisfyin Lover* (1967), and *State* (1968). In the 1970s, Paxton was involved with Grand Union, a dance theater collective that included Becky Arnold, Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Nancy Lewis, Barbara Lloyd (Dilley), Yvonne Rainer, and Lincoln Scott. It was during his time with Grand Union that he first formulated Contact Improvisation, which has remained an influential dance form. He then developed the movement practice Material for the Spine from Contact Improvisation in 1986. Paxton's interest in improvisation has continued to guide his choreographic practice over the past twenty-five years.

During his fifty-year career, Paxton has received two New York Dance and Performance Awards, or Bessies, in 1987 and 1999, and has been the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts; the Rockefeller Foundation; the Contemporary Performance Arts Foundation; Change, Inc.; and Experiments in Art and Technology. He received the Vermont Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 1994 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1995. He has also been a contributing editor to *Contact Quarterly* dance journal. In 2008, Paxton published the four-hour DVD *Material for the Spine*, which examines technical movement outward from the core of the body. He lives in Vermont.

selected bibliography

- Paxton, Steve. "Drafting Interior Techniques." *Contact Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1993), pp. 61–66.
- Burt, Ramsey. "Steve Paxton's Goldberg Variations and the Angel of History." *The Drama Review* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 46–64.
- Haleb, Christophe. "Night Stand." www.marseille-objectif-danse.org, April 15, 2004. Online at ressources.marseille-objectif-danse.org/IMG/pdf/CH_apropus_NightStand.pdf
- Nelson, Lisa. "Before Your Eyes: Seeds of a Dance Practice." *Contact Quarterly* 29, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 2004), pp 20–26.
- Nelson, Lisa. "Composition, Communication, and the Sense of Imagination. Lisa Nelson on Her Pre-technique of Dance, the Tuning Scores." *Ballettanz* (April 2006), pp. 76–79.
- Paxton, Steve. "Material for the Spine." DVD. Brussels: Contredanse, 2008.
- Banes, Sally. "Steve Paxton: Physical Things." In *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011, pp. 56–70.