

Visual Arts x

Dance x

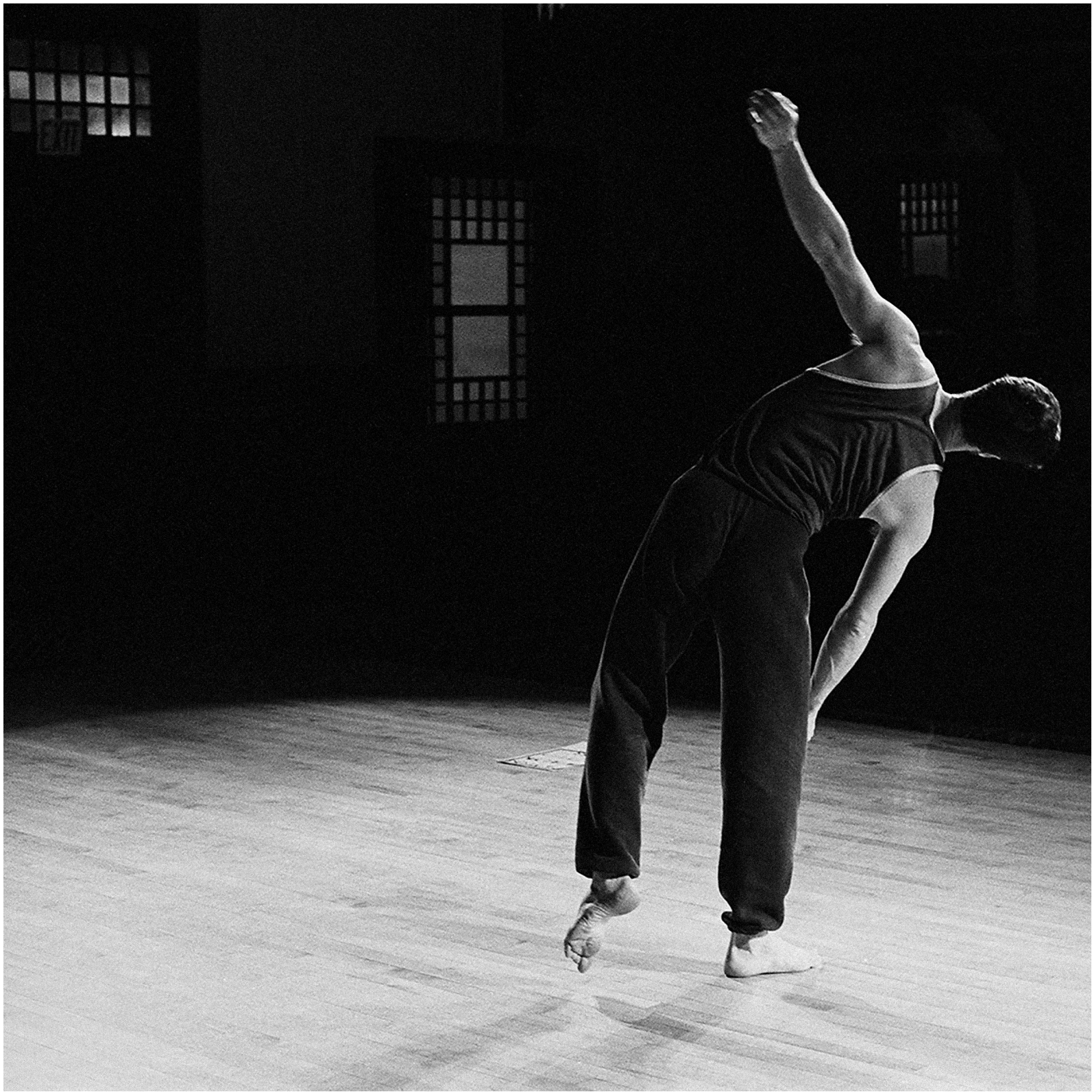
Talks and Debates x

STEVE PAXTON



CURATED BY ROMAIN BIGÉ AND JOÃO FIADEIRO

MAR–JUL 2019





Steve Paxton no Joy of Movement Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 1978

North-American dancer, choreographer and improviser Steve Paxton, born in Arizona in 1939, has been shaping the world of dance for more than six decades. Starting his dance career in the 1950s, he danced with the Merce Cunningham Dance company, co-founded the Judson Dance Theater, and Grand Union, and invented two revolutionary dance techniques: Contact Improvisation and Material for the Spine. Researching, as he puts it, “the fiction of cultured dance and the ‘truth’ of improvisation”, Paxton has written extensively on movement (over a hundred articles) whilst also performing, choreographing and teaching in the most important dance venues around the world, collaborating with artists across disciplines. Since the 1970s, he has been living in Mad Brook Farm, an artistic commune in Northern Vermont.

Honoring the multiple facets of the dance maker, Culturgest presents *Drafting Interior Techniques*, an exhibition curated by João Fiadeiro and Romain Bigé, together with a Steve Paxton cycle of performances, lectures and workshops. Working together with local dancers and dance schools, Culturgest turns itself, for the four months of the exhibition, into a momentary dancing museum.

DRAFTING INTERIOR TECHNIQUES

Like the famous tree which was unsure whether it would be making noise should it fall to the ground in a forest without people, there is a way of looking at things which renders them performance.

(Steve Paxton, 1967)

Drafting Interior Techniques is the first retrospective look taken at Steve Paxton's work and legacy. It is built around a puzzle he persistently posed to himself in the dance studio: what is my body doing when I am not conscious of it?

During the four months of the exhibition, *Drafting Interior Techniques* aims at transforming the gallery spaces of Culturgest in temporary dance studios, where visitors, dancers and students are invited to inquire about their own movements. Showcasing video archives of performances, interviews, and original installations, the exhibition is a place to roll on the ground, to sit, to dance-standing, to nap... In short: to reflect upon movement with a dancing bodymind.

The exhibition is organized in eight studies, each of them pointing to an interior technique of the dancing-improvising body-in-motion.

09 MAR – 14 JUL
Galleries

Room 1 – a study in pedestrian movement

The exhibition begins with a series of questions: what does it take to see an ordinary movement like a dance? Is there a way of looking at people that renders them performance? Is it possible to perform everyday gestures on stage without changing them?

Towards the start of the 1960s, Steve Paxton helped found the Judson Dance Theatre, a collective transdisciplinary adventure that laid the foundations for post-modern dance. Collaborating with artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown, or Robert Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton began a decade-long investigation into pedestrian movements: walking, sitting, smiling, standing, playing sports...

At the exhibition entrance, we present a video installation based on *Satisfyin Lover* (1967), a piece for 42 people crossing the space. What appears, as dance critic Jill Johnston noted in 1969, is “the fat, the skinny, the medium, the slouched and slumped, the straight and tall, the bow legged and knock-kneed, the awkward the elegant the coarse the delicate the pregnant the virginal the you name it ... that's you and me in all our ordinary everyday who-cares postural splendor.”

Room 2 – a study in anarchy

How can a collective invent ways of dancing together without directing each other? What forms are invented when we try to create and to live without leaders?

These are some of the questions that spurred Grand Union, an “anarchistic-democratic theatre collective” of nine choreographers with whom Paxton performed collective improvisations throughout the 1970s. “The form is permissive, permutative, elastic, unspecified. In the Grand Union, it is continuously invented by nine people [...]. They do not know what they create, but they trust it”, remarked Paxton in 1972.

In the exhibition, videoclips are projected alongside a full length, two-hour-and-a-half long performance at Iowa University, where the viewer can follow the constant negotiation, invention, readiness for change displayed by the dancers – here, the study in anarchy is a study in communication, in humanness, and in mutual generosity.

Next to Grand Union, we present *Air/Beautiful Lecture* (1973), created in the same period, which superimposes a pornographic movie with a video from *Swan Lake* and the live broadcast of Nixon's first Watergate speech. A lesson in queer dramaturgy, where Paxton ponders: “Why are we in the West so hung up on orgasm?”



Daniel Lepkoff and Steve Paxton, from a performance at Merce Cunningham Studio, New York City, October 1977 © Peter Petegorsky

Room 3 – a study in contact

January 1972. Bodies, off-kilter, leap into the air, hurl themselves at each other, grasp, fall, rise, fall. This strange activity lasts fifteen minutes. Eleven young men wearing sweatpants explore the laws of gravity, on gym mats. We are at Oberlin College. The piece is entitled *Magnesium*. An elemental metal capable of producing a brief, brilliant glow. Clashing of bodies. The origins of Contact Improvisation. Contact Improvisation thus began with a question: what happens to dancers when their skins meet?

For the past fifty years, in dance studios around the world, bodies have been rolling on each other following the joys of contact. Entwining, lifting, supporting each other, losing their definite sense of top and bottom. Everywhere in the world, dancers arrive – often as strangers to each other – to the address of the nearest jam – a space for experimentation in which no one leads and everyone dances, engaging with the forgotten sense: touch.

Room 4 – a study in gravity

Earthlings, we are earthbound. Our external form, our movements, our rhythms are shaped by gravity more than by any other force. From the point of view of gravity, we are not so different from large rocks, other large mammals or plants: thrown into the air, a human body will ineluctably follow the same and simple ballistic laws and describe a parabolic trajectory. There is something heavily reassuring in this permanence: wherever we go on the surface of this planet we are inhabited by a force that will not let us go astray for long.

To study dance is to study what underlies movement. Gravity being one of the constants in our human lives, dancers ride and play with and against its force, learning to yield and to tune themselves to its speed.

In his workshops, Paxton offers daily naps, considering sleep to be part of a dancer's training to surrender to gravity. For the dancers that will use the space, for the visitors that will need a rest, for the city dwellers that might pass by, the exhibition offers a large nest of cushions to climb and test the interior technique of napping...

And if one needs to have an excuse to lay down, we offer a lullaby: Steve Paxton, recorded as he is reading *Gravity*, his latest book, a meditation on dance and movement.

Room 5 – a study in stillness

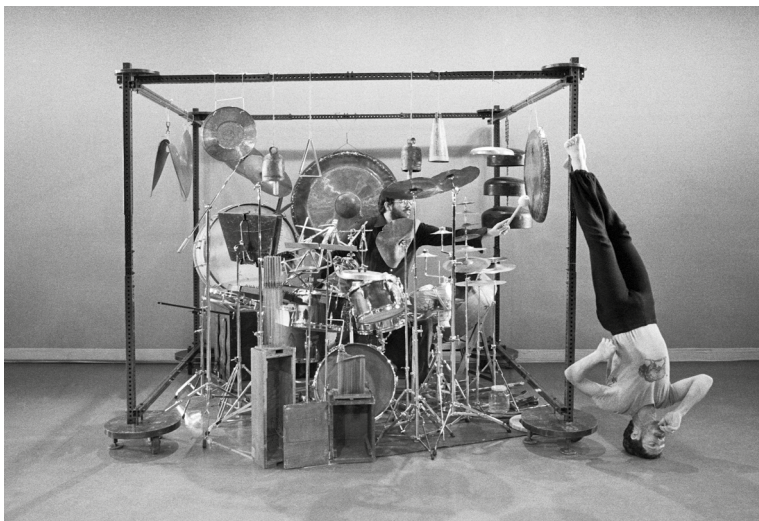
Not-doing is a central gesture in Steve Paxton's interior techniques, borrowed to the martial art of Aikido and to the meditation practice of Yoga. A humility-in-the-act, not-doing is the study of what is happening when I decide to not-decide, and to let the event decide for me.

For Paxton's generation of artists, American musician John Cage was the grand purveyor of this wisdom of not-doing. The story is well known: Cage, curious to know what it would mean to "listen to silence", enters in an anechoic ("deaf") chamber to cut himself off from exterior sounds. The result, of course, is the contrary of silence: his bloodstream beats to his ears, and the rhythm of his breath is still there, unavoidable. For Cage, this is where everything begins: when we stop and discover that nothing has stopped nonetheless. The exhibition showcases the score of *4'33"*, a piece in three acts which only reads *tacet* (literally: "keep quiet"), and where the musician, not playing their instrument, invites the stupefied audience to listen to the sound of silence.

In 1970, Paxton started to work with *Standing*, the movement analog to Cage's piece, asking the question: what moves when everything has stopped? The response

is a Small Dance, that the visitors are invited to practice, aided with sound recordings of dancers describing their own experience of gravity in the erect posture:

You've been swimming in gravity since the day you were born. Every cell knows where down is. Easily forgotten. Your mass and the earth's mass calling to each other...



Steve Paxton and David Moss performing at the Dance Theater Workshop in New York, November, 1978 © Peter Petegorsky

Room 6 – a study in disorientation

Dancing is playing with orientation: “if every cell of our body knows where down is,” the multiple spins, inversions, lifts, dives and tumbles a dancer learns through their life often brings this knowledge into tension.

After several decades of dancing and improvising, Steve Paxton developed *Material for the Spine*, a series of kinetic puzzles and movement *koans* for studying the body's experiential anatomy, where dancers are placed in unusual positions, confronted to “perfect” and impossible forms and encouraged to track all the tensions, all the gaps in consciousness that emerge while moving.

In this room, we present *Material for the Spine* in its digital version, a set of videos offering exercises and images to nourish the dancer's practice. On the ceiling, a selection of clips forms the core of the *Phantom Exhibition*, a video installation created by Paxton, with Baptiste Andrien and Florence Corin, to immerse the viewer in visual experiments with gravity.

Room 7 – a study in solo

Martha Graham said that one never dances alone: there is always at least one absent partner. Each of Paxton's dances, in this sense, contain studies of the partners: even when they are in solo, they unearth the dancer's hidden companions – gravity, music, memories.

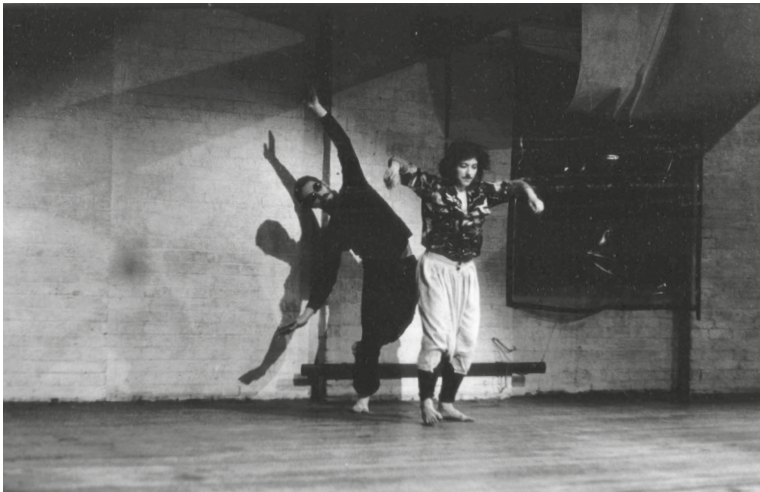
Soloing poses a specific puzzle to the improviser: how can one keep not knowing oneself enough to remain in relation with the unexpected? What kind of others (human, non-human, ecological) can be invited in the dance and how are we caring for them?

In 1955 and 1981, Glenn Gould recorded two interpretations of J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Starting in 1986, Paxton began a five-year study of the two recordings, investigating difference and repetition. Could he improvise movements never done before? What would be a pure improvisation without repetitions?

One time I performed two Goldbergs in a row, and that was the kind of thing I thought was possible. To do two shows with a process of no process, would they end up being different performances? But having worked on Contact Improvisation to see if I could figure out why this thing called improvisation has a reputation for not having structure, I kept finding structure. At a certain point I decided that the structure was me. That I couldn't get outside of that. I couldn't continue the process because I kept running into myself.



Steve Paxton, *Goldberg Variations*, Felix Meritis Hall, Amsterdam, 1992
© Dirk Leunis



Steve Paxton & Lisa Nelson in *PA RT*, Butler's Wharf, London, 1978
Photo courtesy Lisa Nelson

Room 8 – a study in relation

This brings us to the non-physical part of this dancing; the state of being or mind permitting mutual freedom, with mutual reliance. The mind is kept empty of preconceptions and memories it is in the present moments only, meditating on the potentials and on the easiest paths in the energy construct which are available to both dancers. (Steve Paxton, 1973)

In the 1970s, Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson moved to Mad Brook Farm, an artistic commune in Northern Vermont. Building a dance studio, editing *Contact Quarterly*, living from agriculture when not from dance, they also shared a lifelong relationship onstage. For 24 years, they performed *PA RT*, a simple score of solo-duet-solo-duet to the music of Robert Ashley. Improvising their encounters, bringing to the shared space their life, their imagination, their story, they embodied two rather queer characters: a blind man, very stiff, with sun glasses and an unexpressive face; a woman with a mustache and a loose shirt for her. Rejecting the romantic reductionism of dance coupling, *PA RT* investigates the in-between of a relation of “mutual freedom with mutual dependence”: neither facing each other, neither side by side, but living in worlds that, from time to time, entangle.

The exhibition ends with images from their duet, and a video installation presenting *Conversations in Vermont*, a series of interviews with both dancers – their precise sense of what it is to improvise a life offering a close to this investigation in interior techniques.

EXHIBITION

CURATORS
Romain Bigé and João Fiadeiro
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PRODUCTION
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ASSEMBLY
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ASSISTANCE
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VIDEO PREPARATION
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Ray Chung
Cathy Weis
Ixiar Rozas
Walter Verdin
Jurij Konjar
Alice Godfroy
Trisha Brown Archives
Florence Corin and Baptiste Adrien
from Contredanse Éditions
Contact Quarterly
RE.AL
Thomas Lax
Delfim Sardo
Amélia Bentes
Bernardo Devlin
Vítor Rua

LISBON DANCE SCHOOLS

c.e.m.
Escola Superior de Teatro
Escola Superior de Dança
FOR
Fórum Dança
Faculdade de Motricidade Humana

A special thanks to the 42 Lisbon residents that accepted to be part of *Satisfyin Lover*.

GUIDED TOURS

ON SATURDAYS
9 MAR 17:00
with João Fiadeiro and Romain Bigé
27 APR, 18 MAY, 13 JUL 17:00
with Ana Gonçalves

LUNCH TIME
3 APR, 8 MAY, 5 JUN 13:00
with Ana Gonçalves

CONTACT IMPROVISATION CLASS
Every sunday, 11:00–13:00
By Rita Vilhena and guests
(20 people maximum / no reservations)

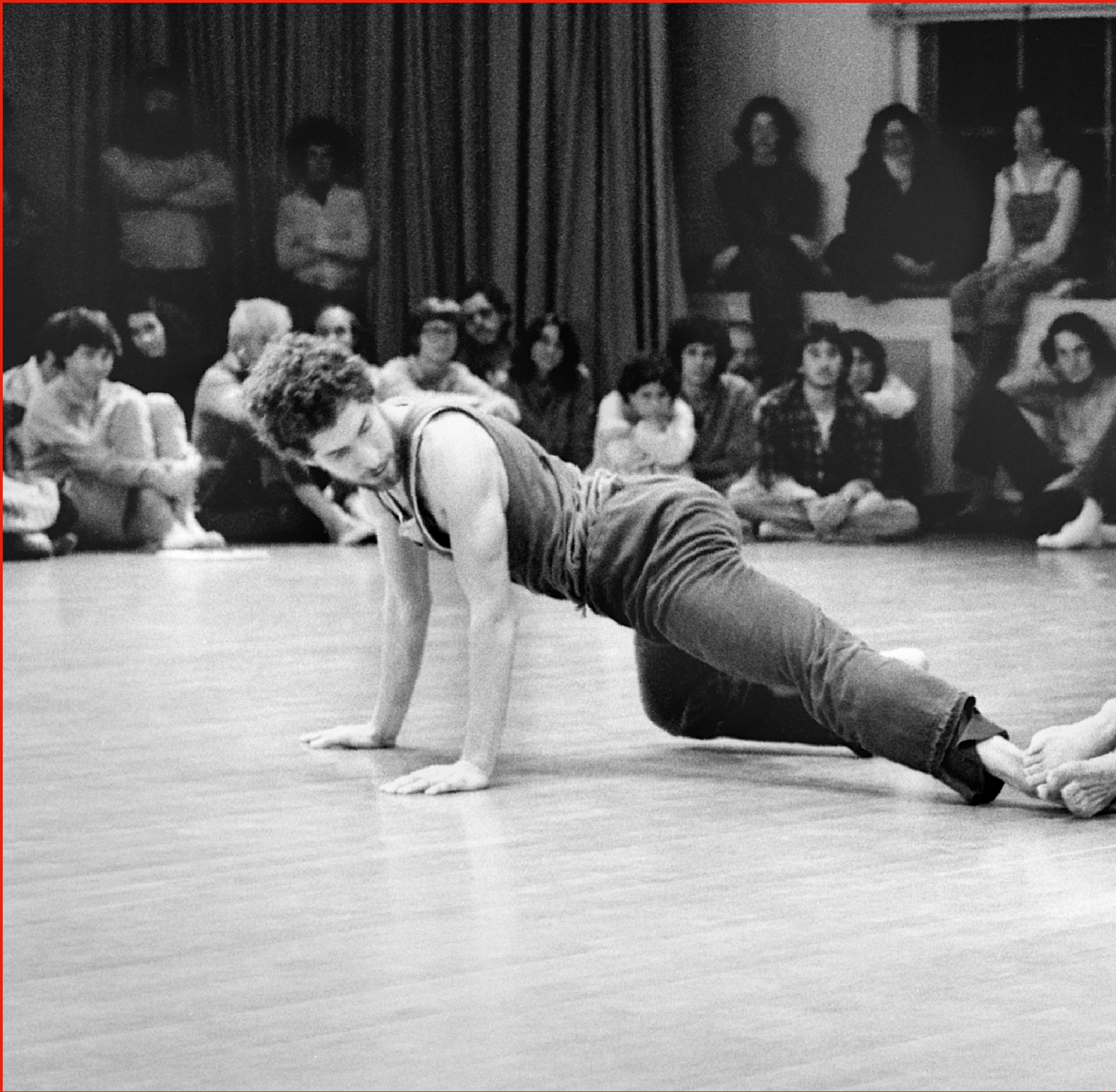
BOOKING AND INFORMATIONS
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TRAVEL SUPPORT







Dance x

STEVE PAXTON: FLAT + SATISFYIN LOVER

JURIJ KONJAR: GOLDBERG VARIATIONS (AFTER STEVE PAXTON)

09 MAR
SAT 19:00
Main Auditorium
Duration: 90 min
M/6

Talks and Debates x

Dance x

STEVE PAXTON CONFERENCE

10 MAR
SUN 18:30
Main Auditorium
Free entry

ON FLAT AND SATISFYIN LOVER

In the 1960s Steve Paxton participated in the Judson Dance Theatre, a collective adventure that became the laboratory for post-modern dance. He created dozens of scored-pieces, using simple timing or spatial instructions to look at ordinary movements.

In *Flat* (1964), he uses a “photo-score” to instruct the dancer (himself) simple gestures of dressing, undressing, walking and sitting around. In *Satisfyin Lover* (1967), 42 people go from stage left to stage right: a single passage – a chance to witness the postural uniqueness of each walker.

For Culturgest, Slovenian dancer Jurij Konjar will perform *Flat* and reenact *Satisfyin Lover* with 42 Lisbon residents.

ON GOLDBERG VARIATIONS Jurij Konjar

Some years ago I was looking for a way to enter and maintain a daily practice of my own. For me, “daily practice” meant an environment to get to know every day; some kind of structure, allowing entry into an open playground. After many misses, this structure came in the form of another dance work: a version of Steve Paxton’s improvisation to the *Goldberg Variations* by J. S. Bach, captured on video. I watched the video over and over again, trying to see what was beyond the apparent movement in Steve’s dancing; what was the un-grasp able, that never-the-less kept drawing my attention. Then I would try it in the studio, repeating, observing, and learn as I went along. Imagination, not knowing, repetition, and continuity were a few of the many essential parts of the process.

An integral part of the practice is that it keeps being reinvented, reacting to its own “need to know.” More than to lead, I tend to feed and follow that process. In it, everything can be used, nothing should be kept.

Another part of the practice explores the structure and functionality of the body, working on sequencing and strength. The best place to practice these is while dancing, often with a specific focus, using my dance training as much and as often as I can.

Though what I do manifests as dancing, the focus of the work is not dancing, or moving. I like to observe the processes that happen before and during the movement taking shape. I am here to feel, touch, guide, follow; take choices consciously as well as unconsciously; allowing the body to find a way, using whatever I might not be

consciously aware of at the moment. The physical me is there to disappear through taking care of its own needs, finding its own way. To be at the same time an equal partner in dialogue, a sensory experience, a part of the circle. The body is there to inform me of what is there to play with – the possibilities. It's a translator, an initiator, and a feedback system; a vessel, and everything. It doesn't begin with the flow of blood and end at the surface of the skin. If it is fully present and tuned, then it does not exist, it does not call attention to itself. In my experience, the tuning takes personal investment: concentration, work, and time. From what I know and what I hear from others, the process is never-ending, since it is not a place to arrive to but a place to observe and observe from, every day, neither beginning nor ending at the borders of the studio. Furthermore; it's a place that is different for each of us.

FLAT (1964)
FROM Steve Paxton
INTERPRETATION Jurij Konjar

SATISFYIN LOVER (1967)
FROM Steve Paxton
COORDINATION Jurij Konjar

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS (1986/2010)
CREATION, INTERPRETATION
Jurij Konjar
BASED ON THE WORK BY
Steve Paxton

LIGHT
Robrecht Ghesquiere
MUSIC
Goldberg Variations (Johann
Sebastian Bach), by Glenn Gould
(1981)
THANKS TO
Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson
PRODUCTION
Jurij Konjar
COPRODUCTION
Tanzquartier Wien
SUPPORT
Slovenia Ministry of Culture

© Hans Schubert



PROGRAMME MAR–JUL



DRAFTING INTERIOR TECHNIQUES	09 MAR - 14 JUL		
FLAT + SATISFYIN LOVER + GOLDBERG VARIATIONS STEVE PAXTON / JURIJ KONJAR	09 SAT	MAR	19:00
STEVE PAXTON CONFERENCE	10 SUN		18:30
OTHER WAYS OF SEEING #2 STEVE PAXTON	20-22 WED THU FRI		10:30,14:30
	23 SAT		16:00
FOUR LECTURES AROUND PAXTON			
ARE YOU DANCING NOW?	21 THU	MAR	18:30
SOLO DANCING, REALLY?	30 THU	MAY	18:30
WHAT IS MY BODY DOING WHEN I AM NOT CONSCIOUS OF IT?	06 THU	JUN	18:30
IS IT TIME TO ATTEMPT ANARCHY?	25 TUE		18:30
WORKSHOPS			
CONTACT-IMPROVISATION	04-07	JUN	10:00-16:00
DOING THE THINKING. THINKING THE DOING.	11-14		10:00-16:00
MATERIAL FOR THE SPINE	17-19		10:00-17:00
	20		10:00-13:00
WEEKLY CLASS CONTACT IMPROVISATION	MAR-JUN EVERY SUNDAY		11:00-13:00

Other exhibitions

**JOÃO
ONOFRE**

Visual Arts x

**ONCE IN A LIFETIME
[REPEAT]**

16 february – 19 may 2019
Galleries

IRMA BLANK

Visual Arts x

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29 june – 08 september
Galleries

Culturgest