

20/3/06

Dear LUTSF,

Please find attached a report, with supporting material, concerning my travel project to the USA in 2005 which was supported by a scholarship from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. The purpose of the award was to support a period of research and training in the USA including:

- 1) professional development in New York;
- 2) attendance at the School of Body Mind Centering;
- 3) meeting with Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson at their home in Vermont for discussion and research.

The report will expand on the following areas:

TIMESCALE AND SCHEDULE

Overall duration of project 30th June – 7th August 06

- New York: June 30th – 5th July: viewing venues, meeting with promoters and artists.
- School of Body Mind Centering, Northampton, Massachusetts: July 5th – 29th July: participating in the following courses: Senses & Perception 1 (6th -9th July); Basic Neurological Patterns (12th-19th July); Reflexes, Righting Reactions & Equilibrium Responses (22nd-28th July).
- Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson, Vermont; 29th July – August 7th: professional exchange and studio/landscape research.

OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Overall the project was very successful, particularly in the following areas:

- Making new professional contacts in both New York and at the School of Body Mind Centering, where the group was very international.
- Successfully completing three courses at SBMC which I am now integrating into my own teaching and practice.
- Inspired to engage further with Somatic Movement Education training in both Europe and again in Northampton, USA.
- A rewarding exchange with Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson which included excellent discussion about dance and wider issues, and creative practice.
- A very well planned project in terms of timescale and activities.

PARTICULAR HIGHLIGHTS

- All the SBMC courses, in particular the work concerning neurological patterns.
- Two excellent one to one sessions with BMC teachers Amelia Ender and Christine Cole-Cohen.
- Being taught by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and observing her work with children
- Observation of excellent SBMC group teaching and leadership.
- Interviewing Lisa Nelson about her work.
- Hard physical work on the farm with Steve Paxton, including learning to drive a tractor.
- Visit to Jacob's Pillow - historic landmark of American modern dance
- Visit to Bread & Puppet theatre in Vermont
- Greyhound internal coach service

SUGGESTIONS

- I would like to advise any future awardees who may be interested in attending the School of Body Mind Centering that the work is both physically and experientially demanding and, as such, requires experience and maturity. I would also advise that fairly extensive study of anatomy needs to be undertaken prior to any course.
- Make sure any equipment is compatible.

(I would be very happy for any future awardees to contact me about any aspect of my trip).

FUTURE PLANS

- To expand this report into a longer article for publication in one of the dance journals, or *Performance Research*. *Contact Quarterly* is also a possible context.
- To publish the interview with Lisa Nelson as part of a wider project (book of interviews) which I am currently co-editing titled *The Wise Body* concerning the experience and practice of mature

performers. An interview with Steve Paxton, undertaken at a different time, is also part of this project.

- Integrate the SBMC work into my own teaching and choreographic practice. After a series of highly successful workshops in the autumn 2005 at the Dance Research Studio which were supported by the Sasakawa Foundation I am in the process of designing an interdisciplinary training programme for dancers and actors to commence in spring 2007. The BMC work will support and integrate well into my own processes with voice and movement and cultural/intercultural gesture, and provide a useful structural model.
- To use my deeper understanding of sense and perception to resource my current choreographic work which will be premiered in January 07.
- I have had preliminary discussions with BMC teachers – Mark Taylor and Linda Hartley – about the possibility of BMC courses taking place at the Dance Research Studio, which I have offered to help organise

(I have included a CD of photographs for use by the LUTSF for purposes described in the contract; I have copyright of all photographs).

I would like to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for supporting this project. It was an extremely valuable and rewarding experience which will nurture my work for a very long time.

With best wishes
Jacky Lansley

Report for the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund from Jacky Lansley

A Visit to the East Coast

Introduction

Three years ago I acquired my own studio, Dance Research Studio, to support my work as a choreographer and contribute to the context of innovative dance practice and research. Part of my own development at the studio has been a desire to visit other independent studios, (in 2004 I visited and worked with Pauline de Groot at her studio in Amsterdam, where she has been based for over 30 years) and I made a decision to build into this new journey, which included study at the School of Body-Mind Centering and meetings in New York, a visit to Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson in Vermont to talk, maybe dance, and see their studio on their farm, which is surrounded by forest in Northern Vermont. During my trip I kept a diary, and this report is styled and based upon that process.

New York

I arrived at JFK airport on the 29th June 2005 with a large suitcase full of books, publicity packs, tapes and, hopefully, the right variety of clothes; I knew already that it was sweltering in New York. I was staying on the lower east side with my friend Vin, or Lavinia Co-op to friends and acquaintances in NY; I had always known him as Vin - for Vincent Meehan dancer, actor and cabaret artiste - whom I had met 30 years ago when we both studied at The Place in London. Vin is now also an Alexander teacher, and I attended one of his group sessions at a local studio, which was excellent. In New York my intention was to visit interesting dance spaces and venues, most of which I had been guided to by Steve Paxton during our previous email correspondence. Steve had very kindly contacted several venue promoters to pave the way for my re-entrance into NY as it had been a long time since I was last there. I did not get to see everyone I thought I should, but I did see spaces with a view to taking my own work ***Holding Space*** (premiered in the Clore Studio at the Royal Opera House, June 2004) which requires, as its title suggests, a distinctive and particular environment, and was delighted to see the beautiful studio theatre in St. Marks Church in-the-Bowery where Danspaceproject is based. The Artistic Director Laurie Uprichard was not there at the time but I had a very useful meeting with her associate Abby Harris, and have since had further useful correspondence with Laurie Uprichard.

I only had five days in New York, and I whisked around visiting Dance Theatre Workshop, Danspaceproject, The Kitchen, PSI, The Joyce Theatre and talked to people at Movement Research - an independent organisation which has been going since 1978 - and where *Movement Research Performance Journal* is produced which is committed to discussion about improvised work. Movement Research was inspired by a slightly earlier generation of artists involved in, for example, the Judson Group; it reminded me of Chisenhale Dance Space in London, which had been inspired by X6 Dance Space at Butler's Wharf.

Steve and I had both been founders of these earlier collectives and, although there are many differences including the decades in which they existed, we shared some interesting thoughts and comparisons. I managed to achieve all this useful networking while also walking around most of NY with Vin who proudly showed me his adopted city. We included a visit to Ground Zero; I wanted to see the real space, as opposed to the media space; it was very desolate and very moving. I said farewell to Vin on the 5th July, having also managed to watch a superb July 4th fireworks display with him on a friend's rooftop, and got a Peter Pan Greyhound bus to Northampton via Springfield.



School of Body Mind Centering, Northampton, Massachusetts

The School for Body-Mind Centering USA programme was based at the historic women's university Smiths College in Northampton, Massachusetts. I stayed in 'the dorm', which apart from poor cooking facilities was comfortable. I enjoyed the absolute focus on one area of research, it felt a luxury to give myself time to be a student again and work with teachers for whom I had complete respect. I was there for nearly four weeks and participated in the following courses: ***Senses and Perceptions 1; Basic Neurological Patterns; Reflexes, Righting Reactions & Equilibrium Responses***. The work was very

demanding in the sense that it is multi layered and deeply informed anatomically. I had some knowledge as I had worked on BMC approaches to voice and movement with Pat Bardi in the 80s, and attended workshops with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in London also in the 80s. Over the last 20 years I have been working with actors and dancers and have begun to formulate a training programme for the interdisciplinary performer. The profound work that BMC explores with voice, movement and breath is something I wanted to re-visit to support my own research. I also wanted to work at a deeper physical level for myself, and to take further my work with emotional embodiment. I found the teaching excellent, and the sessions that we had with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (she does not teach as much now) were illuminating, particularly observing her work with children. Soon after my arrival on the 7th July the London bomb attacks happened. I was the only Londoner and Bonnie, very appropriately, invited me to share my feelings with the whole group. The situation became an opportunity for everyone to explore their response to what had happened which was very helpful to us all. This was an example of Bonnie's fine and brave leadership. I made some good friends and professional contacts, while learning much. My own experience, too, was validated; on several occasions my knowledge of more creative and playful workshop processes was useful and liberating for the group, and gave me insight into the integration of BMC into my own work and practice. The courses I attended are part of the Somatic Movement Educator programme, which I will complete in Europe and a further visit to Northampton.

While I was in Northampton I visited Jacob's Pillow in Becket, Massachusetts which is a famous site of modern dance, and now a national historic landmark, founded by Ted Shawn in the 30s. This rural dance site set in beautiful forest in Massachusetts became part of a pioneering artistic movement on the East Coast. Bennington College is not far away, and Northampton which has had a continuous alternative history dating back to the 19th century, including college education for women, and the secular poetry of Emily Dickinson who lived and worked in near by Amherst which is now the home of the School of Body-Mind Centering founded by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in the early 70s, and where many BMC teachers live and practice. Jacob's Pillow is now somewhat of a tourist attraction, but its beautiful timber theatre, the Ted Shawn Theatre built in 1942, and its' outreach work are thriving. It is now a receiving house for American and some international dance companies who are on the more mainstream touring circuit; when I visited we saw, for example, the Mark Morris Company. Also at the centre is Blakes Barn, a gallery space filled with large framed photographs of renowned dance practitioners. One of the things I really appreciated is the respect shown to the great



pioneers of American modern dance. All the photographic portraits were of artists who had at one time or another performed/worked at Jacob's Pillow over the last 90 years or so (the Dennishawn company was established in 1915) I was very aware of absences, both men and women, those who seemed to represent a more recent alternativeness and had moved into places where they could continue profound exploration and research.

Steve Paxton & Lisa Nelson, Madbrook farm, Vermont

From Northampton and the deep and excellent work at the School of Body - Mind Centering which I now look forward to integrating and exploring within my own practice as a choreographer and teacher, delighting that I have a studio in which to do this precious work, I travelled on a Peter Pan bus to White River bus station in Vermont where I was met by Steve Paxton who had driven for two hours from his farm in Vermont to pick me up. It was good to see him and drive along the Connecticut River into Vermont with its beautiful hills and extensive forest. We stopped at St. Johnsbury a beautiful elegant small 19th century town on the Connecticut River; Steve drove along the wide central road flanked by quite large elegant wooden houses; we drove on through to Lyndonville also beautiful with a strange old fashioned quality, as though not much had changed in a century or two. On the traditional porches fronting all the houses I saw whole families enjoying the late afternoon sun, I suspect many of whom, sadly, were unemployed. We arrived at Island Pond the nearest small town to where Steve and Lisa lived, and parked; Steve wanted to visit a small organic market by the pond, he had lent a woman at the market a special knife and in exchange she gave us a beautiful apple pie (which triggered the making of several more pies at the farm by a variety of dancer types including myself).

Once settled at Madbrook Farm where I was sleeping in Steve and Lisa's studio which they built themselves over 7 years ago – a beautiful space built from the wood of an old timber barn - I began to enjoy the focus on small but important things. How the beans looked, what state the tomatoes were in, how to clean the garlic. I became aware that work needed to be constantly done on the farm, it was not appropriate for me to just observe - our choreographic 'text' became the gardening, the cutting of hay, the learning how to drive a tractor; and the walks in the forest daring myself to go a little further each time while wondering about the bears. I asked for tasks and was given the task of picking the potato bugs off the potato plants everyday. My main contribution was helping Steve clear a large field of cut hay behind the house. It was enjoyable but exhausting work, and I was aware of using different muscles! Steve works on the farm all the time when he is not touring, applying his physical awareness to simple repetitive tasks which keeps him very fit; it is, in a way, his personal 'training'.

One of the special delights of my visit was a reconnecting with Lisa Nelson. Lisa's office is above Steve's kitchen; it is quite a large room stacked with papers and images, most of which belongs to *Contact Quarterly*, a pioneering magazine conceived 30 years ago by a group of artists including Lisa Nelson and Nancy Stark Smith its current editors. The remarkable thing about *Contact Quarterly* is that it has kept going, unlike *New Dance Magazine* in the UK which stopped publication in the early 80s. As a consequence the magazine has a place, and places an area of work that would, perhaps, have a low profile within the current rather commercially driven world of dance. The magazine provides a platform for artists, not just scholars, to have a dialogue with each other and the world. In 2005 CQ celebrated its 30th year (Winter/Spring 2005 Volume 30 number 1) which is an amazing achievement. I talked to Lisa about the work involved in producing the magazine with her co-editor Nancy Stark Smith; they live quite far apart, Nancy in Northampton, and Lisa in north Vermont, they do not meet very often but both seem completely committed while also maintaining their artistic work.

Lisa and I also discussed improvisation and her work with scores, my processes, and the idea of a laboratory. We looked at the rather harsh division between improvisation and choreography, and both agreed that the division was a false one, and that the issues are complex and very interesting. Do improvisers (and I include myself) believe that art is part of what they do? Does improvisation (as the Dadaists believed) defy the quality of product? These, and others, were some of the questions we touched upon. Lisa generously gave me her time in the form of an interview broadly concerned with being a dancer and being older. I am transcribing this interview as I write. Lisa spoke very clearly about her early history and the major changes she has been through to her present focus. I was very moved listening to her speak about her life and work. She has been single minded and strong, symbolised by her present lifestyle on the farm where she lives in a wood cottage, which she built on the edge of a hill over looking a wild and thickly forested valley; It could not be a wilder place to live. Steve and Lisa did not seem to agree on whether or not bears were in close proximity – I think they were both trying to protect, advise and have a laugh – but I did not want to risk sleeping with the studio door open, as Steve suggested. When I walked in the forest I never saw a bear, moose or stag – but I did have a feeling of being watched. I had three glorious swims, one in a

forest mountain stream and two in Echo Lake with Lisa and her friends. East Charleston, their region, is on the edge of the great lake country, and Echo Lake, a small lake, is the nearest to the farm. On my last swim huge lightening crackled on the far side of the lake and it poured with rain, we kept swimming.



Before I left Steve took us to see **Bread & Puppet Theatre** in another outcrop of barns over the hill. Bread & Puppet Theatre is now an internationally recognised force of alternative puppetry, I had certainly known of them through my friend Peter Fluck, himself a puppeteer and founder of Spitting Image, but I had no idea that they were so close to Steve and Lisa. The puppets were displayed in an intriguing show with local performers, and also in barn galleries. It was a wonderful obsessive and grotesque spectacle; galleries full of giant puppets from previous shows in family groups with horrid offspring. The barns themselves were carved and painted with strange creatures and shapes; creativity was everywhere, it seemed as though the work - the process was

constant. Students of Bread & Puppet painting, carving, performing as though their lives depended on it. "ART IS FOOD. YOU CAN'T EAT IT BUT IT FEEDS YOU" (from a Bread and Puppet 'manifesto' poster).

On my last day I said good-bye to my friends and their neighbours while enormous blue dragon flies zoomed around, and the occasional humming bird was spotted. Steve drove me over the Canadian boarder to catch a bus to Montréal, and somehow in good tradition we managed to miss the bus. However there was another one, and we were able to have a cup of tea and enjoy the French Canadian accent of the waitress. Steve waved me off, giving proper time and weight to the act of waving. As the bus left Vermont I thought about Steve's extensive contribution to dance, and his great and pioneering project Contact Improvisation which, I feel sure, will continue to have a growing impact on wider areas of human experience. Steve and Lisa let me into their private lives with great generosity, and we shared something as dance people, mostly unspoken, that was special.

After Thoughts

This was an important trip for me at this mid point in my career, not least of all because I met many artists also in their mid careers who were thriving. The SBMC work was excellent, and has laid a foundation for further work and investigation into the embodiment of emotion and how this relates to dance training, and to my own choreographic practice. The exchange with Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson was a delight as, in the spirit of much great work, we focused on the invisible and the seemingly mundane. The encouraging aspect of my trip was the evidence of considerable 'independent' dance practice and many studios supporting it, not just in the USA but globally. I was nourished by a sense of a much wider international community of dancers and the idea that we were part of an even broader community with a very distinctive agenda, I am very grateful to the Lisa Ullmann Foundation for enabling this opportunity, it has, and will continue to have an important impact on my work.