

KAAI **THEATER**

SARMA & ORAL SITE **CONVERSATIONS IN VERMONT:** **LISA NELSON**

30/03/2018 • 19:00 • Kaaistudio's
publication launch • 90 min. • in English



EN *Conversations in Vermont: Lisa Nelson* is a digital artist publication and an online research resource that highlights the work and life of dance and video artist Lisa Nelson. It revolves around many hours of audio-recorded interviews with Lisa Nelson, conducted by Myriam Van Imschoot between 2001 and now. Their conversations zoom in on crucial aspects of Lisa Nelson's art making and teaching. Key notions such as 'stillness', 'attention', and 'image', give a specific insight into Lisa Nelson's practice, but also into dance making at large. Altogether this publication, made in collaboration with the artist, gives a rare overview of her prolific work and honors her fine-tuned ideas as they have been shaping the potential of the senses for action and composition in and outside of the realm of dance. Its legacy is felt in the practices of many artists.

To celebrate the launch of the publication and the text collection comprising 50 writings by and about Lisa Nelson, Sarma organizes an evening with contributions by Lisa Nelson herself, Jeroen Peeters, Myriam Van Imschoot and Tom Engels.

Additionally, dance artist and pedagogue Anouk Llaurens hosts *The Breathing Archive*, a workshop in which she invites you to collectively edit a poetic and ephemeral document based on a selection of texts from Sarma's anthology on Lisa Nelson as well as texts emanating from Llaurens' research on poetic documentation.

In 2019 Sarma and Oral Site will release the second chapter of *Conversations in Vermont*, which will focus on the work and life of dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton.

The publication can be accessed on www.oral-site.be and www.sarma.be

interviews Lisa Nelson & Myriam Van Imschoot | **editors** Lisa Nelson, Myriam Van Imschoot & Tom Engels | **dramaturgy** Tom Engels | **design & technical support** Julien Bruneau | **transcriptions** Kevin Fay & Kristien Van den Brande | **editorial assistance** Stéphanie Auberville | **production** Sarma | **co-production** Kaaitheater, STUK, Centre National de la Danse | **made possible with** the support of the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie

Introduction text to *Conversations in Vermont*

Dear reader,

We should have written 'dear listener', because that's what we invite you to do. To listen to a variety of materials which play a role in a publication giving stage to Lisa Nelson's and Steve Paxton's words.

Two years ago, we arranged for Myriam to go to an old farmhouse in Northeast Vermont. She arrived there with her boyfriend Marcus, a bag of 35 minidisks, playback devices, headphones, notebooks, and a suitcase that lacked 'warm' clothes, she soon found out. The weather up there can quickly change from hot to whimsically cold.

The plan behind this visit was to propose a publication. This implied to revisit a period of Myriam's life in the early millenium when she was not yet an artist working with voice, but active as a dance historian, working on a Ph.D. on improvisation (from the neo-avantgardes of the 1960s to the European flaring interest in improvisation in the 1990s), and found in Lisa Nelson and Steve Paxton her main interlocutors to explore this topic. We can trust them when they say that no one has ever interviewed them to such an extent, not before and not since. The 35 minidisks bear evidence of that commitment back then. They sprung from long interview sessions at Mad Brook Farm, the home to Lisa and Steve. They were never published, never put to public use, never quoted, never ever released into the public sphere. So the plan behind the visit was to investigate, together with Lisa and Steve, if that release could happen through Sarma and Oral Site, 17 years later, even though so many of the parameters had changed, leaning us to disagree with our previous selves.

In our culture the divide between the written and the oral runs deep. Even the advocates of speech in all its various outlets (radio, interview, etc.) may be challenged in the 'face' of these informal ambles, searchings, yet always passionate verbal improvisations. No doubt they constitute a 'treasure'. But why then is working with them so much like walking a thin line between 'nothingness' and 'something-ness'. How quickly can a sentiment of abundance and wealth tilt into its opposite, and the utterances redress themselves with their everyday banality, with words limpdancing around the voids and holes, ellipses, attempts, hits and misses. We don't even *like* our voices performing that dance—a common reaction when hearing our own voices, but rather problematic if you are going to put out 30 hours of that mediated voice. With this publication we invite you to walk the thin line with us.

As much as it was Myriam who was the one revisiting her past, it was Tom who discovered and excavated a past which was definitely not his, and which did not exactly correspond to the aesthetic paradigms which he grew up with. Why is this of relevance to you? Perhaps it's not and that's fine. Yet, stumbling upon this material might provoke a slight, but necessary rupture, or clear an untrodden path down the history of dance and its developments since the 1970s and onwards. As much as this is a historical project, which gives insight into the lives and makings of Lisa and Steve, these documents also unravel to a certain extent what it means to live a 'different' life up there in the North, what it might mean to think art unbound from immediate commodification and marketing skills, and how it has come about that today we talk so fondly about 'practice' in dance, choreography and art making at large. Or as Lisa once said: "I begged to differ."

And here parallel love stories unfold—just like we call this years-long interview project an ‘interview affair’—where not only the love for talking and upsetting narratives manifests itself, but also the love for sharing them and to make them public. To publish an archive which was at the risk of being forgotten might mean to realise that one might learn from narratives that are not grand or representational. Instead it evokes a will for thinking, often in an idiosyncratic manner, which runs counter to what it means to make art nowadays. It is indeed this parallel love story which lies at the heart of Sarma’s activity; an attempt to cherish the interstices of a field where knowledge often tends to be put to instrumental usage. Cutting this story and its history short, it is just like Lisa once wrote: “Look, but do not publish? Ah, then: to publish is to touch.”

Yours,
Myriam Van Imschoot and Tom Engels

Biographies

Lisa Nelson, a choreographer, improvisational performer, videographer, and collaborative artist has been exploring the role of the senses in the performance of movement since the '70s. From this investigation, she developed a radical approach to real-time editing, communication, and dance performance she named Tuning Scores. Through touring widely, and co-editing *Contact Quarterly* dance and improvisation journal since 1976, she was instrumental in the early development of a worldwide network of workshops for independent dance artists that integrate somatic training with artistic practice. She lives in Vermont, USA.

Myriam Van Imschoot lives and works in Brussels. She is mostly working with voice and sound as a vehicle for vocal performances in theater and the public space (*What Nature Says* in 2015, *HELfel* in 2016, *In Koor!* with Willem Dewolf in 2017). Since 2014 she has been engaged in projects based on the youyou and in participation with local performers. On 5 April 2018 her new film *Le Cadeau* premieres in Beursschouwburg. Van Imschoot was founder of Sarma (with Jeroen Peeters) and Oral Site (with Kristien Van den Brande).

Jeroen Peeters is a writer, dramaturge and performer based in Brussels. He has published widely on contemporary dance, performance, art theory and philosophy in various books and specialized media. Interested in documenting the ‘languages of making’, Peeters set up several dialogical projects with artists, which resulted for instance in a book in collaboration with Meg Stuart, *Are we here yet?* (2010). Recent publications include the book *Through the Back: Situating Vision between Moving Bodies* (2014) on spectatorship in contemporary dance, and the artist edition *We don't know what free jazz is* (2015). Forthcoming is the essay *Reseeding the Library, Gleaning Readership* (Afternoon Editions, Brussels). His current research focuses on ecologies of attention, embodied knowledge, material literacy and sustainable development.

Tom Engels works as an editor, curator, writer and dramaturge. He is part of the curatorial team of Sarma, the Brussels-based laboratory for discursive practices and expanded publication. As a dramaturge he recently worked with Alexandra Bachzetsis (CH/GR) and Mette Ingvartsen (BE/DK). His writings appeared in visual arts and performing arts magazines such as *De Witte Raaf* (BE), *Extra Extra Nouveau Magazine Erotique* (NL), *Etcetera* (BE), a.o. His curatorial project *another name, spoken*, was presented at Jan Mot Gallery (Brussels) in 2017. His new performance and lecture series *Matters of Performance* will run throughout 2018 at the School of Arts in Ghent. Engels is also active in different educational contexts like P.A.R.T.S. (Brussels), S.N.D.O. (Amsterdam), Centre National de la Danse (Paris) and the Schoof of Arts (Ghent). He himself holds degrees in art history (Ghent University) and Choreography and Performance (Institut für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft, Giessen).