

Warming up the Attention: Scores as Doors to Poetic Documentation

Anouk Llaurens

The two sides of touch

Close your eyes and use your hands to explore your environment. Let yourself drift, following your tactile interest. Continue what you are doing with eyes open, notice the difference. Close your eyes again. Now use your environment to explore your hands. Expand this exploration to the whole body. You can alternate touching and being touched, open and closed eyes, moving or being still.

Lisa Nelson

— Scan of Lisa Nelson's Score: *The two sides of touch*. Image taken after experiencing the *breathing archive*, in Amsterdam, November 2016.

Living is an on-going documentation practice. To state this, I first refer to cell memory and DNA that encodes the genetic instruction used in the development and functioning of all living organisms. Yet, the storage and transmission of information not only happen through generations but also on a daily basis: our nervous system records our perception, our experiences store them to support living, learning, and creating. Our perceptual apparatus can be seen as an organic and embodied 'documentation technology'. So, even if we are not aware of it, *we are very experienced archivists*. We not only spend our life documenting and recycling our experience to go on, we also invent documentation tools: pens, typewriters, video cameras, computers, etc. that we use as external extensions of ourselves, in order to record and store what we touch, see, feel, say, think, and imagine. The traces we produce with these tools are reflecting our sensorial, emotional, and mental activity. The more sensitive/attentive a person is, the more sensitive and singular documentation can be.

I am a dancer, a performer, a teacher, a researcher, and a shiatsu practitioner. Since I have encountered the work of Lisa Nelson in 1999, my dance practice shifted from exercising the body to exercising the attention. Now, I see the body as a vehicle for the attention and its dance as a reflection of its state of awareness. I am currently leading a research on poetic, polyphonic and multimodal dance documentation. At the beginning of this research my initial question was: *what if dance artists apply their perceptual, motor, mental, and composition skills to document their own practice?* I want to encourage documentation that emanates from our embodied knowledge so that our empirical perspective takes part in the creation of dance archives and dance history. Together with other artists, I experiment documenting with different media: drawing, writing, filming, and also performing as live documentation practice. The documents produced are a reflection of our sensitivity and state of attention.

I am researching on poetic documentation because *poetic experience* is my core interest – be it in the form of a dance, a text, a film, an object, a situation, or a document. For Georges Bataille, "The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strange and ourselves with it. It never dispossesses us entirely, for the words, the images (once dissolved) are charged with emotions already experienced, attached to objects which link them to the known."¹

The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strange. This kind of shift happens for me in the studio when, for example, I spend some time looking at things and people around me. Suddenly, everything is beauty; the old piece of bread crust that lies under the table becomes the most incredible sculpture, people around me are composing the most exquisite choreography. Nothing has changed but I see it differently. Everything is organized, in order, at the right place. Since the *poetic* happens when I pay attention to details, attention is what makes the ordinary extra-ordinary; it is a door to poetic experiences.

For my contribution to this publication, I want to bring forward the intimate connection between attention, poetry and poetic documentation. To engage us into practice, I have chosen simple scores as warm up for the attention, which I am playing with myself. I also invite you to play before or during documenting your dance experience or your dance class. I propose fourteen scores organized in three groups. The first one addresses breathe, spine, and global presence; the second visual and tactile perception; and the third relation to objects and

recording machines. These scores originate from Somatics and meditation practices, Odile Duboc, Lisa Nelson, and myself. Scores of Lisa Nelson in particular are perfect interfaces between dance and documentation. (Lisa was a dancer before becoming a videographer, who then went back to dance again). They are deconstructing perceptual and motor skills necessary to see, to frame a visual experience, or to interact with objects. They are sharpening visual perception (focused and peripheral), tactile perception and support a more sensitive inter-action with objects/tools like pen, paper, clay, photo or video camera.

These scores have been transmitted to me orally. I have not seen any of them on paper. Probably some have never been written down. I have transcribed them in my own words, through the filter of my interest and memory. Following the advise of my peers I have also given them titles. I hope these scores will help you, as they help me, in your own and unique documentation process. Diversity is today more than ever a matter of survival and as Felix Guattari advised already in 1989, in *The three ecologies*: "Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different."²

Scores

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Breath, Spine and Global Presence

Imprint

Lie on the floor in any comfortable position and close your eyes. Imagine that you are resting on a warm and malleable surface: it can be earth, clay, sand, else. You can relax into this matter and imagine that your body makes an imprint into it. Start to scan yourself from feet to head or head to feet. Visualize the depth and the width of the imprint that your feet, heels, lower legs, knees, thighs, pelvis... are making in the warm matter. When you get to your head visualize all of your body and its global imprint. If you feel like it, find another position and repeat the same process. Acknowledge the end, open your eyes and see what you see.

— Odile Duboc

Underlying Pulse

Lie on the floor in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to the movement of your breath. Notice how your body inflates, expands, lightens up when you breathe in and deflates and meets the floor more intimately each time you breathe out.

Acknowledge that you are made of trillions of cells that are also breathing: inflating and deflating, expanding and condensing, touching each other and exchanging information through their porous membranes. Spend a moment paying attention to this subtle internal pulse. Let it expand and contaminate the entire body, reaching the extremities and less visited areas. When you feel ready open your eyes and see what you see.

— Adapted from *somatic practices* and *meridian stretching*

Wide-Awake

Sit comfortably on the ground, on a cushion or a chair. Let your legs and pelvis melt into your support. Let the spine rise up from this anchor. Bring your attention to the caress of the air entering and exiting through your nose. Pay attention to the space of emptiness and rest in between exhale and inhale. Let the body decide when to breathe in again. Pose in between inhale and exhale and let the energy fill up the entire body. Breathe out and let go completely. After 20 minutes open your eyes, sense what touches you and what touches your retina.

— *Meditation practice*

Branching Out

Bring your attention to your spine from your coccyx to the top of your head. Follow your appetite for movement and stillness. The spine is the most central and articulated limb of the body. It protects the spinal cord and connects the three masses: pelvis, rib cage,

and head, which protect vital organs themselves. Notice how the spine is branching out into the arms and legs, the hands and feet. You can alternate exploring eyes closed and eyes open.

— Anouk Llaurens

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Visual and Tactile Perception

Take Your Eyes For a Ride

Look at your right hand. Let your hand move and follow it with your eyes. Change hand. Continue with your eyes closed. Are you breathing? Open your eyes. Look at your hand, look behind your hand, look at your hand again. Alternate eyes closed and eyes open; movement and stillness.

— Lisa Nelson

The Eyes' Desire

Look at the space around you. Follow your visual interest, and let it move you through the space. You can get closer or take distance; zoom in and zoom out. Resist the temptation to take things with your hands. Let the whole body adapt and move to support your eyes' desire.

— Lisa Nelson

Compose Your Visual Field

Lie on your back with your eyes closed. Take a moment to pay attention to the movement of your breath. Open your eyes and see what composes your visual field. Start to gently move your eyes in their sockets, notice what enters and what exits: parts of yourself, part of the

room, parts of other people and objects present next to you. Engage progressively your head in the movement, then your entire body and play with composing your visual field following your interest.

— Lisa Nelson

Enter and Exit

Bring your attention successively on your shoulders, your arms, your hands, and your fingers. Follow your appetite for movement and stillness. Then play with your hands entering and exiting your visual field, alternating between eyes open and eyes closed. Notice the hands' capacity for articulation, and notice their expressivity. What if they are two characters composing with one another, in and out of your frame of vision?

— Lisa Nelson

My Visual Field Is My Window to the World

Take a window marker. Place yourself in front of a large window. Your nose should be almost touching the surface. Notice the limit of your visual field and draw its contour paying attention to details. Step back and look at the shape of your visual field.

— Anouk Llaurens

The Skin Is the Most External Layer of the Brain

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your skin. Remember to breathe. Lungs and skin are deeply connected. Move gently and use your environment: floor, objects, people, clothes, air, and temperature to give sensation to your skin. Try to stay at the surface. Notice when you engage into deeper tissue. Continue your exploration with your eyes open. What touches your retina?

— Lisa Nelson

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— Lisa Nelson

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Relation to Objects and Recording Machines

Paper Frame

Take an A4 sheet of paper, cut it in four and keep one of the quarters. Cut a small rectangular hole in its center and use this paper frame to look at your surrounding as if you were making a movie.

— Anouk Llaurens

Camera as Object

Take a camera, close your eyes and explore it as an object. Get in touch with its weight, temperature, texture, and shape. Now continue with your attention on how the camera is touching you. Open your eyes and continue playing with the materiality of the object while following your visual interest and filming the activity around you.

— Anouk Llaurens inspired by Lisa Nelson

Cyborg Camera

Use a camera as an extension of yourself to visually explore your environment. Notice what enters and exits the frame. How does your body and attention compose your frame? How does the frame compose your body and attention? You can decide if /when you want to push the record button and if you want to take fragments or continuous shot. (You can play this score with a sound recorder as an extension of your ears.)

— Anouk Llaurens inspired by Lisa Nelson

NOTES

1. Bataille, George (1988). *The Inner Experience*. New York: Suny Press. p.5
2. Guattari, Felix (2000). *The three ecologies*. London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press. p.69