

Interviewee: Lucia Walker (LW), Alexander Technique and Contact Improvisation Teacher.  
Lucia describes her work as: *teaching the voluntary act of moving your attention*.  
Interviewer: Nicola Visser (NV)

**“..of ready”**

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Nicola Visser (NV): Can I record on microphone, I don't have a zoom subscription?

Lucia Walker (LW): Yes that's fine.

LW: Your questions about vision .....

NV: I forget what I wrote to you but perhaps it is simply: what are the treasures of the eyes in your practices?

LW: Well, there is quite a lot. And it's interesting that you remembered this one that I had been working with (peripheral vision). There are a few little anecdotes. One is that I went to one big contact festival where there were other people teaching and it was one of those synchronous things I have often noticed in the contact world. Even if people have nothing to do with each other - and certain topics arise - and everybody had stuff about vision in their classes, which I had never come across before. And this was already quite a long time ago. I had been working somewhat with some stuff with vision for a long time with separate eyes and that kind of thing and I can say it was almost my favourite kind of teaching with some colleagues who were...one was a trained Bates teacher. You know about Bates ?

NV: Is that about working with eyes?

LW: Its in a whole field called Natural Vision

NV:.. Yes

LW: There is Bates and Janet Goodrich. And loads of people. And Bates was contemporary with Alexander. And also Aldus Huxley wrote - who was a student of Alexander's at the time. He wrote this very old book and was very into Bates. His book is called *The Art of Seeing* which is a little more accessible than Bates's which is technical and dense - which is all about relaxing the eyes basically. The eyes *function best* when they are *relaxed and interested*. And that is so interesting for me - that is like all of us - like children and like us dancing. That's kind of metaphorically has enhanced my teaching. I am always calling it, whatever I am teaching: CALM AND LIVELY, EASE AND ENERGY, RELAXED AND INTERESTED. You know, what is that? And it is about the nervous system and the integration of the parasympathetic and sympathetic parts to presence So there was that

theme. And then I did some retreat style workshops with these colleagues which we called *Being, Seeing, Moving*. And that was Alexander technique and vision stuff. And I maybe even told this little story. But I would say it was my - -with Alexander work and dance work - I hadn't been great one for enormous Aha moments. It's been much more of a gradual learning and shifting. Some people have these big wow moments - especially with Alexander work - and I had one with vision, which was on one of these workshops, where one of the practices that you refer to is seeing in the periphery for sure but practising seeing movement in the environment when you move too. Because of course as soon as we move the environment moves. But when I was first given this idea I couldn't see it. I couldn't make that flip in my brain to say the environment is moving - not me.

NV: And did you ?

LW: I did. And this particular moment I was dancing outside on my own. We were in an exploration. And I worked for a long time as all movers do with peripheral vision, we have to. That's where you experience movement most and connect to other dancers and sport of course they are ...they have it in sport i think. In this particular instance I was moving and it was fairly fluid, and there was suddenly a little flip and I really allowed the world to move. And the experience was a little bit freaky. It was like my whole body turned to water. The freedom of movement was like, a bit shocking. It wasn't bits moving - it was complete fluidity.

And so after - of course - you don't have that moment over and over again. But I do realise and my colleague would describe that when we get stressed or over-focused or any of those things - we lose that, even at the most basic level, that widened vision. That peripheral sense of what is around, above, behind, inside you. So I have been looking for ways to practise that. And in movement i am not even sure, this then leads on to something else perhaps. I am also very intrigued looking at dancers that there is a big tendency to look inside. In somatic practices you see a sort of thing like hooding of the eyes - they are looking in - which is different to the theatrical over - looking out - looking at. And so I have been playing with it and not knowing if it is possible - to have - especially the sense of touch, so of the ground - of your own proprioception, position and movement AND vision all at once. When I do, I get a sort of three dimensional presence and that's what I see. It's a sort of a practice and yet I don't know if you can actually maintain that. While all the time moving.

NV: mmm

LW: That used to be what brings presence.

NV: And that is what you said earlier - something to do with the parasympathetic and the sympathetic..

LW: mmm

NV: Can you talk a little more to that - where it reaches a sense of presence that you mention?

LW: I am going to go another one first and come back to that

NV: Yes

LW: Which is the..... you raised it about softening the eyes and including the periphery. And I found that - well there is this other guy - who had done a lot of work with Alexander technique and vision, Peter Grunewald. He has a thing about personality types and the brain and all sorts of things like that . But I think that one of the things I learned - learning about the eyes, and it is sort of obvious, is that: it is not focused vision OR peripheral vision - peripheral vision is everything you are not focusing on. So it's both at once. However when you are moving fast especially or a lot, you can't direct focus on things. You don't have that sort of focus. So I am kind of interested in that - perhaps that is why people go into a sort of zoning out.

There is something very strong in Bates. Something extremely bad for the eyes is something he called STARING . And staring both means this over focusing that we associate with it but it's also like that thing of zoning out - thats also called staring.

NV: Why ?

LW: Because the eyes fix. They stop being interested and lively and moving - and receiving.

NV: mmm

LW I will come back about the sympathetic. It's also why we called it *Being Seeing Moving*. There is sort of obvious parallel between BEING and DOING, and SEEING and LOOKING. And we want both of them but everybody knows there is a sort of an emphasis in life on looking and doing and we have to practise and do endless things. Which is more on the receptive side of being and seeing, and seeing is a receptive act, and looking is a more active act.

NV: I have learnt a little from BMC -that the motor neurons emerge from the front of the spinal cord and the sensory nerves enter from the back - so a sense of receiving vision and going to fetch as a motoric act attending to the front of the body.

LW: I am interested to know more about the back. I would like to hear more about that. I don't know it, but I do know we use it, but maybe you do there, and I find it helpful in my work. It's that you don't see with the eyes - you see with the brain. The visual cortex is back here. So you think of receiving and then into the whole nervous eye system and the breaking is connected to the whole nervous system —so —I think I used the words sympathetic - its not very technical, its more metaphorical that sympathetic is the active ready to go version on the fight or flight possibilities and the parasympathetic is the rest digest soften. What people look for in somatic dance things, and used to go so far that way that there is a sort of, that kind of moving and softening

NV: mmm

LW:.. and that for me, is presence, a peak state. Also flow. Those kind of things are when those two things come together so thats why. You know semi supine - called semi or constructive rest. It is not rest-rest. It is rest-wakeful and playing is play relaxly not frenzied -

and both these practices help feed each other to that state which you really need - in improvisation - of ready.

NV: of ready

LW: of ready

NV: If you take that to the role of witnessing - that active role of witnessing - what are some of the supports you might use for seeing in that way?

LW: Well one of my kind of, you must have done it with me, it's a desert island activity. With Alexander Technique and all movement classes. It is witnessing through touch: receiving and or vision or sensing movement. I am told it's used a lot in the retreat workshops too because it is such a good practice for teaching (witnessing) as it's such an important thing to be able to (as one colleague put it) to *behold* someone rather than *be-doing* things to them or for them or at them. So ...In terms of the vision. Well it's that same thing of being relaxed and interested and receptive to what is going on and not going to sleep and not being over controlling or catching with the eyes. ...there was something else I was going to say ...oh that this practice of touching is a kind of witnessing also. And being witnessed. This colleague that I am staying with is just writing a book in Spanish unfortunately - about the connection between Alexander Technique and Non Violent Communication. And for me witnessing is very like empathy.

Witnessing is a form of empathy

Which is very nourishing for people. I mean we know that - being witnessed.

I think this is not an answer to what you are saying - its a sidebar - the interesting thing is that when you work as in Authentic Movement with eyes closed or eyelids closed - It's not about shutting your vision off.

NV: What is it about ?

LW: It's quite an interesting thing. It is about and for most people it does quieten the nervous system to close your eyes. If it doesn't encourage people to open them and open them often for some people it causes anxiety - but for most people it brings some relief - that is different though to the witnessing role. That is in the moving role

*Except that I am sure you agree , that part of the practice in those two roles is that you can learn to witness yourself. And that of course is a very hard thing to put language around - because you are not separating yourself when you witness yourself - you are just - yourself your higher self or something else. But you are not disembodimenting so the language is sometimes quite hard.*

NV: there is about ten minutes on zoom

LW: yes

NV: Just yesterday , my body was thinking. I was witnessing and somehow a space opened up in me from which to witness. It kind of - there was no - it was a feeling space. It held the space and my space became .....(no word - gesture - round)?

LW: It's a nice thing to say. As you said it, I realised that we do have to practise that - and how like with empathy - that finding - I don't know - an aggravated or emotional or some strong state. It is much harder to witness and to receive someone else.

And that is often what I want to say with hands on stuff, or if you are doing active witnessing - as in moving in anyway to witness - what I notice people often do or what I often say is - *don't move so much - that your system is more interested in you* - that is what happens - and that is what happens if you are over-emotion - what you want to *do is move enough (for your system) to stay interested in them*.

NV: Yes and there was something about moving as a support mechanism for the release of the eyes. There is also a trap for the early witness I think. The good witness of a yoga class - back straight - and a staring quality to the posture. But when, even just this activity - when touching under the eyes, brings into the back space, a recline into a light release.

LW: Touching the eyes brings you to the back space?

NV: Yes, my experience. I made it up a little bit - into a thing to do, by following the experience of it. I don't know whether it is about being short sighted and peering so that it is a tactile reminder. The same effect can come from pressing around the orbits, the muscles and things like that.

LW: I also encourage not so much the timed Authentic Movement thing. I encourage people to witness in the peripheral and direct vision.

NV: Yes. exactly - exactly. I have taken a lot of enjoyment from Barbara Dilley's eye practices (explains).

LW: They sound familiar ...the lineages all are working on it in different ways. 'Infant eyes' is an interesting one: Relaxed and interested. Babies are also able to hold a focus - which I love and sometimes parents get embarrassed by the children, but they just look at you for a long time, right into the eyes. Especially under one.

NV: Yes it's kind of like just looking at a landscape - not looking with a demand or a request that you want something returned. It's just looking.

LW: yes exactly - and *that's what you mean by 'holding space' which is how do we practise?* In Alexander Technique the term is borrowed from Buddhism and it is '*non doing*'. and it was here in Argentina. I taught Contact and nearly everyone had a lot of experience of Alexander Technique, either teachers or long term students. And the quality of movement was so particularly what I loved. It was like non-doing dancing - people weren't trying to make something happen, but allowing what happened. Which wasn't like nothing happening. Which is a place I can go to - the other side - which is like dropped.

NV: That is such an interesting inclination to go to that place of dropping out full into gravity or staying with and shifting weight.

LW: I have been playing with that a little bit. When you said about the meditation posture being a bit too much. I have been playing with: Is it possible or how is it possible to change

your tone at a subtle level while sitting up? In it's extreme it is collapse. And we want somewhere in between. I often use the metaphor - of when you see a child or an animal get interested in something- their whole tone changes. The interest changes the tone and can we make that voluntary? So you go - 'oh its getting too soft and down - can I turn up my interest?'

You can, especially with the eyes. Or if you are falling asleep - look at things- look at things find colour in something - you don't look at things when you are asleep and the opposite - when your are anxious or strung out or over focused - soften to the periphery - or go to touch more. As touch seems to be that back space.

NV: I have a suspicion that touch would bring one back as well.

**LW: Its attention - its the voluntary act of moving your attention .** This is probably what my teaching is most concerned with

NV: the voluntary act of moving attention

*LW: Ja noticing stuff but choosing what you notice, and noticing it with more discernment and not in order to do something about it.*

It's a really hard thing about Alexander Technique - because when people come it's a different way of learning - it's more like Waldorf or Montessori for adults - you want to be in the environment and see what there is. It's not about: 'oh my shoulder and I must fix it'. So there is constantly a fix-it attitude which is what Authentic Movement really helps to undercut.

NV: Yes. A fixing attitude can go in so many ways

LW: It's how we are wired and how we learn

(.....new recording...zoom timed out)

NV: We were talking about the fixing attitude in dance and finding ways not to.

LW: You can still have a learning objective - or a wish - or a quality wish or an interest. It doesn't have to be completely open. There can be a focus. And that is not about a fixing or an effort-ing to get that.

Something about the back space - in Alexander Technique work there is a lot of emphasis about the '*phrases being in the back*' - *no one knows what that means* - old style Alexander - which is what the teacher helps constantly tending to - and you were saying something about BMC.

NV: Was it phrases being in your back or back space?

LW: In your back - Alexander Technique - but in moving I would be aware of being in the backspace. There is also the *8 corners of the room* exercise for movers. An instant calming

for performer anxiety. When you are standing there ready. Bring your awareness to the eight corners of the room and suddenly ...I can feel it - it places you architecturally in a system of support. And I think that is the same as the back space.

NV: ja. I can feel it as you say it. I can send you a video clip of the sensory nerves in the spinal process from the back (BMC).

LW: Yes, a neurology thing.

NV: She (BMC) did something that I tried the other day. It is useful for anyone really, it was useful for me, but I am mostly working with people with no Dance training.

LW: There is a lot of information - we did a course with Dr Daly Mason - called the *Neurobiology of Everyday Life* about the brain - and Sharron has done a hugely helpful something called educational neuroscience - and that whole thing about motor cortex and different cortexes - and you mentioned wanting more of that. I am not sure how much I have to go down this route. Some of the information does undermine the old ways of thinking. That you can program yourself or that the mind is controlling your thinking. That we have in our cultural thinking - getting up to date information does seem to help. Its catching up with the somatic teachers and the Alexander and Feldenkrais Teachers who knew all this before. That's not how it works - but we are in body-mind-space.

NV: When you spoke about your body turning to water, and that shift in your perception, I thought about something I have been reading about quantum theory. We are constantly scattering into space and space is imploding into us - being informed as we move. A bit of a mind swirl ...

LW: There was a similar experience on that same workshop where we did a similar practice. It was more like a meditation. Really you are focusing with interest into one thing. And I definitely had the most extraordinary experience of disappearing into everything. I mean spiritual disciplines have known this for a long time. My colleagues named it '*a connected state of being*' and how you practise getting there within this. We don't necessarily live there but it is something sort of extraordinary.

But that is maybe another query I have in my own work. In Japan - when I ask people what struck them first about Alexander work they say it is usually as a result of being touched in a particular way and several people would say. 'It was like I disappeared'.

*That is presence* and the strange thing is that many of us are constantly looking at becoming more and more aware of our sensory experience in order to disappear. In order to disappear, not in order to be aware of it all the time.

NV: Exactly this. What are the conditions we can practise for the disappearing? Because it does not come with a switch.

LW: Ja, no it doesn't, so..I thought is this an appropriate strategy if that's what you want it seems to be. There is something about taking yourself out of normal or habitual ways of things- and taking the—because in Authentic Movement of course, the quiet radical information is- that if you don't want to move then don't move. And I have known some

colleagues - the straight laced types - who did join - because they heard that invitation of just going to sleep - yes - I thought I would lie down and just go to sleep and he didn't in the end, and he followed the wish or the idea.

NV: The line of flight or the desire

LW: That is another paradox which I would love to hear your way of inviting. We are interested in consciousness - how do you then 'follow your whim' - how do you not get lost in your movement and then follow that desire - with awareness, anyway....that's where practising witnessing is important.

NV: I think that is where the Buddhist invitation of not holding too tight and not holding too loose is useful . Even now of tension - I don't have a straight answer, but i do love Barbara Dilley's thing which is kinaesthetic delight - really delight in the movement -  
oh oh

and what I have been doing lately - something about surfing - more for myself - for myself I think about surfing. It's you moving, the wave moving and today you are making a third thing together - and I love it - that is my disappearing - when my brain is surfing with my body - whatever is happening is unravelling. I don't pull it along - it opens as I move into it. For me the exciting bit is the material of the body is making decisions wherever it wants to make it and surfing with the decision that is arising. I love that.

LW: Yes exactly and in my mind listening, is talking to Kristi (Simpson). And I think I told you ages ago that this 'soften and lively' came from a workshop that I did and taught with her - many years ago - and when we were planning it - we were planning all she said was ' all i really want to do is soften them up ' And I said: 'all I really want to do is wake them up' and since then what I really want is both those  
to be in and she is talking about the softening again and it is a particular quality  
And the other thing I can't quite remember she taught on a workshop in Thailand  
its about connection. That the practice makes you able to be connected to other people and the world and everything and that is sort of the same thing as what you were describing as the surfing you are describing. You can't do it on your own - yet - you are all you've got to work with.

NV: Yes what is it about being seen that makes it so?

LW: ja

NV: Do you find that if you were to try Authentic Movement .. I mean we can get there - where is there? - is it the disappearing - it's so different to go to that place alone or with a witness.

LW: I barely do anything alone. If i do something alone it is likely to be a form you know - or i might - encourage people to do it with music to move alone. No, I don't I do one:one or one:group even online with theatre students. I do a lot of what I call 'microdancing' and I might do a little bit of that alone

When I berate myself for not doing movement practice I might do something like - if everything was called dancing - when walking the dog - or doing housework - what if I put



some kind of choreographic awareness to that or movement awareness to that - now I think it is completely different. Although the practice helps you to witness yourself. I notice if someone comes into the contact jam with a camera - it affects me. Mostly positively. I think ooop. Oh yeah —there is a possibility I will be seen. It wakes something up in relation to the outside space.

NV: Do you think it is possible to be witnessed by nature?

LW: Yes definitely. I have gotten to think about that when I was teaching online in Japan last year. It reminded me - there was a young man who might have been a piano player - he found it hard to practise without an audience. He wasn't doing any performing. I suggested let the furniture, let the walls, let the other things in the room be your audience. And it made a big difference. Ah yeah of course, of course we can.

NV: At first it is an intentional act - but then at some point you can just sense it happen - sometimes when I walk in a forest - its easy to feel.

LW: I am doing this little - I haven't done much - I am intending to do it more formally - I call it FOUND STAGES. You do need a person to hold the phone and I hope to invite more people . But when out and about suddenly you might see something and go - oh its a stage - and doing a dance on it - it started in Cornwall - doing a dance on an old tractor bed - and then there is a big stone in the forest - a hole under a tree.

And in a way I did not do any considering - I thought I would just go in there and mess around and then there was a huge pile of big plastic hay bales in Cornwall. I am intending to do more - and there is - there is a space on which I might perform - definitely a sense of a stage. I can whatsapp to you.

LW: We have been thinking a lot about fascia as well - 'strolling under the skin' video - hyper-magnified fascia - like liquid goopy spider webs- its interesting.

NV: And that happens in the periphery and the whole body is with it. It was that video that I loved the word 'tensegrity'.

NV: Just one comment really. When you talked about the focused interest in the flower and dissolving into everything - to be soft and awake- it is interesting what is interesting to people. How we are entrained to see and we put things in a hierarchy - and the invitation is to undo that -a political thing that happens.

LW: Yes exactly - for me that - that was probably part of the workshop - colour is interesting to us and movement is interesting to us - go back to the baby - and so is expression - faces - but the visual cortex capacities are light and dark, colour, movement , shape and depth perception- as we have two eyes - things aren't flat if two eyes are working. But I notice that if I have not two eyes my brain makes it up - it is another practice to not see things as flat, and to see things as not flat and that give YOU more dimensionality!

NV: You talked about active witnessing

LW: I have only once done an official workshop in Authentic Movement and it was a week Susan Schell and in this week it was very profound - she just witnessed the whole group - it was interesting. And then she had categories of field witness and personal witness - and sometimes we did that in a group - and then the other one was active witnessing - you are moving in order to witness. And that is close to many exercises that we would do in an improvisation - I have always done that. Like go along just paying attention to someone else rather than yourself. And I don't in a way- I like it but it's quite challenging because your movement becomes more interesting with another person. They had this in relation to empathy and pain. If you are in a lot of pain you are almost incapable of listening to another person - you have to put it aside or deal with it - emergency self empathy otherwise you can't help another person. I think it is the same with movement - if you are totally fascinated with what you are doing you don't have the attention space for another person's movement.

NV: I recall something Susan did. I think we were in 3s. One move, one witness, one field -who started off touching the back of the witness.

LW: Doesn't matter where it comes from - it sounds great. I did one with Miranda Tufnell - she did one where you witnessed someone and you let it affect you. You go in with that information into that space - without letting it be a totally separate thing. There is a lot of things there. This whole thing about holding space - is about being able to choose a state that then affects another state because of a resonance.

Something Sharon has been doing with the trust technique with the dog - no overwhelming of their will - just joining and inviting to things - it is very beautiful and it could be a good application for people as well .

NV: There is so much Lucia, in the best of ways

LW: I am happy for some more for more exercises - it gets simpler and simpler - how to practise those things and what kind of forms. And Authentic Movement has a nice structure or score and that often supports people - not everybody - I notice that with teaching - when I don't tell people what to do, some find it unnerving.

NV: That is what I have understood when watching the unnerving - is to offer a jetty of invitation. When I imagine the open space being like a lake - the invitation is a jetty. So I can come back to it - like my eyes, keeping it very simple - it's been interesting teaching where english has to be kept simple - very intelligent people coming but it's more the overload of words - because words have a physical resonance.

LW: Do you speak danish ?

NV: Not yet. I struggle.

(End)

