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INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS MEDITATION  
IN A CREATIVE PROCESS IN DANCE

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BY  
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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

L'INTÉGRATION DE LA MÉDITATION DE LA PLEINE CONSCIENCE  
DANS UN PROCESSUS DE CRÉATION EN DANSE

MÉMOIRE  
PRÉSENTÉ  
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE  
DE LA MAÎTRISE EN DANSE

PAR  
MONICA COQUOZ

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche-cr  ation examine l'influence de l'int  gration de la m  ditation de la pleine conscience, issue de la tradition bouddhiste Theravada, dans un processus de cr  ation en danse contemporaine. Elle tente   galement de discerner quelles facettes du soi ont   merg   au cours de ce processus,    savoir ce qui a surgi dans le corps et le c  ur/esprit de la chor  graphe/interpr  te/chercheuse, gr  ce    un processus d'auto-observation rigoureux. Enfin, l'  tude cherche      lucider si (et comment) l'int  gration de la m  ditation de la pleine conscience dans le processus de cr  ation a contribu      un plus grand sens de l'  p  rience pour la chor  graphe/interpr  te/chercheuse tout au long du processus.

M  thodologiquement, la recherche a   t   inspir  e par la m  thode heuristique, l'autopoiesis et la pleine conscience. Le processus de cr  ation a eu lieu pendant neuf semaines et a   t   soutenu par trois yeux ext  rieurs distincts. Le travail final, un solo de 30 minutes ayant pour titre « Being with the unknown » a   t   pr  sent   devant un public quatre soirs de suite en septembre 2015    Montr  al. La collecte de donn  es s'  st compos  e du journal de bord de la chercheuse, compl  t  e par un entretien d'explicitation et des enregistrements vid  o des r  p  titions et des repr  sentations. Pour l'analyse des donn  es, la chercheuse a employ   l'analyse th  matique et l'analyse en mode   criture.

Les r  sultats de l'  tude ont montr   que l'int  gration de la m  ditation de la pleine conscience a influenc   quatre composantes du processus de cr  ation: 1) l'interpr  tation pendant les r  p  titions et les spectacles; 2) l'esth  tique de la pi  ce finale; 3) les m  thodes de cr  ation en studio; et 4) la relation de la chor  graphe    la mati  re. En outre, la chercheuse a trouv   que tous les aspects du soi qui ont   merg  , les diff  rents   tats du corps et du c  ur/esprit, parfois agr  ables et parfois d  sagr  ables, se sont r  v  l  s   tre impersonnels. Autrement dit, analys  s    la lumi  re de la m  ditation de la pleine conscience, la chercheuse a pu voir qu'ils   taient dus    des causes et des conditions, sujets au changement et principalement hors du contr  le volontaire de la chor  graphe. Pour la chercheuse, cela mettait en   vidence un concept central dans le bouddhisme Theravada, celui de anatta ou du non-soi, c'est-  -dire une compr  hension du soi comme processuel, dynamique et multiple, une vue qui est partag  e par de nombreux penseurs postmodernes, f  ministes et queer. En ce qui concerne la question du «sens», la chercheuse a constat   que, en devenant plus consciente de ce qui se passait au niveau de son corps et de son c  ur/esprit, la relation    la mati  re dans chaque moment a   t   clarifi  e. Cette clart   de relation a rendu l'  p  rience plus «significative» ind  pendamment du fait que cette relation   tait principalement kinesth  sique,   motionnelle ou cognitive. Enfin, l'  tude conclut

avec l'espoir que d'autres études seront menées sur les apports possibles de la méditation de la pleine conscience dans le processus de formation et de création des artistes, même s'ils ne souscrivent pas nécessairement à la pensée bouddhiste Theravada. En effet, la chercheuse a constaté que l'utilisation de la méditation de la pleine conscience a eu de nombreuses influences positives sur la qualité du processus de création, ainsi que sur l'expérience de l'interprète. En outre, le chercheur estime que développer des qualités tels que la conscience de soi et la bienveillance est universellement bénéfique indépendamment des affiliations personnelles.

Mots clés: Méditation de la pleine conscience, mindfulness, méditation vipassana, la méditation bouddhiste, Bouddhisme Theravada, les quatre fondations de la pleine conscience, anatta, le non-soi, la conscience du soi, Metta, danse contemporaine, le processus de création, la chorégraphie, la performance



## ABSTRACT

This research-creation study sought to examine the influence of integrating mindfulness meditation in a creative process in contemporary dance. It also attempted to discern what facets of the self emerged during this process, that is to say, what arose in the body and heart/mind of the choreographer/dancer/researcher, in accord with the process of rigorous self-observation that is integral to mindfulness meditation in the Buddhist Theravada tradition. Finally, the study also seeks to elucidate whether or not integrating mindfulness meditation in the creative process contributed to a greater sense of “meaning” for the choreographer/dancer/researcher throughout the process.

The primary data consisted of the researcher’s creative journal, supplemented by an explication interview and video recordings of the rehearsals and performances. The research was inspired by heuristic inquiry, autopoieses, and mindfulness in its methods and by thematic analysis and “writing as an analytical praxis” for the data analysis. The creative process took place over nine weeks and was supported by three distinct outside eyes. The final dance work was presented in front of an audience four evenings in a row in September 2015 in Montreal, QC.

The results of the study showed that the integration of mindfulness meditation in the creative process influenced four aspects of the creative process and the final work: 1) on the dancer while rehearsing and performing; 2) on the aesthetics of the final piece; 3) on the methods for creating and working in the studio; and 4) on the choreographer’s relationship to the material. In addition, it was seen that all of the aspects of the self that emerged, the different states of body and heart/mind, at times pleasant and at other times unpleasant, revealed themselves to be impersonal. That is to say, analyzed in the light of mindfulness meditation, they were due to causes and conditions, subject to change and mainly out of the control of the creator. For the researcher, this pointed to a central concept in Theravada Buddhism, that of *anatta* or selflessness, that is to say an understanding of the self as processual, dynamic and multifaceted, a view that is also shared by many postmodern, feminist and queer thinkers. With regards to the question of “meaning,” the researcher found that by becoming more aware of what was happening at the level of the body and heart/mind, the relationship to the material in each moment was clarified, and that this was what made it “meaningful” regardless of whether that relationship was primarily kinesthetic, emotional, or cognitive. Finally, the study concludes with the hope that more studies be conducted integrating mindfulness meditation in the training and creative process of performing artists, even if they do not necessarily subscribe to a Theravada Buddhist framework. This is because the researcher has found that using mindfulness meditation had numerous positive influences on the quality of the

creative process as well as on the experience of the performer. In addition, the researcher considers that developing qualities such as self-awareness and kindness are skills and tools that are universally beneficial regardless of personal affiliations.

Key words: Mindfulness, mindfulness meditation, *vipassana* meditation, insight meditation, Buddhist meditation, Theravada Buddhism, the Four Foundations of mindfulness, *anatta*, selflessness, non-self, awareness, *Metta*, contemporary dance, creative process, choreography, performance



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Origins of the Study: Personal Trajectory in Light of My Artistic Practice

I am an independent dance artist based in Montreal, Canada. My creative practice consists of dance, performance and relational art, video and installation. I began dancing as a young child, all the while pursuing my intellectual appetite and curiosity for learning more about the world I lived in. In university, I was passionate about cultural studies, feminist and queer theory, and performance studies. Although I loved the exciting realm of theoretical investigation, after completing a B.A. in Cultural Anthropology at Wesleyan University (U.S.A.) in 2002, I felt that I reached the limits of a logocentric approach to epistemology. I had learned how to become skilled at analytically deconstructing systems of oppression and injustice, but had learned little in the way of generating alternatives or solutions. It seemed to me that creativity and the arts had much to offer in this regard and decided to dedicate myself more seriously to dance. I believed that artistic practice could offer tools for engendering change, both personal and social, namely by developing creativity and imagining other ways of being and doing in the world. In addition, I was interested in being less cerebral and deepening my connection to the body, exploring more embodied ways of knowing. Dance, which had been my passion since I was a child, was the obvious choice for me since it is centered on the body and artistic expression. Since flamenco was my favorite dance form that I had encountered so far, I decided to plunge myself wholeheartedly in the study of this traditional dance.

I therefore moved to Seville, Spain, where I spent five years training intensively in flamenco dance. Although I greatly appreciated many elements of my training, by the end of my stay, I realized that I felt increasingly disconnected from my inner experience. Instead, I often felt like I was trying to fit myself into an exterior model that I could only rarely embody authentically. Rather than feeling more connected to my body, I was becoming increasingly disembodied, not feeling at home in myself while dancing. Fortuitously, towards the end of my stay in Seville, I participated in a residency that gathered artists of various disciplines. I began creating performances, videos and installations, both solo and in collaboration with others. This experience opened my horizons to contemporary creation and made me hungry for more. I knew I needed to leave Seville and find a place where I could grow as an artist and develop my own language. I did not know exactly what my next step would be but I knew that it would involve the body, creativity and a more inwardly connected approach to movement.

Moving back to North America, I discovered the Somatic Education program at UQAM in Montreal, Canada. Although I was not very familiar with the Feldenkrais Method before starting my training, its emphasis on inner experience, listening to the body, and developing autonomy was very appealing to me. I obtained a DESS in Somatic Education from the Dance Department at UQAM in 2010 specializing in the Feldenkrais Method. Since then, I have continued to study several other somatic approaches to movement such as Continuum, Body-Mind Centering, Chi Kung, Contact Improvisation and Hatha Yoga (Joly, 1999, p. 1). I am a certified teacher of Hatha Yoga and have been teaching this movement practice since 2011.

In addition to exploring these somatic approaches to movement, I immersed myself in improvisation and instant composition in contemporary dance. This was a huge relief for me as I finally felt at home, in my body and in my self. I realized that in these approaches to dance, I was no longer trying to live up to some external ideal but,

rather, that unexpected facets of my being were allowed to emerge. I felt like I was able to take risks, make discoveries and surrender to the unknown. For the first time, I was invited to use my voice while moving which felt totally natural and liberating for me. After some time training in these practices, it was clear that I wanted to harness them in the service of creating artistic works to be shared with a public.

Therefore, in order to further my artistic training and develop my skills as a creator, I enrolled in the Contemporary Dance program at Concordia University. During those three years, I was able to train rigorously in contemporary dance technique and create solos, duets and group choreographies. I completed a B.F.A. in Contemporary Dance with an emphasis on choreography in 2012.

## 1.2 Motivation for Research, Research Issues and Questions

Although I greatly appreciated the freedom of expression that I found while at Concordia, I realized that a sense of dissatisfaction continued to persist in my creative work. My sense was that I was so concentrated on creating a final product that would be artistically interesting that I missed out on the potential depth and richness of the creative process itself. As a result of the stress of expectations, I often experienced difficult heart/mind states during the creative process, making it often unpleasant and challenging. In addition, I felt that the creative process was not as meaningful for me as I would have liked, that I did not investigate or clarify the themes I was working on as much as I could have and that this, in my opinion, was reflected in the overall quality of the work. Therefore, my global motivation in carrying out this research-creation was to find ways to make my creative process more enjoyable and meaningful for myself as both the creator and performer. My intuition was that integrating Buddhist meditation during the creative process could help achieve this goal since that was the impact it had had on my life in general.

At this point, it seems important to explain the role that Buddhist meditation had taken in my personal life. In fact, the need for meaning that had been clamoring in my artistic practice had also been manifesting in other facets of my life. Over the past years, I had been feeling an increasingly strong sense of dissatisfaction in general. Even though I was doing all that I most cared about and had a privileged life, by all objective standards, I did not feel truly content or satisfied. It was only when I encountered Buddhist meditation in 2008 that I realized that what I had been experiencing is universal to all humans (according to Buddhism). Indeed, the primary goal of Buddhism is to help beings understand suffering (*dukkha*, a Pali word that can be translated as discontent or unease), the causes of suffering and its remedy. The Buddha is said to have said: “I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering” (The Four Noble Truths, n.d.). For the first time in my life, after years of intellectual and artistic training, I felt like somebody was finally speaking directly to my heart and to the existential issues that it cradled. Thus, I began going on intensive ten-day silent meditation retreats and practicing meditation more regularly on my own. After I finished my B.F.A at Concordia, I committed to plunging deeply into meditation practice and went on a series of long retreats, three months in the Fall of 2011 and eight months in 2012-2013. These retreats were deeply transformative and precious to me, and nourished a great yearning for silence, healing and understanding.

Interestingly enough, by the end of this time of intensive meditation retreats, it was also clear to me that I missed artistic practice and creative expression. I realized that I wished to integrate my spiritual and creative practices so that there would not be such a sense of separation between them. Meditation practice without creative expression felt incomplete to me, as did artistic practice that was not deeply connected to inner experience. Thus, part of my goal for this research-creation was trying ways of integrating these two practices both theoretically and practically. Specifically, for this

project, my primary research question was: **How did integrating mindfulness meditation influence my creative process and performance practice in dance?** In addition to this central question, two sub-questions also accompanied my research process: **What facets of myself (in the body and heart/mind) emerged during the creative process? How did using mindfulness meditation help to make the creative process and the final work more meaningful for me, if at all?**

### 1.3 Situating my Artistic Practice

My artistic practice in dance combines elements from somatic approaches to movement, performance art and relational aesthetics. My work is often site-specific, integrates voice and movement, and uses improvisation to varying degrees. I situate myself in the post-Judson Church lineage and am grateful to my predecessors. I look to Anna Halprin (1995) for her focus on awareness (kinesthetic, emotional and mental); exploring principles of movement rather than copying stylized vocabulary; using scores as ways of creating work that is alive in the moment; involving the audience and community in creating events that are potentially meaningful for everyone; and, in her later years, tapping into the healing and transformative power of dance and creativity both on an individual and collective level. I bow down to Simone Forti (1974) for her use of games as a way of generating “work” and her rejection of formal dance technique in favor of movement inspired from children and animals. Deborah Hay’s use of cellular awareness to stimulate other ways of moving and being in space is of great interest to me. Her famous phrase, “Imagine all your fifty-three trillion cells (and more) perceiving” (2000, p. 18), offers a concrete tool for generating movement with a somatic sensibility. In the vein of working with perception and, especially, vision, I am indebted to Lisa Nelson (2008) for her legacy. Daniel Lepkoff is another source of inspiration for me, especially in his emphasis on tracking the movement of awareness while performing (Forti, 2005).

I am also influenced by local dance artists in Montreal who anchor their work in somatic awareness, such as Benoit Lachambre, and who also use improvised voice and movement, such as Lin Snelling and Andrew Harwood.

What links all of these dance artists is that none of them use codified vocabulary from dance techniques. Instead, they search for other ways of generating movement that is unique to them. This has been the case for me in my own creative work. I realize that when I use codified vocabulary, I often feel a sense of estrangement from myself, it is more difficult for me to feel at home in my body or in the movement. In many traditional dance styles, such as ballet, modern and flamenco, the emphasis is on learning from the outside in. The teacher models a sequence of movements and the students do their best to imitate it and make it their own. Here, students are learning to use their bodies in ways that are perhaps unfamiliar with the goal of increasing their repertoire and inscribing themselves in a stylistic heritage. In improvisation and somatic approaches to movement, the movement is generated from the dancer; there is less emphasis on the outer form of the movement and more on the inner life of the movement. Personally, I appreciate studying traditional techniques and forms, as they train my body and expand my palette of possibilities. However, it has been essential for me to move beyond trying to master these techniques and develop my own artistic language and sensibility.

#### 1.4 Situating my Meditation Practice

The style of meditation that I practice comes from the Buddhist Theravada tradition, also known as insight meditation or *vipassana* meditation. The Pali word *vipassana* (Pali was the language in India at the time of the Buddha) can be translated as “seeing clearly,” gaining insight, into the true nature of all phenomena (Goenka, n.d.). The



main tool in this style of practice involves maintaining an open awareness of what is happening in the present moment by paying attention to the senses. The theoretical framework underpinning Buddhist philosophy is that by observing experience directly through the lens of the Buddhist teachings, the meditator will realize liberating understandings that will end suffering both for themselves and for others. Thus, the practice of meditation is meant to be deeply transformative (Goenka, n.d.).

*Vipassana* meditation is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. It focuses on the deep interconnection between mind and body, which can be experienced directly by disciplined attention to the physical sensations that form the life of the body, and that continuously interconnect and condition the life of the mind. (Goenka, n.d.)

This self-transformation is understood as coming about from the wisdom gained in observing experience through the Buddhist theoretical framework and understanding these teachings for oneself in a directly embodied, experiential manner.

According to Buddhist philosophy, human suffering is caused by ignorance of the fundamental characteristics of phenomena and liberation comes as a result of having understood them deeply on an embodied and experiential level (Luangpor, n.d.). In the Buddhist worldview, all conditioned phenomena share three fundamental characteristics. They are: 1) ephemeral and impermanent; 2) ultimately dissatisfying and cannot provide lasting happiness; 3) devoid of substance, a fixed essence or self (Goldstein, 2013, p. 57-59). This third characteristic (no self, emptiness or *anatta* in Pali), is of particular interest to me in relation to this research project.

The understanding of the self as a delusion is one of the central teachings of Buddhist philosophy.

The last hallucination of perception is taking what is non-self to be self... Notice how often we identify with sensations in the body or thoughts or

emotions as being “I,” as being “self.” Or we identify with the knowing of all these experiences, creating the sense of self as the observer (Goldstein, 2013, p. 219).

This is one of the most difficult aspects of Buddhism to grasp since it runs so counter to the common perception of our self as a solid, fixed and separate entity. I find it fascinating that although in daily life this might seem to be a baffling concept, it is possible to access with relative ease in somatic movement practice. In somatic explorations, I have experienced the body as permeable, the boundaries between outer and inner began to dissolve, and I could sense a deep interconnection with all that surrounded me. In dance improvisation, I have had the impression of incarnating many selves emerging in rapid succession. In some performance contexts, I have experienced a sense of intimacy and mutuality with total strangers, the audience. Therefore, if my overarching research question looked at how integrating meditation practice influenced my creative process and performance practice in dance, my sub-question for research was examining what facets of myself (in the body and heart/mind) emerged during the creative process and how they contributed to my suffering or well-being. In addition, I was curious to see how integrating mindfulness meditation helped to make the creative process and the final work more meaningful for me, if at all.

## 1.5 State of the Question: In the Artistic Milieu

### 1.5.1 Buddhist influences in Western Modern and Contemporary Art

It is beyond the scope of this research to detail the historical aesthetic influence of Buddhism on Western modern and contemporary art, but, suffice to say, there have been several waves of influence since the mid-1800s. According to Berlin (2016), Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were inspired by Buddhism and, in



turn, their writings had an impact on Walt Whitman and others. Early Theosophy, founded by Helena Blavatsky, also drew from Buddhism, and had an impact on the work of Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Gauguin and other artists. Brancusi was apparently very much influenced by Milarepa, the 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan meditation master. Marcel Duchamp is also said to have been exposed to Buddhist ideas, as can be seen by his emphasis on art residing in the eye of the viewer. The Japanese Zen master D.T. Suzuki had a great influence on many artists such as Allan Watts and John Cage, whom I will talk more about later on. The Beat writers also avowedly were inspired by Buddhist concepts and many even became practitioners. Some such writers were Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder. Of course, not all of the above mentioned artists were committed Buddhist practitioners, some merely used Buddhism as one of many, multiple influences as Chin (2007) points out.

The Fluxus movement, conceptual art, performance and relational art all have homage to pay to Cage and his interest in Buddhism. Many leading artists of Fluxus attended Cage's classes in Experimental Composition from 1957 to 1959 at the New School for Social Research in NYC, exploring notions such as chance and indeterminacy in art, and the use of scores as the basis for performances. Some such key Fluxus artists were Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, and La Monte. One notable performance artist that has avowed ties with Buddhism is Marina Abramovic who has stated in interviews that she is very interested in Tibetan Buddhism and that she meditates (Mogutin, 2010). In her piece, "The Artist is Present," at the MoMA in New York, 2010, Abramovic used her presence in the moment to activate the audience's presence and awareness. Another such artist is Laurie Anderson, who talks about her practice of Tibetan Buddhism with her late husband, Lou Reed (Thompson, 2013). In Montreal, Sylvie Cotton, interweaves Buddhist meditation into her artistic practice based on performance and relational art. From what I know of her work (2009), Cotton is very much interested in the encounter between self and other and often addresses this theme specifically from a

Buddhist perspective. However, her work is not dance based nor does she speak of using specific embodied awareness practices while performing. In sum, many aspects of performance art, conceptual art and relational art reflect elements of Buddhism. For example, Lieberman (2007) describes how Zen artists try to suggest the essence of something using the simplest means possible. As he states, “Technique, though important is useless without it; and the actual execution of the work may be startlingly spontaneous, once the artist has comprehended the essence of his subject” (2002, p. 2). This is very reminiscent of the spirit of performance art, Fluxus and Happenings.

#### 1.5.2 Buddhist Influences in Postmodern and Contemporary Dance

John Cage was a student of D.T. Suzuki and attended his lectures at Columbia University in the 1950s (Larson, 2010). Many sources attest to his interest and commitment to Buddhist theory and practice (Larson, 2010; Lieberman 2007; Purser n.d.). Cage taught at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the summers of 1948 and 1952 and organized the first “happening” in the U.S. in which Merce Cunningham, Rauschenberg, and David Tudor, among others, participated. Robert Dunn, who had studied with Cage and wished to apply his ideas to dance, gave composition classes in Cunningham’s studio in NYC. Many visual artists, composers and dancers attended these classes that deconstructed dance as it had been known until then. The collective of students began performing at the Judson Memorial Church in NYC from 1962 to 1964. This became the beginning of what is known as postmodern dance and included Steve Paxton, David Gordon, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, and Lucinda Childs among others (Banes, 1993). These dancers set the stage for generations of dancers after and their influence is still strongly felt today.

One dance/movement artist from this time who explicitly comments on the connections between Buddhist meditation and dance/theater improvisation is Ruth Zaporah, the founder of Action Theater, in her most recent book: *Improvisation on the Edge: Notes From On and Off Stage* (2014). She notes that both practices require a full attention to the present moment, a capacity to be still internally and listen to what is emerging. Zaporah describes how, in contrast to meditation, in improvisation one actively engages with all of the passing arisings, the images, sensations, thoughts and feelings that traverse the body and mind. Deborah Hay, in her book *My Body, The Buddhist* (2000), speaks of noticing parallels in her work with Buddhist thought although she does not consider herself a practicing Buddhist. However, her approach to the body as a changing field of perception is indeed quite resonant with how the body and self are understood in Buddhism. Barbara Dilley, a former member of Cunningham's company as well as Grand Union (a group of dancers working and experimenting with Trisha Brown in the 1970s), went to Naropa University, founded by Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa, and became deeply involved with Buddhist meditation practice. She founded the Naropa Dance Movement Studies Program and developed a practice she named "Contemplative Dance." This practice consists of practitioners sitting in *vipassana* meditation together, doing a personal warm-up and then improvising in a shared space (Cohen, 2013). There is little published, however, about more specific working methods or using this in a creative process. According to Lalitaraja (2012, p. 145), several key dance artists in the Contact Improvisation community, such as Nancy Stark Smith, Steve Paxton, Lisa Nelson and Daniel Lepkoff among others, also practice Buddhist meditation but to date, I cannot find many writings that document this explicitly. Meredith Monk, who also participated in the Judson Church performances and is a very well-known choreographer, film director, composer and musician, is a committed Buddhist practitioner and speaks about the influence of meditation on her creative practice in several interviews (2012). She speaks of the need to cultivate courage, faith, and curiosity in both meditation and artistic practice.

### 1.5.3 The Relationship of Buddhism to the Arts

There is a long tradition of Buddhist-influenced art that began after the death of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha in the fifth century B.C. It began on the Indian subcontinent and then spread to other parts of the world following the rise of Buddhism. This includes paintings depicting Buddhist legends, sculptures and statues of the Buddha<sup>1</sup>, and the making of objects related to Buddhist practice such as bells and stupas. Some traditional Buddhist artistic forms can be seen as integral parts of spiritual practice, such as chanting (though one could argue that it is not art), the making of mandalas in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as a wide range of Zen-inspired practices such as Haiku poetry, calligraphy, the tea ceremony, flower arranging and gardening. Indeed, according to Loori (2005) “Zen arts, creativity and realized spirituality were seen as inseparable... Many of the great Zen masters, such as Genko, Tesshu, Hakuin, and Bunsho, were also renowned calligraphers, poets, painters and musicians” (p. 5). In modern times, Chögyam Trungpa, a recognized meditation master and the founder of Shambhala Buddhism, was a great advocate for the arts. He was also a visual artist and writer and coined the term “Dharma Art” (1996). The term “Dharma” refers to the teachings of the Buddha, so this can be considered to refer to Buddhist-inspired art. Nonetheless, he does not detail what happens internally during this process nor does he focus on performance or dance as artistic practices.

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<sup>1</sup> It is said that the Buddha prescribed against the direct representation of his figure in order to prevent idol worship and promote the potential for self-realization. This would explain the relatively few anthropomorphic depictions of him in the first centuries after his passing (Lopez, 2013, p. 37-8).

However, in Theravada Buddhism, which is the branch of Buddhism from which mindfulness meditation stems, there is little mention of creativity or the arts. In fact, often, these are regarded with suspicion as being sources of distraction from the practice of meditation. One of the basic rules that monks and nuns undertake while ordained is to “refrain from dancing or singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garments...or beautifying” (Thanissaro, 2013). Indeed, there seem to be varying attitudes towards the practice of art in Buddhism, depending on the school of Buddhism and the time period. In one of Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s commentaries on the Buddha’s teachings (2010), he recounts how the Buddha is said to have told an actor that there was a hell for actors who incite their audiences to greed, anger, and delusion. From this, one can gather, that perhaps artistic practice would be considered beneficial if it incited audiences to the opposite of these unskillful mind states, namely, generosity, peace and wisdom.

### 1.6 State of the Question: In Academic Literature

When I began working on this project, I could find little documentation regarding contemporary dance artists today who explicitly claim to integrate Buddhist meditation in their work. However, thanks to the rise in popularity of mindfulness in U.S. culture (Walton, 2014), mindfulness in dance seems to be a burgeoning field. The recently published anthology, *Dancing With Dharma: Essays on Movement and Dance in Western Buddhism*, edited by Harrison Blum (2016) gathers a wide range of essays on the intersections between contemporary movement and dance practices and Buddhism. Of particular relevance to my research-creation project is Karen Nelson’s essay on the connections between Tibetan Buddhism and postmodern improvisation in which she details her internal experience during a contact improvisation jam. In addition, she does so in light of the Buddhist Paramis (2016, location 1218), qualities considered essential for spiritual progress that I will also discuss in Chapter IV.



Another essay of interest in this anthology is Lalitaraja's "Dance as Dharma Practice," in which he reflects upon his wish to integrate his practices of dance and Buddhism and thereby "engage [his] ethical and artistic sensibilities in a creative path that could support and express [his] Dharma practice" (2016, location 1692).

In the journal *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, there is a very pertinent article by Kittikong (2015) in which she reflects upon experiencing the body through a Buddhist framework while choreographing and performing. Similar to my research-creation project, Kittikong finds that the practice of mindfulness in movement "offers an experiential access route to a 'direct experience' of being; a state beyond attachments to body and notions of self" (p. 1). I would add that what my research-creation project offers, in addition to considering the body, is a detailed exploration of what arises in all dimensions of the self during the creative process and performance, including the heart/mind. Whatley and Lefebvre Sell (2015) describe a choreographic process with four dancers that integrated Zen meditation and principles from the very beginning. Each rehearsal began with a period of formal meditation, followed by a Dharma talk (teachings of the Buddha) and a mindful movement warm up. The authors paid special attention to seeing if the practice of meditation could contribute to a "deeper awareness of embodiment" (Ibid., p. 439) and how this study could "extend understanding of spiritual experiences in dance" (Ibid., p. 437). Some of the themes that emerge in this study are similar to my own, such as "just being" (Ibid., p. 447), the experience of judgment as a challenge (Ibid., p. 450) and an overall sense of heightened awareness during the performances (Ibid., p. 453). However, the authors do not detail what happened in the body and heart/mind systematically as I have done, nor do they explore their causal relationships. In addition, none of the four dancers had previously practiced meditation.

As can be seen, the most relevant research is from practicing artists who write about their own work. For example, Lalitaraja, a contemporary British choreographer,

shares his efforts at making choreography a Buddhist spiritual practice in his writing (2012). He describes his journey as a dancer, choreographer and Buddhist practitioner and the various ways he has attempted to integrate Buddhist practice in his work. Shaw (2012), a choreographer working on a master's project, integrated mindfulness in the creative process and speaks of how it helped to counteract the stress of anticipating the future final work. Souzis (1996) writes about the relationship between *vipassana* meditation and Authentic Movement. Authentic Movement, originated by Mary Whitehouse, a dancer and Jungian analyst, is a form of inner-directed movement in which the mover moves with their eyes closed in the presence of a witness. Similar to a moving meditation, the mover is keenly aware of their movement and inner states. However, Souzis (Ibid.) does not relate these forms to the creative process but rather to the therapeutic one. Pelchat (1999) documents the integration of Authentic Movement in his creative process but does not mention meditation. He speaks of the struggle between remaining true to his inner impulses while performing in front of an audience.

In her study on spirituality and contemporary dance in Montreal, Tremblay (2004) examines the elements of spirituality in dance but she does not focus on a Buddhist perspective. Greenstein (1990), analyzes three innovators in American contemporary dance, Emily Conrad, Barbara Dilley and Hawkins, and finds that all three highlight "the power of dance/movement to facilitate a shift in locus of personal identity [...] from a place of self-centeredness to [self-transcendence]" (p. 334). This is very much in line with my research interest although it does not speak to the creative process specifically. Greenstein's doctoral thesis details the way in which these three dance artists pay attention to intentional awareness practices, Dilley being the only one practicing Buddhist meditation.

More generally in contemporary art, Bass and Jacob (2004) gather a collection of essays by and about Buddhist inspired artists working with the notion of emptiness or

selflessness. However, none of them give specific tools for achieving this in the context of dance or performance.

### 1.7 Methods: Research-Creation

The experiential nature of this research asked for continual movement between practice and reflection and was therefore perfectly suited for a research-creation project. This consisted of qualitative, experiential research that fits within a post-positivist paradigm. The practice-based, creative research component consisted of developing a solo, anchored in listening to the present moment (open awareness, the basis of mindfulness meditation), and witnessing what manifestations of self emerged, according to a Buddhist conceptual framework. This solo *Being With the Unknown*, which I choreographed and performed, was performed for an audience four evenings in a row. The theoretical research component was based on heuristic inquiry, an approach to qualitative research developed by Clark Moustakas. Heuristic inquiry is used to “describe the process of an inner search for knowledge, [in which] the transformative effect of the inquiry on the researcher's own experience becomes the main focus of the research” (Hiles, 2001).

The primary data collected and analyzed consisted of a personal journal in which I documented the creative process, describing what had happened during each work session. I included in the journal my interactions with the outside eyes who came and observed rehearsals during the course of the creative process and offered me feedback. Towards the end of the creative process, I underwent an explicitation interview to help me better understand a specific moment of the work. Finally, I filmed my rehearsals and performances in order to document the process and serve as a reference to go back to in case of need. I then analyzed my data using thematic analysis as well as writing as analysis, as explained by Paillé and Muchielli (2012).



### 1.8 Limits and Hopes for the Study

Since I am both the researcher and the object of research, this study is, of course, subjective. I am able to share my experience and insights but without any pretense of universality or exhaustiveness. In addition, the study will take place during a specific time in a specific context, factors that colored my experience, and made it unique. Although the results will not be able to be generalized, I do hope that through my data analysis and discussion, the questions and results that I present will resonate in the experience of other artists interested in the intersections between Buddhist practice and dance and performance. It is also my aspiration that this research will help my own creative process and artistic practice to become clearer, more well defined, historically and aesthetically contextualized and able to integrate elements of Buddhist meditation practice more fully.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this research-creation is to study the impact of my practice of mindfulness meditation on the creation and performance of a solo dance work, “Being With the Unknown.” In order to do so, it is necessary to identify and flesh out the key concepts that I will be using both during the creative process as well as during the data analysis. Many of these concepts stem from the theoretical foundation of the Theravada Buddhist teachings upon which mindfulness meditation is based. Theravada Buddhism offers a detailed and comprehensive theoretical and experiential framework for investigating and understanding experience. Since my research-creation project focuses on the integration of Buddhist theory and practice in my creative process in dance, it is logical that I would use this system both methodologically (for the creative process) as well as theoretically (for the research component). In Buddhist understanding, theory and practice are deeply intertwined since, in this framework, knowing is an embodied experience and cannot be limited to the discursive, conceptual realm. In fact, Buddhism “gives primacy to direct experience, inviting each individual to test its principles in the crucible of his or her own experience” (Bodhi, 2005, p. 83). In this chapter, I will outline the main Buddhist concepts and terms that directly relate to my research-creation such as mindfulness, mindfulness meditation, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the skillful and unskillful roots of mind, the Brahma Viharas, anatta (non-self) and the five aggregates that make up the illusion of self.<sup>2</sup> Then, I will briefly make links with

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<sup>2</sup> The main bibliographic reference I will use in this chapter is Bhikku Bodhi’s *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (2005), a translation of selected discourses of the Buddha, as well as Analayo’s translation and commentary of *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to*

certain post-modern, queer and feminist authors' understandings of the self that resonate with the Buddhist concept of *anatta*, not-self. It is my view that these seemingly different currents of thought are all, in their own way, seeking to contribute to personal and collective liberation and in this case, by lifting the stronghold of identification with various facets of the socially constructed self. As a North American scholar, my academic training was strongly influenced by these authors and it is important for me politically and intellectually to align myself in this tradition since it is my heritage. Finally, I will discuss several key dancers who have written about their experiences of self while dancing.

## 2.1 Mindfulness

The term mindfulness, which has become quite popular in the last few years (Walton, 2014), is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.” In Pali, the language in Northern India at the time of the Buddha, the term for mindfulness is *sati*, which is often translated as moment-to-moment awareness of present events (Goldstein, 2013, p. 13). This paying attention to bare experience is at the heart of all Buddhist schools and is at the basis of meditation practice in the Buddhist Theravada tradition as well. This was key in my research as I did my best to be mindful throughout the process of what was happening in the body, the feeling tone and the heart/mind.

## 2.2 Mindfulness Meditation: Theravada Buddhist Meditation Based on the Satipatthana Sutta

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*Realization* (2003). These offer the closest possible source in English of what the Buddha said. I will also refer to Goldstein (2013) as he is one of the key references in American Theravada Buddhism.

In this study, I am using the term “mindfulness meditation” in order to refer to Theravadan Buddhist meditation based on the Satipatthana Sutta as shorthand. I am aware of the issues that surround the use of this term, as it could imply mindfulness as a secular movement and not rooted in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. However, due to the increasing popularity and recognition of the term and practice of mindfulness (Goldstein, 2013, p. xiii), I believe that it is more beneficial to highlight this connection than to obfuscate it, as would have happened from choosing the lesser known terms *vipassana* meditation or insight meditation. My hope is that readers can understand and perhaps integrate elements of this practice in their own lives and work, without necessarily having to adopt Buddhism as a way of life.

The Satipatthana Sutta, the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness, is considered to be the foundational Buddhist text with the most complete instructions on how to meditate as taught by the Buddha (Bodhi in Thera, 1998, p. 1). In this discourse, part of the oldest surviving collection of Buddhist suttas (scriptures) known as the Pali Canon, the Buddha explains that meditation practice consists of placing and maintaining one’s attention on one of the four foundations of mindfulness. These four pastures for attention are: 1) the body; 2) *vedana*, the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral affective tone of contact with an experience; 3) the heart/mind; and 4) *dhammas*, the teachings of the Buddha. In this study, I focus on the first three categories of experience, paying attention to body, *vedana* and the heart/mind while rehearsing and performing. As Analayo explains in his translation and commentary of the sutta, this division into categories provides an analytical approach for investigating all aspects of one’s subjective experience (2003, p. 24). Indeed, the Buddha states that being mindful of these four categories of experience constitutes the direct path to liberation and freedom from suffering which is the ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation practice (Goldstein, 2013, p. xv).

It is important to note that being aware of these four aspects of subjective experience does not just happen during formal meditation practice, during which practitioners sit, walk, lie or stand for a limited period of time. With practice, meditators integrate this kind of awareness during all aspects of daily life, such as while speaking, driving, reading and so on. This was why it seemed fitting to apply this specific kind of paying attention to the creative process and thus integrate Buddhist meditation both formally, at the beginning of each rehearsal, and informally, throughout its entirety.

## 2.3 The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

### 2.3.1 The Body

The body is the first site proposed for anchoring our attention in the Satipatthana Sutta. This includes mindfulness of breathing, postures, movements and actions, as well as what are known as the thirty-two parts of the body, material elements and cemetery contemplations which I will not elaborate on here. In this dance research-creation project, I mainly focused on mindfulness of postures and the body in movement as they were the most pertinent. The Buddha exhorts practitioners to clearly know whatever activity they may be doing: “Again, monks, when going forward and returning one acts clearly knowing; when looking ahead and looking away one acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending one’s limbs one acts clearly knowing” (cited in Goldstein, 2013, p. 61).

In this category, the focus is on noticing concrete physical sensations such as heat, cold, heaviness, lightness, spaciousness or density, to name a few. By paying close attention, one notices through practice that these sensations are always changing, arising and disappearing of their own accord. This realization of the ephemeral,

changing nature of sensory phenomena is considered to be one of the primary characteristics of experience in Buddhism. Through this practice of paying close attention to physical sensations, one is in direct contact with experience less and less mediated by concepts. For example, what might have been previously considered a “leg” reveals itself to be a constellation of ephemeral sensations, a construction.

In my research, I found that paying attention to this category of experience was the most useful in anchoring attention in the present moment, helping to stabilize attention and maintaining a sensorial, embodied connection to what was happening.

### 2.3.2 *Vedana*

The second area for mindfulness, *vedana*, often translated as “feeling” does not mean emotion but, rather, refers to “the ‘affective tone’ of experience- either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral” (Bodhi, 2005, p. 304). It is proposed that when consciousness comes into contact with any sense object (a sound, sight, smell, taste, bodily sensation, mental object), there is automatically a reaction towards it. As practitioners, we are encouraged to pay attention to this reaction in the mind so as to not identify with it. This risk, otherwise, is that pleasant contact can lead to clinging, unpleasant contact can lead to aversion, and neutral contact can lead to delusion. All three of these mind states are considered unskillful and leading to suffering. This moment of reactivity can slip by unnoticed if we do not pay close attention to it. During the process of self-observation, I would note the quality of my experience as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

### 2.3.3 The Heart/Mind

The third pasture for mindfulness is the mind and all of its activities. In Pali, the term is *citta*, which can also be translated as heart/mind (Goldstein, 2013, p. 316). This is because in the Pali language and in Buddhism, there was no distinction made between the heart and the mind in the way the terms in English imply. It is for this reason that in this study I refer to what is commonly designated as “mind” in English translations or discussions of Buddhist texts as “heart/mind.” My motivation is to remind the reader of the presence of all of the dimensions of this category, including emotions, moods, states, as well as thoughts, images, memories, dreams, and more. In this category we are encouraged to be aware of the presence or absence of specific mind states and thus notice their ephemeral nature. “Mind states are focused on so that we may see how they color perception, rather than identifying with them as reality” (Tingstad, 2003). This is a crucial area to be aware of and one that we often get caught up in. Without this training, we tend to believe our thoughts and be ruled by our emotions with little room for maneuver. With practice, we see mental activity as passing clouds in the sky, no need to latch on to any of it or push it away, simply watch it come and go.

This category is the one responsible for most of the suffering or wellbeing that we experience. During my research I could clearly see how certain thoughts, judgments, expectations as well as moods and emotions influenced me and my creative process, often creating suffering.

#### 2.3.4 Dhamma

As Goldstein recounts, the term *dhamma* can be interpreted as categories of experience or the Buddhist teachings. In this fourth and last category of the Four



Foundations of Mindfulness, practitioners are encouraged to explore phenomena through the lens of Buddhist teachings. As I have alluded to previously, Buddhism is made up of a vast and precise array of teachings, much too extensive to cover here. Some of the main components of the Dhamma category are: the Three Characteristics, the Five Hindrances, the Five Aggregates, the Six Senses, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. For those interested in knowing more, please see Goldstein (2013), Bodhi (2005) and Analayo (2003). In this research-creation, I will mainly be referring to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness due to their practical application in my research. Throughout the research-creation process, I will be paying attention specifically to the first three Foundations of Mindfulness, that of body, *vedana* and heart/mind. After each rehearsal, I will record in my journal what arose in each of those three areas. Again, I will not include the fourth Foundation of Mindfulness because it is beyond the scope of this research project to include all of the Buddhist teachings. Suffice to say, what I observed in the first three areas of mindfulness pointed to a key Buddhist teaching, the changing and processual quality of the self, something I will discuss further in this chapter.

#### 2.4 The Three Skillful and Unskillful Roots of Mind

The three unskillful or unwholesome roots of mind are thus called because they are considered to be responsible for suffering, for oneself and for others. In paying attention to our experience, especially the heart/mind (the third category in the four foundations of mindfulness), we are encouraged to pay special attention to the presence or absence of these three states of mind. The first unskillful mind state is *lobha*, sometimes referred to as desire, greed, wanting, clinging or attachment. This can manifest as wanting to have a “better” experience, more pleasant, other than the one we are currently in contact with. Its opposites are renunciation, letting go, non-



clinging, non-attachment and generosity. The second unskillful mind state is *dosa*, also known as aversion, hatred, ill will, judgment, irritation, anger, fear, or pushing away. This manifests as being in resistance with what is happening, wishing it would go away, or cease to exist. Its opposites are friendliness, good will, kindness, empathy and compassion. The third, and last, unskillful mind state is *moha*, or delusion, ignorance, confusion, doubt. Its opposites are clarity, wisdom and right understanding (Analayo, 2003, p. 191).

Hence, mindfulness meditation consists in being mindful of the four areas for our attention (the Four Foundations of Mindfulness) with special attention to the presence or absence of the Three Unskillful Mind States. Practitioners are instructed to meet all experience, bodily, pleasant or unpleasant, skillful or unskillful, with equanimity and wisdom, understanding that these experiences are universal, shared by all human beings, subject to change, and that identifying with any of them leads only to suffering. Being mindful of what arises in the body and mind moment by moment allows unskillful states to become weaker and skillful states to become stronger. This serves the end goal of freeing oneself from the causes of suffering and thus attaining liberation (Goldstein, 2013).

In my research-creation process, I noted what heart/mind states arose, whether they were skillful or unskillful in that they produced suffering or freedom from suffering. In addition, I examined the links between the first three areas of mindfulness, the body, *vedana* and the heart/mind.

## 2.5 The *Brahma Viharas* or the Four Heavenly Abodes

It is important to mention that the practice of mindfulness meditation is made up of two facets. The one that is the most often discussed is *vipassana*, being with

experience just as it is, mindfully, without trying to change anything. The other facet is the practice of the *Brahma Viharas*, cultivating states of mind that are skillful and conducive to wellbeing. These are 1) *Metta*, loving-kindness or friendliness; 2) *Karuna* or compassion; 3) *Muditta* or sympathetic joy; and 4) *Uppekkha* or equanimity. These four qualities of the heart-mind can be trained with regular practice and are necessary to advance on the Buddhist path (Goldstein & Salzberg, 2001, p. 218). In my research-creation, I spent time cultivating both facets, although I realized through my data analysis that I could have actively encouraged more of a spirit of friendliness towards myself throughout the process.

## 2.6 *Anatta* or “Non Self” in Buddhism

As I mentioned in Chapter 1.4, the self in Buddhism is considered quite differently than we might be accustomed to in the West. As stated in the Encyclopedia Britannica, “*anatta*, (Pali: “non-self” or “substanceless”), in Buddhism, [is] the doctrine that there is in humans no permanent, underlying substance that can be called the soul. Instead, the individual is compounded of five factors (Sanskrit *skandha*) that are constantly changing.” According to this perspective, there is no aspect of our self that we can point to as being inherently and permanently our self without causing suffering. In this way, we can begin to see how the three characteristics of reality according to Buddhism, impermanence, suffering and non self, are interrelated. If we cling to any aspect of ourselves as permanent or essential, we will inevitably suffer since it is subject to change like all conditioned phenomena. It is important to remember that the basic objective of Buddhist practice is not to speculate abstractly about the nature of existence but that it is quite pragmatic: to end suffering and the causes of suffering (Bodhi, 2005, p. 83). I will now detail what the self is made of, according to the Buddhist worldview.

## 2.7 The Five Aggregates: Components of the Self in Buddhism

The Buddha identified five categories of experience that we usually take to be our self and breaks them down one by one to show that these are not reliable or stable entities to be identified with. “These five aggregates are the building blocks that we typically use to construct our sense of personal identity; they are the things we cling to as being “mine,” “I” and “my self” (Bodhi, 2005, p. 22). The five aggregates are: 1) form, 2) feeling, 3) perception, 4) mental factors and 5) consciousness.

### 2.7.1 Form

The first term “form” (*rupa* in Pali) refers to the physical component of experience, the body. Most people regard the body either as themselves (“I am my body”) or as owning their body (“this is my body”). However, by paying careful attention through meditation practice, one begins to see that the body is always in a process of change and trying to identify or hold onto any aspect of it causes suffering. For example, if I am attached to having a youthful or healthy body, it will cause me great pain when aging or illness inevitably has its effect on the body. This also raises questions as to which body was, is or will be really “me:” my body as a newborn, a child, a young adult or an aging elder? What if I have a heart transplant or lose a limb? Am I still really “me”? In sum, we can see that in Buddhism, not only we are not our bodies but we also do not “have” our bodies since there is no permanent self or soul that could “own” the body. Again, “body” in Buddhism is considered to be a concept and not an expression of direct experience, in which all one can find are changing sensations: “our experience in the contemplation of *rupa* is one of a flow of changing vibrations” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 173).

### 2.7.2 *Vedana*

The second term is *vedana*, which I explained in the section on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The danger here is identifying with the reaction of the mind when it finds something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. For example, observing myself on video, I later noticed that I often missed this step of simply acknowledging that there was an unpleasant feeling tone arising “before the onset of reactions, projections, or justifications” (Analayo, 2003, p. 156). Instead, I usually identified with this feeling tone of the experience and believed that “I don’t like what I’m seeing, I didn’t dance well” when, concretely, it was just a question of sight and an unpleasant affective tone in the sensorial experience. There is no “me” that likes or does not like, it is simply a reaction in the moment. Hence, we can see how Buddhism proposes a radical disidentification with how the mind and body react to given situations and, thus, a greater space for freedom.

### 2.7.3 Perception

The third aggregate, perception (*sanna*), refers to “the identification of things through their distinctive marks or features” (Bodhi, 2005, p. 304). The simile that is used for this is that of a mirage, thereby alluding to the fallacious nature of perception. This category points to the danger of taking our perceptions as truth and forgetting that they are partial, subjective and changing. Hence, it is recommended to not identify with or insist on our perceptions and instead remember their capacity for error. Otherwise, we can believe that “I am” my perceptions, when in fact these are always changing.

#### 2.7.4 Mental Factors

The fourth aggregate, mental factors (*sankhara*), refers to all mental activity, such as thinking, planning, remembering, imagining, fantasizing and includes all emotions, moods and mind states (Goldstein, 2005, p. 183). Depersonalizing emotions and thoughts is a radical step in the deconstruction of self. Instead of thinking “I am sad,” there can simply be awareness that sadness is present. Instead of believing the thoughts that pass through one’s mind and taking them as “mine,” it is possible to see that it is simply the mind at work. On an experiential level, this teaching is one that can offer great freedom from suffering as we stop identifying with our mind states and beliefs, opinions and moods. For example, if an unskillful thought, such as self-judgment, passes through my mind, if I identify with it as “mine,” I will then perhaps experience a feeling of shame (since I believe that it is true) or perhaps even act on it (since I cannot distinguish between the thought and “me”). However, recognizing it as simply a thought that has arisen as a product of the mind, I can investigate it and choose to disregard it if I consider it to be unskillful. This by no means suggests that we do not have personal responsibility in Buddhism, quite the contrary. In fact, it is a very empowering approach because it invites us to be aware of what is happening in our minds and make balanced decisions about what to do about it.

#### 2.7.5 Consciousness

The fifth aggregate, consciousness (*vinna*), refers to the “cognizing function of the mind, that which simply knows” (Goldstein, 2005, p. 188). This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of experience to not identify with. Even when one has repeatedly observed how the body, feeling-tones, perceptions, thoughts and emotions are always

changing, and thus cannot be “me” or “mine,” it can be difficult to let go of a sense of self in consciousness. However, the Buddha clearly explains the conditioned and impermanent nature of consciousness. Consciousness is not always present in the background somewhere but rather arises in specific circumstances. There are said to be six forms of consciousness each of which corresponds to a sense organ and arises in conjunction with a sense object. For example, “a moment of seeing consciousness arises from the conjunction of four causes: the working organ of the eye, a visible form, light and attention. If any of these conditions are absent, then seeing consciousness cannot arise” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 188). Hence, due to causes and conditions, certain manifestations of consciousness arise at each moment (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting and mind consciousness), there is no “me” who is “being” conscious, who is somehow responsible and in control of these manifestations of consciousness. Rather, they happen of their own accord.

With careful attention, we begin to explore these categories of experience for ourselves in formal meditation practice as well as in daily life and see if these teachings hold out in practice. Rather than taking anything at face value, we observe what happens and notice when a sense of “me,” “mine,” or “I” arises and in relation to what. With practice, we begin to see that they fit in one of the five categories and can be understood and deconstructed. Again, this is not merely a conceptual exercise but a deeply experiential and embodied one. We observe our experience as continuously as possible and, at times, are able to see into the nature of it, impermanent, selfless and subject to suffering, again and again. With time and practice, our understanding clarifies and deepens, bringing us to ever-increasing levels of disidentification and freedom from suffering.

## 2.8 Deconstructing the Self in Postmodern, Queer and Feminist Theory



As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it seems pertinent for me to point out that Buddhism's understanding of the self is actually quite similar to how the self is understood in feminist, queer and postmodern thought. Hence, the notion of *anatta* cannot be disregarded as an archaic, somewhat idiosyncratic, fallacious understanding. Instead, one can see that contemporary thinkers share more than what might first seem to be the case with Buddhism with regards to conceptualizing the self. Indeed, whereas the self in Western society is usually considered a "self-enclosed, autonomous individual bound to a fixed identity" (Lepecki, 2006, p. 8), it is interesting to note that Buddhism is not the only theoretical system to challenge this notion. In postmodernism, "subjectivity is to be understood as a dynamic concept" (Lepecki referring to Foucault and Deleuze, 2006, p. 8). Instead of understanding the individual as a unitary subject with an essential, unchanging self, soul or other, "the postmodern person is thus a hybrid...their self—and their identity—are not fixed, but continually in process, as the boundaries between themselves and others, and between the different parts of themselves are negotiated" (Identity and the Self, n.d.). This postmodern conception of the self as changing, made up of parts, and constructed is very much in accord with the 2,500 year-old Buddhist concept of *anatta*.

In a similar yet different vein the feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler (1990) proposes the notion of the self as being a result of performance in daily life. Butler specifically argues this in terms of gender, sex and sexuality being performances that we enact usually unconsciously and mostly in ways that are congruent with hegemonic norms. The constant repetition and reenactment gives the impression that this identity is stable and unchanging but, in fact, at every moment there is the potential for choice and deviation. Drawing upon Foucault's notion of "regulative discourses," Butler points out that these identity constructs have been so naturalized that they are rarely, if ever, questioned. This understanding of the self as a constructed fiction is very much in line with Buddhist understanding of the self.

“...[W]e become attached to and identified with the idea of self because we are satisfied with superficial perceptions and with the concepts we use to describe experience. This complacency of observation keeps us from seeing clearly the impermanent, insubstantial nature of what we’re calling ‘self.’” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 198).

I also align myself within the trajectory of contemporary feminist thought that also shares an understanding of subjectivity as multiple and mobile. In contrast to the modernist myth of a unitary and monolithic male subject, contemporary feminism proposes a shifting, complex, fragmented female identity. As Louise Dupré, a renowned feminist writer, recounts: “women accepted living with a fragmented identity and giving a kaleidoscopic image of themselves...” (2014, p. 7). Feminism and critical theory generally critique the idea of a hegemonic, normative subject (i.e. white, male, heterosexual and wealthy) and are more interested in exploring identities as marginal, multiple, and heterogeneous.

These approaches to the self resonate with Buddhist ones and help to show that such ideas are more and more in circulation and accepted by the academic community, especially by thinkers in cultural studies (Barthes, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Guatteri), critical race theory (hooks, West, Fanon), feminist theory (Kristeva, Irigaray, Grosz), queer theory (Butler, Sedgwick, Harraway) poststructuralist theory (Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida) and post-colonial theory (Spivak, Said, Appadurai). Thus, the Buddhist concept of *anatta* can be easily linked to these contemporary Western notions of the self in a rich interplay of ideas and trajectories across time and space.

## 2.9 Experiences of Receptivity and Non-Self in Dance Artists

As I mentioned in chapter one, I am not the first person to pay attention to the experience of self while dancing. Ruth Zaporah, the founder of Action Theater and master movement and voice improviser, speaks of the succession of selves that she embodies while performing in her latest book as well as the state of receptivity that she must be in to improvise: “The improviser must be relaxed, open and willing...this way of no resistance” (2014, p. 13). This is very much in line with the state of embodied presence that meditation fosters, of being in the moment. As I observe experiences arising in the body and the mind, I can allow them to pass through me, without identifying with any.

Similar to many meditators, Deborah Hay (2000), also a veteran of postmodern dance, explores the body on a cellular level except that she does it via dance. Using open-ended questions, she invites the image that every cell in the body is aware and allows movement to emerge as an exploration. This is very similar to meditation in that the body is no longer experienced conceptually or technically but rather as an energy field. Difficult to find a sense of Deborah or me or you among the fifty-three trillion cells!

Barbara Dilley, the founder of Contemplative Dance, who explicitly incorporates *vipassana* meditation into her dance teaching and practice, highlights the importance of “*letting go*, i.e., releasing the mediating self, the self that negotiates the terms of exploration...and engaging with the ‘now’” (Greenstein, 1990, p. 341). She is also understands the self as fluid, changing and interconnected.

## 2.10 From Theory to Methods

Using specific tools from mindfulness meditation, primarily, being aware of the first three Foundations of Mindfulness, I hoped to become increasingly aware of how

difficult heart/mind states arose and how to eventually reduce them. At the same time, by actively cultivating skillful states of mind, such as *Metta* (loving-kindness), I hoped to create an increasing sense of ease and friendliness towards my experience. Finally, by seeing the impersonal nature of the states of body and heart/mind that traversed me, I hoped to gain a deeper embodied understanding of *anatta*, allowing my sense of self to be more porous during the creative process. Experience could then flow through me, unimpeded by identification, clinging or judgment, with greater ease and simplicity. As Hafiz, the famous Sufi poet said: “I am the hole on the flute that Gods breath flows through” (1999). In this state, there is no sense of identification, of a “me” doing something, but instead, of process moving through me. I simply listen and follow.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Through this research-creation project, I seek to elucidate the influence of my practice of insight meditation on the creative process and performance of *Being With the Unknown*. I also try to discern what facets of myself emerged during the creative process in light of the Satipatthana Sutta, the foundational text and basis for practice in Theravada Buddhism. Finally, I examine whether integrating mindfulness meditation in the creative process made the work more meaningful for me as the choreographer and performer. In this chapter, I will discuss the methods I used to conduct my research for both collecting and analyzing data. I will also discuss the ethical considerations of this project.

#### 3.1 A Bricolage of Research Methods: Autopoieses, Heuristic Inquiry and Mindfulness

Research-creation in the arts currently constitutes an innovative approach to knowledge production in the university. If, formerly, art was considered primarily a vehicle for expression, Paul Valéry has championed the idea that research in the arts provides the opportunity to contribute to knowledge, to the development of a body of theoretical work elucidating the specificities of artistic practice (as cited in Laurier & Gosselin, 2004, p. 168). Innovative projects require innovative research methods. One way of creating innovative research methods is by using a bricolage of existing methods (Stewart as cited in Laurier & Gosselin, 2004, p. 181). This is the case for this undertaking, as I am inspired by several approaches belonging to a post-positivist

research paradigm. As Green and Stinson explain, “positivist researchers attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis, while postpositivist research attempts to interpret or understand a particular research context” (1999, p. 94). Through the tools that I used to collect and analyze my data, I sought to understand the influence of my mindfulness meditation practice in a specific creative process in dance. It seems important to highlight that although improvisation was the main method I used for generating material, I ultimately made a dance composition, with varying parts of the piece more or less set. This is because I was curious to see how the practice of mindfulness meditation would play out in a choreographic process.

Hence, it made perfect sense to use autopoiesis as the first component of my methodological bricolage. Rather than focusing on the analysis of an artistic work per se, poietic research is interested in the process of art making, especially the relationship between the artist and work-in-progress (Conte as cited in Laurier & Gosselin, 2004, p. 175). Autopoiesis is when the artist is also the researcher. Hence, I am clearly taking an autopoietic stance since I am investigating my own creation process both as artist and researcher. Although this approach in itself could have been enough to guide my research project, it seemed necessary to also include the heuristic approach for its affinities with mindfulness meditation, such as self-reflexivity and the focus on the direct, first-person lived experience (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38).

The heuristic approach to qualitative research developed by the American humanist psychologist Clark Moustakas thus proved to be particularly appropriate for this research project. As Hiles (2001) describes, this approach is concerned especially with self-inquiry. It is used in the process of “an inner search for knowledge, aimed at discovering the nature and meaning of an experience” (Hiles, 2001, p.1). In fact, the research focuses on the lived experience of the researcher and pays special attention to the transformative effect of the inquiry on the researcher’s experience (Ibid., p. 2).



In addition, this method allows for a continual back-and-forth movement between an “experiential, subjective and sensitive manner of thinking and a conceptual, objective and rational one” (Laurier & Gosselin, 2004, p. 180, own translation) that is necessary in artistic research. This was especially fitting for such a project as this one in which I lived an experience, such as a rehearsal or performance, took the time to write and analyze what had happened in my journal, meditated, rehearsed again, talked with my outside eye, wrote and moved again.

There are seven phases to Moustakas’ (1990) approach to heuristic inquiry: 1) initial engagement; 2) immersion; 3) incubation; 4) illumination; 5) explication; 6) creative synthesis; 7) validation of heuristic inquiry. It was interesting for me to observe that the research-creation process quite naturally followed these seven phases without me having to force it in any way. There was an initial engagement period, in which I began fleshing out the various dimensions of my research question and began writing the first chapters of this thesis. Then, I was in a state of immersion with my topic as I was in an intensive mode of creation, in the studio, day after day. After the performance of the dance work, there was a period of incubation, during which I retreated from the topic and took care of other affairs. Although I was not directly engaging with my question, I realize now that the “inner workings of the tacit dimension...continue[d] to clarify and extend understanding” (Ibid., p. 29) so that when I reengaged with my material, illumination occurred spontaneously. I then understood my research question under a different light and clarified my focus for research. As I wrote the different drafts of Chapter IV: Results and Discussion, the phase of explication took place, detailing the new understandings and connections that were being made. The creative synthesis, the sixth phase of heuristic research that Moustakas mentions (1990, p.32), is found in Chapter VI: “Slogans for Creating and Performing.” The final phase, that of validity, is one in which the researcher repeatedly goes back to the raw data and checks if what has been extrapolated fits

with what emerged. This is the process that I have been engaged in throughout the whole process of rewriting and correcting. Pragmatic validity is also of great importance to me, as defined by Green and Stinson (1999), that the research be “useful to readers – does it help them recognize more or differently than they did prior to reading the work?” (p. 78). It is my intention and hope that this be the case.

It is important to note that all of the phases of heuristic research continually refer back to the researcher’s self-awareness and self-knowledge: “in the process, I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self” (Moustakas, 1990. p. 9). This is very much in line with the process of attaining insight in Buddhism, in which one continuously observes phenomena in an experiential manner. The idea is that from this continuous observation, understanding can arise and, perhaps, even lead to a change of behavior. It is worth noting that there is also an approach to research that is called mindful inquiry which is informed by four intellectual traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social theory, and Buddhism (Bentz and Shapiro in Hiles, 2001, p. 4). Of course, due to the importance of mindfulness in the theoretical framework of the project as the first ingredient in Buddhist meditation, it would make sense to incorporate it as a methodological tool as well. As Hiles points out, “the idea of bringing mindfulness into disciplined inquiry is exciting, as it stresses focus, intention and awareness of whatever is present in a situation or experience” (2001, p. 4). Indeed, I will include mindfulness in all aspects of the research-creation process, but I will not necessarily refer to Bentz and Shapiro’s approach since it also includes phenomenology and critical social theory.

Mindfulness involves observing oneself at all times, including while thinking, watching, speaking, moving and writing. This requires the presence of awareness that is able to track experience as it changes without identifying with what arises.

According to the Buddhist framework, all experience is created through our six senses: touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste, and mental-emotional experiences (Goldstein, 2013). Therefore, while moving, creating, reflecting, and exchanging, I did my best to maintain open awareness and pay attention to these sensorial impressions and constructs as they emerged moment by moment. More specifically, I paid attention and noted in my journal what arose in the body and in the heart/mind, and their pleasant, neutral or unpleasant feeling tone, in accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the basis of Theravada Buddhist meditation (Anlayo, 2003). As I explained in Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness offer detailed instructions on where and how to pay attention, that is, the body, the feeling tone, the heart/mind, and the Dhammas, or categories of experience as defined by the Buddha. This occurred during formal sitting practice time as well as off of the meditation cushion.

### 3.2 The Creative Process

The creative process was divided into three stages, each lasting about three weeks each. I worked in the studio alone three hours a day, four days a week. An outside eye came for a total of twelve hours each. The first outside eye was Katya Montaignac, a recognized dramaturge, scholar and choreographer working in Montreal, whom I chose for the first stage of the creative process due to her experience in working *in situ*. Katya had accompanied various artistic and academic projects of mine as a teacher and artistic curator that then culminated in this research-creation process and was thus familiar with my work. The second outside eye who came during the second stage of creation was Josée Gagnon, whom I had chosen for her experience in working with voice and movement. I had had Josée as a teacher before in voice and movement improvisation and considered her one of my main teachers in this domain. The third outside eye was Sylvie Cotton, whom I had had as a teacher before in a

performance art workshop at Studio 303 in Montreal. I felt a great affinity with Sylvie, as she is a much-appreciated multidisciplinary artist based in Montreal who explicitly integrates Buddhist practice into her work (Cotton, 2012). Although I was ultimately responsible for my work, I wanted to make sure that I had varied outside opinions informing what I did throughout the process and thus enriching the methods, concepts and form. These exchanges were invaluable in helping to stimulate, deviate and question my ways of working and reflecting. Finally, I had a dress rehearsal in front of a small, select audience and then three evenings of formal performances in a row. These took place in a large studio in the UQAM Dance Pavilion in September 2015. After each performance, I briefly presented the project and facilitated a discussion with the public in which they were invited to share comments and questions.

### 3.3 Gathering Information

As the nature of my research was heuristic, it was important that I keep track of what I experienced in varied formats and expressions. Moustakas encourages heuristic researchers to “depict the experience in accurate, comprehensive, rich and vivid terms...often... stories, examples, conversations, metaphors, and analogies. (1990, p. 49). Therefore, I used a diverse array of methods for collecting information, ranging from textual to video. Although my primary method was the use of the journal, it was important that I supplement it with other sources as well.

#### 3.2.1 Journal

All throughout the creation process, I kept a journal that I used two-fold: both as a tool for the creative process and a tool for the research process (see Annex C: Extract

from Creative Journal). For the creative process, I jotted down ideas for the dance creation, thoughts and any relevant moments during my process. For the research, I also detailed what happened in the studio, what I did, and how I felt. More specifically, I noted what I did during the period of formal meditation at the beginning of each rehearsal and how I experienced it. Then, I noted what emerged in my body and heart/mind while rehearsing, as well as the feeling tone of each experience. Finally, I articulated any possible connections I observed between my creative process and my meditation practice.

### 3.3.2 Video Recordings of Rehearsals and Performances

All of the rehearsals were filmed, first and foremost as a tool for creation. Filming was an essential part of my creative process, especially because I was mainly working by myself. It served as a record keeper, to help me remember what happened, and be able to refer to it later in time. It also helped me have another perspective on the work, by seeing it from the “outside.” I am quite aware of the shortcomings of videos compared to lived experience in that video representations often fail to capture the multi-sensoriality of dance but, for me, their usefulness as a tool at the time outweighed their limitations. As a result of this research-creation process, I now have a different attitude towards using video so assiduously during the creation process, something I discuss more in Chapter IV: Results and Discussion. As a researcher, I did not analyze the videos in an exhaustive way but rather used them as documentary support to help me remember what happened with greater detail and clarity. All of the performances were also filmed in order to be able to refer to them if needed. Since I was interested in my subjective experience of the performances, the video recordings remained secondary sources of information (see Annex M: Video of Performance).

### 3.3.3 Explication Interview

On the day before my first performance, I invited M  ralie Murray-Hall, who is trained in conducting explication interviews, to interview me with regards to my research question. The explication interview, as formulated by Pierre Vermersch, is a form of guided retrospective introspection that aims to help the interviewee make conscious unconscious knowledge that they might have regarding a certain experience (Maurel, 2009, p. 58). I had never experienced an explication interview before and was curious to try one, especially since the premises of this approach are very much in line with my own epistemological positioning, that of valuing subjective, experiential, and pre-reflective knowing. Indeed my interviewer spent well over an hour and a half asking me to remember in great detail a specific moment that was significant to me with regards to my research question. I chose the moment right before stepping on stage during my last dress rehearsal and described at length what I experienced in the body and heart/mind. I did not do a full transcription of the explication interview but, rather, took notes of the most important moments of the interview while watching the recording of it during my data analysis.

### 3.4 Method of Analysis

The main method I used for analyzing my data was thematic analysis as detailed by Paill   and Muchielli (2012). They suggest that through the identification of themes, the researcher begins to answer the question: "What is fundamental in this subject, this text, what is it about?" (2012, p. 231, own translation). The first stage of analysis consisted of rereading my journals and categorizing the information with the use of colors. I used a specific color to indicate what kind of information it was so that it would be easy to find when rereading later. They were divided into dance/artistic



notes, notes regarding themes in the creative work, notes related to meditation in general, notes about meditative qualities that emerged in practice during the rehearsal, and whether I was meeting experience with friendliness or with unskillful mind states (see Annex D: Extract from Analysis Stage 1, Categorizing Information).

The second stage of analysis consisted of rereading the journals and copying the key words and information in another document that served as a summary of the journals (see Annex E: Extract From Analysis Stage 2, Summary of Creative Journals). I noted here succinctly what had happened during the formal meditation in the beginning, what had happened in rehearsal, and in my body and mind/heart, as well as any impacts from meditation that I noticed. This corresponds to the first function of thematic analysis as described by Paillé and Muchielli (2012), that of tracking or finding all of the pertinent themes (p. 232).

The third stage consisted of recompiling this information into a chart (see Annex F: Extract From Analysis Stage 3, Table of Four Foundations of Mindfulness). I found this layout to be useful as it visually clarified and organized the information found in the previous stage. At this stage, I included the category of *Vedana*, feeling tone, the second category in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in order to better complete this analytical scheme as well as to convey the global sense of how I experienced the rehearsal. Thanks to the visual layout, this chart helped me make connections between the different themes that emerged. This corresponds to the second main function of thematic analysis as discussed by Paillé and Muchielli (2012), that of seeing parallels or contrasts between the themes, seeing how they intersect, contradict and complement each other (Ibid., p. 232).

The fourth stage of analysis consisted of spending time with my secondary data sources while paying special attention to my research question. This consisted of

rereading my notes from the discussions with audiences, rereading feedback I had gotten from my outside eyes, rereading my notes from the explication interview and watching the videos of my performances. I then sat back and allowed the information to flow from me in an intuitive way. For me, this clearly corresponded to the illumination phase in the heuristic research process as presented by Moustakas (1990). Indeed, here I was reconnecting to the material after a long incubation phase in which I had not been in direct contact with the data. I experienced what Moustakas describes as “a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question...may involve corrections or distorted understandings” (Ibid., p. 29). In this state, I listed all of the impacts of insight meditation on the creative process and performance of *Being With the Unknown* that emerged in my consciousness. I was surprised to see facets appear that I had not previously considered or thought of. I then cross-checked to see if these free-flow observations fit into one of the categories I had already created from the previous phase of data analysis and, if necessary, created a new category (see Annex G: Extract From Analysis Stage 4, Preliminary Results/Illumination Phase).

I would add that the numerous stages of writing and rewriting different chapters for each chapter, especially Chapter IV: Results and Discussion, were a form of deepening and refining my understanding of what happened and its impact on the creative process and the final work. This corresponds to Paillé & Muchielli’s “writing as an analytical praxis” (2012).

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

I successfully completed the on-line ethical training for researchers provided by CERPÉ, the ethics committee for student research projects involving human beings at UQAM, and feel that I have been well informed of the possible ethical risks that

research in the arts and humanities can engender. I submitted all of the necessary documentation to CERPÉ and was informed that my research-creation project did not need to undergo review for it was deemed not necessary. This was because this research-creation project was focused on my own artistic creative process and I was the primary person involved. The three collaborators, my outside eyes, were present for a limited time and were not subject to any physical, psychological or ethical risks due to their involvement in the project. I can attest that all relationships were conducted in a harmonious, respectful and professional manner.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS and DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will present the results that emerged from analyzing the data that I collected over the course of this research-creation project and discuss them in light of key authors in the fields of mindfulness meditation and contemporary dance. The main themes I will explore are in relation to my central research question, how the practice of mindfulness meditation influenced the creation process and performances of the dance work, “Being With the Unknown.” Mindfulness meditation consisted of both formal and informal self-observation of my body and heart/mind during the creative process as well as encouraging an attitude of friendliness and acceptance to what was happening. I will also examine what aspects of myself emerged during the process, using the lens of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the basis of mindfulness meditation, which I have detailed at length in Chapter Two. Finally, I will also consider the question of meaning, seeing whether or not integrating mindfulness meditation helped contribute a greater sense of meaningfulness to the work for me during the process.

In keeping with the nature of this project, in which theory and practice mutually informed each other throughout the entire process, and in which creation was regarded as a form of research and research as a form of creation, in this chapter, I interweave moments of description with moments of discussion. My intention in doing so is to illuminate specific aspects of the process in light of pertinent authors/practitioners and thereby engage with the larger reflections that these questions evoke. It is my hope that the concrete descriptions of my process will

anchor and contextualize the discussions that they generate. Rather than discussing each section of the final work, I have chosen moments and themes that seem important to me from the overall process. Therefore, the reader will understand that this discussion is not all encompassing but, rather, selective. First, I will describe the various phases of the creative process and the pertinent themes that arose. Second, I will detail my practice of formal sitting meditation and how it evolved over the course of the creation. Third, I will present the results of my informal self-observation and the difficult and unpleasant heart/mind states that emerged. This will carry forth into a discussion on the impersonal nature of self in line with a Buddhist worldview. Fourth, I will describe how I was able to move from fear to care by applying tools from mindfulness meditation such as being in the present moment and embodying an attitude of kindness and equanimity. Fifth, I will describe my relationship to the audience and the shift that took place during the performances showing how the influence of mindfulness meditation played out live, when it was most needed. Sixth, I will describe how aesthetic choices are also political ones, thereby making a link from the personal to the collective, the individual to the social. Finally, I will summarize my findings regarding the influences of mindfulness meditation on the various facets of this project in such a way that the reader can have a clear overview of the main impacts.

#### 4.1 The Creative Process

The creative process was divided into three phases. Each phase consisted of three weeks, twelve hours per week in the studio. A different outside eye accompanied me during each phase and came in regularly to watch and give me feedback. The first phase was dedicated to exploring the space and what emerged in relation to it and the objects it contained. Katya Moutaignac accompanied me during this first phase of creation. In the second phase, I aimed to move and sing more, to see what emerged

from my own body and voice. In this phase Josée Gagnon was my outside eye. The third phase consisted of me making choices, refining the proposition and working on my quality of presence. Sylvie Cotton assisted me in this phase of the process. Finally, the whole process was crystallized in making the leap from rehearsing to performing for an audience four evenings in a row.

#### 4.1.1 Working With What Was There: An Open Attitude, No Plan

I began the creative process by going into the studio with an attitude of curiosity and discovery. I tried to not bring any preexisting ideas, images or expectations about what the process or the final work would be like. Whereas normally, in the past, I had created with a certain idea in mind, or a theme that I wanted to explore, my only overt intention during this process regarded methods, not content. I knew that I would meditate formally before rehearsals and do my best to maintain awareness of my body and heart/mind while creating but nothing else. This itself became a central theme of the work and gave rise to the title, *Being With the Unknown*. It was inspired from meditation in which one pays attention to the present moment without knowing what will happen next, as “we sit in silence to see what can be discovered” (Souzis, 1996, p. 21). Similarly, the artist Meredith Monk states: “Just as in meditation practice, the artist aspires to start fresh, free from past solutions, glories and failures” (Monk, 2012, p. 2). Hence, each day I worked without knowing exactly what would happen or what the final work would be like, trying as much as possible to listen to what the moment presented. I was comforted to later read that Burrows shares a similar attitude to creation when he states that while choreographing, “We usually don’t know what we’re doing” (2010, p. 1).



#### 4.1.1.1 Empty Space: Exploring the Environment Through the Senses

Not having a plan or a vision that I brought to rehearsal allowed me to be open and receptive to what was already there. I began the creative process spending a lot of time exploring the space and the objects in it, at first with closed eyes. This was because I wanted to discover the space through all my senses, especially kinesthetic, and not primarily visual, as is usually the case. Indeed, as Lisa Nelson (2001) explains, “it is not a coincidence that dance has a visual tradition since dancers usually learned by watching and imitating” (Silva, 2010, p. 199, own translation). Having my eyes closed allowed me to sense my inner experience more clearly as I explored the space and received information through my five sense doors. At this early stage of my creative process, I was choosing a somatic approach to dance making, one that emphasized sensorial listening, rather than visual aesthetics. I will discuss this tension between a more somatic approach versus a more visual approach later in the chapter. The explorations of the space with my eyes closed eventually became a section in the final work entitled “Blindness.” It was the opening section of the piece, in which I came on stage from upstage right and slowly advanced towards the audience with my eyes closed. The intention here was to heighten my capacity to sense myself, the space and the audience by not using vision. It also gave me a feeling of greater vulnerability and transparency vis-à-vis the audience. I hoped they could sense with and through me, thereby also being fully present to the moment, with all of their senses activated.

For me, the space was the elemental basis from which to begin creating, since as Souzis declares: “All forms arise out of the emptiness and return to it” (1996, p. 29). This attraction towards empty spaces is one that is shared by other dance artists, as Snelling attests: “Fascination with empty space leads me to dancing...nothing in it, yet it holds so much power” (2001, p. 1). This time spent with the walls, the

perimeter, as well as the rest of the room evoked for me themes having to do with the known and the unknown, safety and risk taking, structure and emptiness. The following is an extract from my journal on the second day of rehearsal:

I love exploring the perimeter of the room with my eyes closed, I enjoy the solidity of the walls, their smoothness, the surprise of the cool window...but after some time, there is something in me that gets bored with the familiar, of the safety, and that wants to take risks and enter the unknown, uncharted territory. As I step into the space, suddenly I feel both exhilarated as well as somewhat disorientated. I don't know where I am or where I am going. The ground is all I can truly know through direct sensation. As I move in the space, there is a sense of excitement, of discovery, adventure and at the same time something that feels lonely, that is looking for connection. (Creative Journal, June 9, 2015, p. 2)

These themes were very meaningful to me both in relation to meditation practice as well as to artistic practice. In meditation, we are repeatedly asked to let go of familiar and habitual ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving. Pema Chödrön, a prominent American Buddhist teacher suggests:

To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest. To live fully is to be always in no-man's-land, to experience each moment as completely new and fresh. To live is to be willing to die over and over again. (2002, p. 87)

Likewise, in contemporary artistic practice, we are asked to deconstruct established forms and codes, stepping back with a critical distance from conventional representations of dance (Charmatz and Launay, 2003). In such a way, we suspend our usual habits and conventions and step into the unknown.

As a result of these explorations of the space and the objects that it contained, I developed an entire section based on opening and moving the folding chairs in relationship to each other and to the audience, saying out loud bits of what I imagined

these inanimate objects might be feeling or thinking. I used this section to conclude the final work since it engaged the audience directly and gave me a way to interweave their presence, my own and that of the chairs. Another result of using the space and what it contained as a generative matrix was the section in which I played the piano. During rehearsals, I would often go to the piano and play, enjoying the freedom to improvise, something I had never done during my classical training in piano. I felt that I was able to express emotions and aspects of my inner life better through music than using my body. I kept this piano section in the final work since I considered that it contrasted and complemented well the other sections that were perhaps less sonorous and more movement based. In fact, almost all of the sections were a direct result of exploring the rehearsal space, attesting to the importance of the space in my creative process.

#### 4.1.1.2 Black Tarp: Conflicting Attitudes Towards Being Seen

It was interesting to me how the physical experience of moving from touching walls to not touching anything had repercussions in my heart and mind. In fact, it was this psychosomatic dimension of movement that interested me the most. Expressly being mindful of the different facets of experience (physical, mental and emotional) while moving and creating helped me be more aware of these dimensions in my creative process and use them in my material. After having explored the walls and the empty space with my eyes closed, I then began experimenting with a black tarp that I found in the space. I played with covering myself with it and imagining the audience watching me become “invisible.” From underneath the tarp, during the rehearsals, I often talked about how I felt when covered and uncovered, what changed when I imagined being seen by others. Indeed, this form of embodied philosophy, dance as a way of apprehending and knowing the world (Louppe, 2007), has always been what

has most interested me in creative practice (as well as in meditation). Often, I experienced contradictory feelings towards the idea of being seen, as evidenced by a citation from my journal: “I love the darkness. I feel safe and protected in my black mantle and don’t want to come out... [However, after some time]... I get tired of staying small. I want to open, expand, see and be seen” (Creative Journal, June 10, p. 1). The question of being seen by others in performance and in life is a significant one and one that continues to intrigue me. Even though part of me felt uncomfortable at the idea of being seen, there was also another part of me that wanted to be recognized by others and clearly felt that this was a necessary part of the creative process. Indeed, Fraleigh (1987) suggests that until a dance is seen by an audience, it is not completed. It was as if the work and I could only come into existence fully when witnessed by others, for as Pelchat states: “Performing is ...being oneself for and through the eyes of the other” (1999, p. 68, own translation). This relational nature of performance is often fraught with tension, desire and fear, a theme that I will explore later in discussing the impersonal nature of the self as well as my relationship to the audience, 4.5.

#### 4.1.1.3 Trusting My Intuition: Repeating Explorations as a Way of Setting Material

Although I did not have a plan for what I was making, I trusted my intuition and followed what called to me, something that I had learned from years of meditation practice. This is also a way of creating that Burrows describes: “Listening to what the material is telling you to do requires as much concentration, control and sensitivity as any other way of working...Sometimes the material knows more than you. Accept what comes easily” (2010). Indeed, already at an early stage in the process, I was repeating certain explorations to get deeper to the essence of what I was investigating. For example, I explored the walls and space with eyes closed almost every rehearsal,

sensing how it felt inwardly and trying different trajectories. I did not know what I would do with this section, what final form it would take but I knew that there was something important about moving in the space with my eyes closed, sensing the space, the audience and the moment. Through this repetition of improvisations, slowly, certain pathways became increasingly set and clear. This became my working method for creating the different sections of the final piece that ended up ranging from almost entirely set choreographies to rather open scores.

#### 4.1.2 The Tension Between Being and Doing

In all of the different explorations during the first and last phase of creation, there was a simplicity and transparency in my state of presence. I said out loud what I actually felt, which gave my imaginary audience access to my inner experience and helped keep me present. Indeed, talking out loud can be “considered an awareness practice of reporting exactly what the experience is in a given moment” (Kraus 1990, p. 47). My movements were mainly pedestrian or task based which helped me maintain awareness since they were relatively simple. I felt quite at ease with this way of working and Katya and Sylvie, my outside eyes during these phases, encouraged me to continue in this direction. Every time I tried to do something more expressive or involved, it felt flat, forced and inauthentic. There was a sense of trying rather than just being. I remember one rehearsal in which I had filmed myself moving against the wall with my eyes closed and it seemed rather monochromatic to my choreographic eye when I later watched the video. I coached myself, telling myself to sometimes reach further with my limbs, to play with the dynamics and timing of the movement, to take more physical risks. I then repeated the wall improvisation several times trying to integrate these cues and filmed the results. I didn’t feel very comfortable while I was doing it and, when I watched the videos, I was disappointed. I had lost

the sense of ease and spontaneity of the original version and was now left with a “trying” that I judged as both awkward and uninteresting. This struggle between just being and also, at times, feeling like I should be doing more was an ongoing one. It is my opinion that this tension that I experienced was also, in part, a result of the presence of multiple divergent discourses that coexist in the field of dance today, ones such as in “new dance or experimental theatre [in which one] cultivates comfort with stillness and the ability to BE” (Kraus, 1990, p. 49) and others that belong to what Nathalie Heinich (2014) calls the paradigm of classical art which emphasizes technical virtuosity and classical canons of beauty. Although this project clearly called for being more than doing as a result of the influence of meditation, I could nonetheless feel a pressure from myself to produce something that would meet my own numerous and, at times, contradictory aesthetic standards as well as those that I ascribed to the larger Montreal dance community.

Despite respecting my tendency for simplicity during the first phase, part of me also suspected that I was perhaps playing safe and therefore wanted to see what would come from creating primarily with my own body and voice rather than in relationship to the space. Therefore, I gave myself permission to try a different direction for the second phase, one in which I repeatedly pushed myself beyond my comfort zone. Indeed, “spiritual progress requires that we repeatedly go beyond our comfort zone until we have made peace with life in the raw” (Ophuls, 2007, p. 89). Similarly, I believe that contemporary artistic practice asks that we stretch ourselves and take risks. Fittingly, Josée Gagnon, who is experienced with voice and movement improvisation, was my outside eye for this phase of the creation process.

#### 4.1.2.1 The Voice as a Gateway to Emotions



Up until now in this creation process, I had not used the voice for much other than speaking while moving and in a sketch of a song that I called “Nobody Knows,” which I did not feel satisfied with. Josée began our first session together by coaching me while I sang and I realized that I felt terribly awkward being coached in real time. While she was coaching me, I felt self-conscious and something in me felt like I was failing, that I was not doing it well enough. Nonetheless, I tried my best to be as receptive as possible despite the discomfort and continue. Josée encouraged me to stop containing my voice and let it go where it wanted to go, to take risks and enter the unknown. As I did so and hit some peaks of volume and strength, tears came to my eyes. To my surprise, I had touched something emotional in me. As Rust-D’Eye (2013) comments, “The non-verbal voice can be understood to give form to emotions, to render them palpable to the self and to others” (p. 16). Somehow, singing was able to touch an emotional chord in me in ways that moving had not. This was in stark contrast with the first phase of creation in which I had not contacted any strong emotions and rather maintained a sense of calm neutrality throughout. Using the voice opened up emotional aspects of my experience and put me more in contact with my expressive dimension. As Pelchat also commented in his creation-research process, “Singing...allows me to contact and express emotions with even greater nuance and precision than the danced gesture” (1999, p. 49, own translation). Indeed, although I was not using the voice per se, playing the piano in one of the sections of the final piece also provided me with an opportunity to experience and express a certain emotion linked to melancholia. It seemed that both singing and playing the piano allowed me to access emotions in ways that movement had not.

This raised the question for me about maintaining such a high degree of inner awareness while creating and performing because it seemed that it might be blocking a certain degree of spontaneity, going to extremes, and instead encouraging me to stay safe, in control. Perhaps a side effect of my training in meditation is that I now

may tend to avoid strong emotional and physical states because I wish to avoid being identified with or overwhelmed by them. Indeed, it is more difficult to maintain awareness and presence when emotional states are strong. Bienaise alludes to this when she states that a presence that is affective and emotional is often elusive, unconscious and uncontrolled (2008, p. 118), qualities that are precisely the opposite of what I try to cultivate in meditation practice. This raises interesting questions regarding meditation and performance practice since most artists, including myself, would not want to lose their emotive, irrational and wild facets in creation, yet how to do so with awareness and discernment? The trick may lie in having a very light touch of awareness and one that is primarily kinesthetic, since as Viarmé states, “Too much awareness kills presence...[especially] an awareness that is too mental” (in Bienaise, 2008, p. 35, own translation). Self-awareness must not become confused with self-consciousness, what Bienaise calls a mental presence to oneself, that “always seeks to maintain control over what’s happening and creates, over time, that which we ‘think’ we are, our ego, our sense of ‘me’” (2008, p. 127, own translation). Awareness should ideally be supple enough to allow for risk-taking and surprises, for as Snelling says: “If the dance is well rehearsed and perfect, then the experience of the audience will be the same. The invitation to come with the dancer is given when the dancer ceases to control the medium so tightly and takes a leap of faith” (2001, p. 3). The challenge is how to both let go and, simultaneously, maintain awareness. In fact, during the one section of the performance in which I engaged in high-energy movements, improvising with my voice and body as if being traversed by lightening bolts, my memory of what happened remains a blur, there was too much happening, too fast to really notice each moment. I imagine that with practice, this could be less of an issue, since awareness is infinitely faster than any movement of the body (Tejaniya, 2008).

#### 4.1.2.2 Pushing Myself: Feeling Like I Should Be Doing More

In this second phase of creation, I began spending more time on movement itself rather than on completing a task (such as exploring the space or covering myself with a tarp) and exploring how to sense it fully. I gave more importance to my warm-up, which I had often neglected previously. Now, after the thirty minutes of formal meditation, I also spent thirty minutes warming up the voice and the body (fifteen minutes of Gaga-inspired instructions<sup>3</sup> and fifteen minutes of vocal exercises) and could feel a great difference afterwards. The body, voice and imagination were more energized and multidimensional, available for creative work. With Josée's help, I tried changing states rapidly, doing several things at the same time, being more expressive, and using my body and voice more fully. Nevertheless, internally it did not feel good, something in me felt forced and uncomfortable. There was a sense of "trying" to be or appear that was painful and not what I actually wanted to do in this project. It felt linked to a sense of striving that was ego-driven and result-oriented. This seemed evocative of the presence to oneself that Bienaise calls action-oriented, which she states is strongly tinged with "willpower, control and direction" (2008, p. 118, own translation). This seemed to me antithetical to the nature of this project, which was to explore the integration of meditation in the creative process, and thus an attitude more in line with the kinds of presences that Bienaise calls "meditative and welcoming," (2008, p. 128) as well as "natural...wishing to remain simple" (2008, p. 64, own translation). I felt the pull in both directions, on one hand, wanting to push myself and take risks, and on the other, to respect my desire for ease and wellbeing.

#### 4.1.2.3 Accepting the Nature of the Work: Simplicity, Less is Enough

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<sup>3</sup> Gaga technique was developed by Ohad Naharin, the Artistic Director of the Batsheva Dance Company. It uses imagery in guiding participants through movement improvisations that are based on somatic awareness, mainly kinesthetic sensations. There is an emphasis given to waking up forgotten parts of the body, expanding range of movement and connecting to pleasure.

During one rehearsal, I remember showing Josée “The Impossibility of Communication,” a score which consisted of me sitting face to face with the audience and talking to them earnestly in an invented language. As I was trying to communicate with Josée in this absurd way, it was clear to me that this was the kind of moment that I was interested in exploring. In fact, in an extract from my journal on that day, I state: “a moment of truth, finally, connection with the moment, myself, Josée...something real. That’s what I am aching for, simplicity, being...together in a state of receptivity, openness, the possibility of being touched and touching others” (Creative Journal, July 23, p. 3). This desire to reach the other despite knowing the impossibility of the task is what moved me to speak. Leduc speaks of this desire of the dancer to bridge the distance between herself and the audience and how there is both a sense of separation and closeness between the two (2007, p. 2). It was clear to me that I was more interested in exploring situations psychosomatically in relation to the audience than doing anything in front of or for them. Although I was glad to have tried to work more expressively in this second phase, with a greater range of bodily and vocal possibilities, in the end, it felt right to respect my need for another tone, one that was more contemplative and less emotional. Curiously enough, I did not end up keeping any of the sections that I worked on this second phase. This, perhaps, reflected a certain equanimity that I felt towards the material I had generated. I was not attached to keeping it and felt comfortable reducing, simplifying and letting go. This was most likely an influence from my meditation practice in which I am invited, over and over again, to not cling to anything and, instead, relinquish.

#### 4.1.3 Making Choices, Composing, and Refining: The Question of Meaning

By the end of the first two phases, I had developed a series of improvisations that I had explored repeatedly. Although I liked the material that I had created, I would often have the nagging questions of how it would all fit together, how to make the material a coherent whole, what the final work would look like. All through these first two phases, I tried to put this question at the back of mind and stay open, just as in meditation. However, by the third phase it was clear to me that it was time to start making decisions and composing the whole. I considered the option of improvising completely while performing or choosing the order of sequences right before performing each evening but decided it was more coherent with my intention to compose beforehand. The aim of the project was to see the influence of meditation on the creation process of a dance composition, not necessarily an improvisation. Therefore, the third phase of creation was dedicated to making choices, simplifying and refining. It was interesting to observe that as I made choices about which sections I was going to keep and in what order, my motivation and enthusiasm for the project grew. It seemed that having greater clarity and structure gave me greater energy and confidence. On one hand, I had avoided setting material and making decisions earlier in the process because I wanted to stay as open as possible and allow the work to evolve on its own. However, I realized that actually, once I had set the material, I was able to dive more deeply into it and allow it to have a life of its own. Leduc describes this well: “Once the dancer no longer needs to think about the dance she is performing, she becomes centered on the action...she neither anticipates nor delays” (2007, p. 75).

At this point, I had many tableaux, or sections, about twenty explorations (see Annex I: Compositional Tableaux) that I had repeated again and again and it was now time to make choices and put them in order. To help clarify, I wrote the titles of each section on flashcards in order to be able to lay them out visually and help me compose. Sylvie Cotton, who was my outside eye in this phase, encouraged me to



intuitively choose which ones I liked best and develop them further. I played with different sections in different orders, seeing how they fit together. I noted which sections were faster or slower, more or less emotional, contemplative, relational, humorous, and sonorous, in order to balance, complement and contrast. This method of composition, working with multiple scenes that can be changed in order, is a method that I had already used in a past creation process and liked. As Burrows states, “Cut and paste is perhaps the most effective way to deal with fragments found by improvising” (2010). It is also in line with postmodern compositional methods that reject metanarratives in favor of non-linear, fractured assemblage (Banes, 1987). Indeed, this felt especially fitting for this project, since meditation involves experiencing one moment at a time, as directly as possible, and noticing how changing sensations arise one after the other in no logical order. There can be a physical sensation, a sound, a thought and then a breath. It is our minds that then overlay a story on this rapid succession of sensorial experience and give it a conceptual label. In meditation, we try to connect with the senses at the most elemental level, noticing concrete characteristics such as hot, cold, heavy or light and as much as possible avoiding interpretation or analysis. As Bikkhu Bodhi translates from what is attributed to have been said by the Buddha, “Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized” (1994, p. 1). By this statement, the Buddha is encouraging practitioners to be with bare experience as much as possible and avoid the mental proliferation that can result if one is not careful. Indeed, meditation encourages us to be in touch with the direct sensory experience and avoid trying to “make sense” of what is ultimately simply a sensorial experience. Hence, the juxtaposition of different scenes without a narrative logic seemed fitting for a composition so influenced by meditation. Interestingly enough, Anna Halprin, who is



not necessarily a self-proclaimed Buddhist, also speaks of coming to this method of composition as a result of carefully observing nature:

I don't like A-B-A, A-B-C, that isn't the way nature operates...Well, what is the nature of nature? So here on this deck, I was sitting one day, and these used to be all madrone trees and a red berry fell, and simultaneously I heard foghorns, and then I heard my children giggling up in the playground up there, and a bird, and I said, oh, that's a form. That's like a collage. That's a collage. Why can't we do that in dance? Let's try that out. (quoted in De Spain, 2014, p. 179)

Nonetheless, part of me was still worried that the audience would want to make sense of it all and I sometimes questioned whether I needed to have a more linear development or a clearer thematic focus. In imagining the audience's expectations and desires, I could feel the weight of a collective Western aesthetic heritage which still carries the residue of the classical, three-part dramatic structure, as presented by Aristotle in *Poetics* (350 B.C.), with an initial tension, a development towards a climax, and a resolution, that is a plot and perhaps, even a message. This not only raised the question of composition for me but also of meaning and how to consider this in a contemporary dance creation. I could feel I was haunted by a desire to better understand what the sections "were about" and what they "meant," so that they would have more "meaning" for me and eventually for the spectators. With further reflection, I began to realize that this was the product of an aesthetic objectivism which "tries to capture, to understand ...even decode (the mysterious art object, with a latent or hidden meaning)" or speculative theories of art that "seek to find coherence in the totality a work. As if artistic work were a coherent thought" (Montaignac, class notes, November 4, 2014). As I continued to try without success to uncover the "hidden meaning" of my work, I finally gave up and accepted that I had created and composed a flow of experience, put together in terms of the formal qualities of each section. Again, I believe that this tension that I experienced regarding the question of meaning was a result of the coexistence of several divergent

discourses that circulate in the field of contemporary dance. If my training in anthropology has taught me one thing, it is exactly this, that what one may experience on a personal level is also, to some degree, a product of larger, societal forces.

This issue of meaning in dance was already being questioned in the 1950s by Merce Cunningham. In fact, he considered that:

If a dancer dances, everything is already there. The meaning is there, if that's what you want...When I dance, it means: this is what I am doing...something being exactly what it is in its time and place, and not in its having actual or symbolic reference to other things. A thing is just that thing. (2015, p. 165)

It is important to highlight that Cunningham was a long time collaborator of Cage, who, in turn, was greatly influenced by Zen Buddhism (Lieberman, 2007). Cage shared this notion of valuing the “suchness” of a thing. He stated that: “We are not, in these dances and music, saying something...There are no symbols here to confuse you...Just the aesthetic object, to be contemplated for its own sake” (in Lieberman, 2007). In contemplating these ideas, I realized that behind this question of searching for meaning lay the idea of somehow needing to “understand” experience thereby fixing, closing and reifying it rather than simply receiving it as it presents itself, a flow of sensorial impressions that succeed one another. Pelchat also speaks of this contradiction in discussing the integration of Authentic Movement in his creative process: “Ouroboros is above all an attempt to communicate a sensorial flux of the dancing-body. But there was tension, even pressure, for me to look for meaning” (1999, p. 59, own translation). Indeed, I felt this tension within myself as part of me wanted to intellectually understand what the piece “was about” and be able to clearly communicate it. Alan Watts comments on this emphasis in Western culture on mainly relying on intellectually “knowing” versus other kinds of more embodied forms of knowing: “The general tendency of the Western mind is to feel that we do not really understand what we cannot represent, what we cannot communicate by linear signs -

by thinking” (1957, p. 181). Similarly, Duchamp in 1949, expressed his idea that “Art cannot be understood through the intellect” (in Bass and Jacob, 2004, p. 20). I comforted myself by reminding myself that in postmodern art making, artistic experience is determined by the viewer, how she or he engages with the work. This is more in line with aesthetics of reception, which proposes a reflection on art focused on how the viewer experiences the art work rather than on the artist’s intentions (Montaignac, November 14, 2014). This subjective approach to aesthetics, as articulated by Scheaffer (1996, 2000), states that:

Aesthetics constitutes “a unique cognitive experience” devoid of any fantasy of objectivity (a discourse on the work without a subjective lens), exhaustivity (saying all there is to say about a work), explication (piercing the enigma of a work) or unveiling (elucidating all of the dark shadows of a work). (Montaignac, 2014, p. 4, own translation)

Hence, the simultaneous existence of diverging discourses on art, such as this one regarding meaning, contributed at times to a sense of stress, since I would oscillate from one to the other. I eventually found that even though I championed an open and multiple approach to meaning for the work overall, I still needed to clarify for myself and connect to what my relationship to the work was during each moment while performing, whether it was primarily kinesthetic, emotional, cognitive or other. In fact, it didn’t seem to much matter what it was but what mattered was that it be clear. Therefore, integrating mindfulness meditation in the process helped me to be more clearly aware of what was happening internally for me on various levels and thus clarify my own subjective relationship to the piece, moment by moment. This question remains a rich site of investigation for me and one that I will continue to explore in future work.

#### 4.2 Formal Meditation During the Creative Process and Performances

#### 4.2.1 *Vipassana* and *Metta* (Clear Seeing and Loving-Kindness)

During the first and second phase of the creative process, I followed a similar structure for formal meditation. At the beginning of each rehearsal, I would spend thirty minutes in seated meditation, fifteen minutes practicing *Vipassana* (clear seeing, in this case, open awareness) and fifteen minutes practicing *Metta* (loving-kindness phrases). In *Vipassana*, I tried to anchor my attention on body sensations, while staying open to the flow of other stimuli such as sounds, thoughts, moods and emotions. I soon noticed that it was difficult to concentrate, to have the stability of mind necessary to clearly notice what was happening since I would rapidly become lost in thought. I often felt frustrated and disappointed by this because it was different from my experience of *Vipassana* on meditation retreats in which I experienced the mind as centered and calm, able to be with experience clearly. Here is an extract from one of my journals after meditating one day: “I feel so frustrated! These sits feel too short, a bit forced and really scattered. Right in the middle of the day, coming from activity and going back into activity, my mind is racing. It almost feels more painful to meditate than not to meditate” (Creative Journal, June 14, 2015, p. 2).

Even though I knew perfectly well that restlessness is one of the five classic obstacles in meditation (Goldstein, 2013, p. 153), there was a part of me that felt like this should not be happening to me, that I should be doing better. Of course, this was just adding suffering to suffering but it was my reality at that time. In fact, it is usually recommended to start with *Metta* first since it helps to stabilize attention and then practice *Vipassana*. However, it has never felt intuitively right for me to practice *Metta* first. To me, it feels like the time spent in *Vipassana* is a way for my mind and heart to unwind and settle enough to practice *Metta*. I did not allow myself to adjust my practice because I had committed to using this structure as part of my research-

creation methodology. Now, I realize that I should have paid attention to the feedback that I was getting from my reactions and made changes earlier on. For example, I could have done walking meditation, another form of formal meditation in which one pays attention to the kinesthetic sensations of walking, and can include other stimuli as well. This might have helped me connect more to my body and calm my mind through the movement. Wong also affirms the value of using mindful movement as a preparation for sitting meditation when she states that “the investigation of felt sense through movement in the body provides a gradual and natural way for the mind to prepare to enter into the stillness of meditation” (2016, location 458). Or, perhaps, I could have tried doing my physical and vocal warm-up first and then meditated. In this way, I could have released any excess energy present and used the physical warm-up to center myself and prepare for meditation. Meditation is an art, not a series of formulas or rigid blueprints and I learned from this experience the importance of listening to what was happening and adjusting en route.

However, first and foremost, it is essential to remember that mindfulness meditation is not about achieving a certain state or experience but rather observing what is happening in the moment whether that is calm, agitation, clarity or confusion. As Sayadaw U Tejaniya reminds us:

People also spend a lot of time thinking about the results. They want to experience peaceful states. . . Then they get attached to these states and to the objects they focus on. The real value of meditation is not in getting such results, however enjoyable they may be. The real value of meditation is the actual process of being aware and understanding what is happening. The process is important, not the result! (2008, p. 5)

Although I knew that intellectually, I still experienced wanting peaceful states and frustration for not having them. Unfortunately, rather than being able to meet these difficult states with self-empathy and understanding which would have eased the



pain, I mainly resisted and even denied them and thus experienced greater suffering. Indeed, it is true that it is important to develop some degree of concentration before opening awareness to include all experience but that will depend on causes and conditions, a key concept in Buddhist practice, which I will discuss a bit later. The structure that I used for formal meditation was not conducive for building concentration and so, in hindsight, it seems perfectly natural that I experienced a racing, scattered mind. The question, as always in mindfulness meditation practice, is not what I was experiencing but how I was relating to what I was experiencing. If I had seen that it was due to causes and conditions, I may have stopped judging myself for “not meditating well” and accepted what was happening (and probably changed the structure).

#### 4.2.2 Skillful Means (Using Different Tools As Needed)

The time that I spent in *Metta*, repeating the loving-kindness phrases or intentions usually to myself, usually felt calming and pleasant, though not always, as often the restlessness of mind would continue. Towards the middle of the third phase, as the date of the performances approached, I began experiencing greater anxiety and stress and saw the need to adapt my meditation practice accordingly. I realized that I was already using open awareness while moving and that what I needed in the formal meditation was something more centering and calming. Instead of practicing open awareness during the first fifteen minutes, I focused my attention on the whole body resting and breathing, which was more grounding. Then, I would spend fifteen minutes on *Metta* or some other form of positive thinking, including more and more my future audience in my thoughts. A few days before the performances, I began using positive visualization, seeing myself doing the different sections of the piece with a clear intention for each one. In my mind, I welcomed the audience and gave a



warm feeling to our connection. I focused on what I wanted to share with my audience instead of what I feared. I also began refusing to pay attention to negative thoughts or beliefs. Whereas during the creative process, I allowed these thoughts to be there when they arose and I tried to simply observe them (though part of me secretly believed them), right before performing it was clear that I could not let these kinds of thoughts remain and undermine my confidence. There is a time for all things and performing is not a time for entertaining self-doubt or criticism since this will compromise the quality of the performance. Indeed, the Buddha specified different ways of working with difficult, unskillful heart/mind states, ranging from bare mindfulness (knowing when they are present or absent), investigation (understanding how and why they arise and disappear), to letting them go and putting one's attention on something more skillful.

There is the case where evil, unskillful thoughts — imbued with desire, aversion, or delusion — arise in a monk while he is referring to and attending to a particular theme. He should attend to another theme, apart from that one, connected with what is skillful. When he is attending to this other theme, apart from that one, connected with what is skillful, then those evil, unskillful thoughts — imbued with desire, aversion, or delusion — are abandoned and subside. (Thanissaro, 2013, p. 1)

This was extremely useful before performing and even more so while performing. If self-doubt or criticism arose, I immediately dropped it and focused on something more grounding, such as kinesthetic sensations or perhaps a certain background state of calm that I was experiencing generally. In retrospect, this makes me think that next time I would like to try to work this way with unskillful thoughts from the very beginning of the process, seeing as they were not useful or helpful at any point. Simply being aware of them was clearly not enough, I was still identified with them and this fueled them to grow and come back.

At times (though not right before the performances) during formal meditation, if an emotion was strong, such as fear, I also practiced acknowledging it and spending time with it, letting it know it was understandable that it would be there. Shaw, who also integrated mindfulness in her creative process in dance, attests that thanks to mindfulness, she “became aware of [her] own tendencies and fears and discovered that being present in the moment not only aided in abetting those fears but also encouraged necessary change” (2012, p. 6). In my case, it was not enough to simply be aware of the fear but, rather, necessary to soften my inner relationship to it and help this part feel accepted. A testimony of this process is the following extract from my journal on August 18, about two weeks before the performances: “Can really feel the shift from being fear to being Presence that can welcome the fear without identifying with it. It makes such a big difference!”. By putting my attention on the awareness of the fear rather than the fear itself, I was able to make some space between myself and the emotion. In this way, I could encourage a friendly, understanding attitude towards the difficult emotion. Often the emotion would calm when it received some empathy and compassion instead of repression or judgment.

Finally, in the last phase of creation, I spent time at the beginning of rehearsals reflecting on the Ten Paramis, which are considered to be the qualities necessary for spiritual development. The Ten Paramis are generosity, ethics, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, honesty, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity. Reflecting on these faculties inspired and calmed me and gave me the courage to continue. Other artists that practice Buddhism speak of the importance of integrating the Paramis in the creative process (Nelson, 2016 and Monk, 2012).

Discipline, exertion and patience are invoked in the daily solitary work... The paramita of generosity begins by working with an “anything-is-possible” mind, allowing whatever arises to be,...Finally we share the vision with the people who experience the piece. (Monk, 2012, p. 4)

At this point, I could see how this inner preparation was absolutely vital to creating and performing and that before even warming up the body and voice, it was necessary to prepare the heart and mind. Although I may not have noticed the impact of formal meditation directly on the rehearsals, I did notice the impact of formal meditation on the performances. Meditating before performing helped me experience a greater sense of calm, groundedness and equanimity, as well as strengthen qualities such as openness, receptivity and friendliness, all of which made a significant difference in my experiences of performing.

#### 4.3 Informal Meditation: Self-Observation of Body and Heart/Mind

Besides meditating formally at the beginning of each rehearsal, the other dimension of my research project was that of incorporating mindfulness meditation informally during the time spent in the studio creating and rehearsing. This integration of the practices of *Vipassana* and *Metta* (clear seeing and loving-kindness) into daily activities is an integral part of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Hence, meditation is not limited to the time sitting on the cushion but expands into all areas of life. As I explained in Chapter 2, *Vipassana* in the Theravada Buddhist tradition consists of self-observation through the lens of the Buddhist teachings, specifically in terms of the Four Foundations for Mindfulness, which are described in the Sattipatana Sutta as the direct path to liberation (Goldstein, 2013, p. 3). As Soma Thera (1998) states: “The Satipatthana Sutta, the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness, is generally regarded as the canonical Buddhist text with the fullest instructions on the system of meditation unique to the Buddha's own dispensation.” Thus, in Theravada Buddhism, it is considered that skillfully paying attention to these four different areas will eventually lead to understanding (insight) and freedom from suffering (awakening). These four categories for establishing mindfulness are body, feeling tone (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), heart/mind and *dhammas* (categories of

experience). During my research-creation process, I used the first three Foundations but not the fourth category, that of *dhammas*, because I considered it to be too vast and complex for the purposes of this project. After each rehearsal, I documented in my journal all that I had noticed in terms of what had arisen in the body, feelings and heart/mind throughout the rehearsal (see Annex C: Extract from Creative Journal). Although I chose these categories because they are the foundations of mindfulness meditation, it is interesting to notice that similar categories can be found in other investigations of body/mind experiences. For example, in her study on the presence of four contemporary dancers while performing, Bienaise states that she “detected three entryways for experiencing one’s presence to self: mental, physical and emotional” (2008, p. 110, own translation). In addition, my explication interviewer explained to me that this form of interviewing paid special attention to what happened in the interviewee’s body, heart and mind (Murray-Hall, personal communication, Aug. 29, 2015).

In order to make this more concrete, I will offer an example of my process of self-observation during rehearsals. During my warm-ups, I often used tools from Gaga technique and voice improvisation to energize the body, wake it up somatically and expand my repertoire of movement (paying attention to the body). During one rehearsal, I noted in my notebook that during this warm-up the body felt energized and enlivened, there was a pleasant sensation associated with it (paying attention to feeling tone), and the heart/mind experienced a sense of freedom, release and expressivity (paying attention to the heart/mind). Later in the rehearsal, I was exploring an improvisation that I called “drunk,” in which I investigate the sensations of laxity, using passive weight, indirect space, disjointed time and free flow, all qualities that I associated as opposed to an ideal, glorious dancing body (Silva, 2010). As I moved, I noted that these qualities in the body gave rise to a pleasant feeling (paying attention to feeling tone). I also observed that the mind felt relaxed to the

point of feeling slightly idiotic (paying attention to the heart/mind). However, while I was watching the video of the “drunk” improvisation, I noted that the state of my body while observing the work was slightly tense, the feeling tone oscillated between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral (depending on whether I liked what I saw or not) and the heart/mind fluctuated between liking, not liking and indifferent, observing, critiquing and suggesting. These are just three moments during this one specific rehearsal but it is clear that in each rehearsal, I experienced many different moments, each one with its accompanying reactions in the body, feeling tones and heart/mind. It was not always easy to be aware of all these areas in the moment but the exercise of writing what had happened in the body, feeling tone and heart/mind in my notebook at the end of each rehearsal helped to clarify this task of self-observation. In addition, this then provided the primary data to analyze after the creative process had ended. As a result of this analysis, I was able to verify for myself the importance of being mindful of these categories and see how “when we’re not mindful, not aware, then we often get lost in unwholesome reactions, creating suffering for ourselves and others” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 3). Indeed, as a result of this analysis I was able to make connections between different aspects of my self and the context and better understand the impersonal nature of self and the ways in which suffering is created or released, which is the main objective of mindful meditation practice.

#### 4.3.1 The Body-Mind Relationship in Buddhism

The question of the body-mind relationship is a complex one and one that has been studied by different disciplines in the West, such as philosophy of mind, neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, as well as in the East, in various philosophical/religious systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. It is clearly beyond the scope of this study to discuss each one and



their differences. Suffice to say that in Western philosophy, there have traditionally been two manners of understanding this relationship, one, dualist, in which mind and body are split and the mind mainly controls the body (Plato, 1160, cited in Baird & Kaufmann, 2008; Descartes, 1644), and another, monist, in which the mind and body are considered to be fundamentally one. More and more contemporary Western philosophers and scientists are now considering the mind as not separate from the body, as Clark (1999, p. 2), a prominent philosopher of mind and cognitive scientist, states: “Talk of embodiment, and situatedness looms increasingly large in philosophy,<sup>4</sup> psychology,<sup>5</sup> neuroscience,<sup>6</sup> robotics,<sup>7</sup> education,<sup>8</sup> cognitive anthropology,<sup>9</sup> linguistics,<sup>10</sup> and in dynamical systems approaches to behavior and thought.<sup>11</sup>” Indeed, in some currents of cognitive science, researchers increasingly speak of embodied cognition and enactivism (Varela, Rosch & Thompson, 1992; Epstein 2016). Hence, Western science is beginning to come closer to Buddhist understandings of the interrelated and complex relationships between mind and body.

In Buddhism, the mind and body are considered to be “neither identical nor totally distinct” (Harvey, 1993, p. 29). Rather, they are regarded as being constantly in flux,

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<sup>4</sup> Varela, F., Thompson E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The Embodied Mind*; Clark, A. (1997). *Being There: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again*; Hurley, S. (1998). *Consciousness in Action*; Lakoff, G. and Johnson M. (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh*; Haugeland, J. (1998). *Mind Embodied and Embedded, in Having Thought*

<sup>5</sup> Thelen, E. and Smith L. (1994). *A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action*; Turvey, M. and Carello, C. (1995). In *Mind as Motion*.

<sup>6</sup> Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' Error*; Chiel, H. and Beer R. (1997). The Brain Has a Body: Adaptive Behavior Emerges From Interactions of Nervous System, Body and Environment. *Trends in Neurosciences* 20.

<sup>7</sup> Arkin, R. (1998). *Behavior-Based Robotics*; Brooks, R. (1991). Intelligence without representation. *Artificial Intelligence* 47, 139-159.

<sup>8</sup> Resnick, M. (1994). *Turtles, Termites and Traffic Jams*; Anderson, J. Reder, L and Simon, H. (1996). “Situated learning and Education.” *Educational Researcher* 25:4:5-11; Greeno, J. (1997). “On Claims That Answer the Wrong Questions.” *Educational Researcher* 25:4:5-11.

<sup>9</sup> Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the Wild*; Suchman, A. (1987). *Plans and Situated Actions*.

<sup>10</sup> Regier, T. (1996). *The Human Semantic Potential*.

<sup>11</sup> Kelso, S. (1995). *Dynamic Patterns*; Port, R. and an Gelder T., Eds. (1995). *Mind as Motion: Dynamics, Behavior, and Cognition*.



each with their own processes, and, at the same time, influencing and being influenced by each other.

For though Buddhism recognizes a polarity between mental and physical constituents of sentient beings, it never sharply divides them but on the contrary strongly emphasizes the close relationship of all mental and physical states. (King, 1964, cited in Harvey, 1993, p.2)

It is interesting to notice that a discipline like dance, in which the body and movement are the primary elements, has paid so little attention to the affective and cognitive dimensions of the dancing experience. Instead, in accord with a mechanist view of the body (and the dancer), dancers have traditionally been trained to pay attention to an outer ideal of the body to, at times, the detriment of their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing (Fortin, 2008). Somatic education has been a counter force in dance and movement training, awakening and refining the capacity to sense the body from within (Hannah, 1986). However, such approaches are mainly focused on bodily sensations, kinesthetic and proprioceptive, and do not explicitly include or address experiences of the heart/mind. Although many of these approaches recognize that movement has an impact on the heart/mind (such as Body-Mind Centering, Rolfing, Chi-Kung, and others), this is not the central focus of their work, choosing to instead concentrate on movement as the primary entryway into the whole person. Similarly, Dance/Movement Therapy focuses on using movement and the body to gain awareness of, and, often, regulate heart/mind states (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). One field that does pay very close attention to the relationship between the body and the heart/mind in an embodied and experiential way is body-centered psychotherapy (Kurtz, 2007). Indeed, some therapeutic approaches such as Focusing (Gendlin, 1982) resemble mindfulness meditation in that practitioners/clients are invited to sense into their bodies in order to get an overall

“felt sense” about a situation. This includes both bodily, affective and cognitive dimensions, although preverbal sensations are favored for accessing intuitive knowing.

What is unique to Buddhism is that it invites practitioners to continuously examine for themselves what is happening internally on the physical, affective and cognitive plane and notice their interconnections. This is something to be done experientially, for oneself, all throughout one’s life. In addition, in Buddhism, the emphasis is to notice what causes suffering and what leads to the end of suffering, thereby giving this task of self-observation a pragmatic goal (Analayo, 2003).

#### 4.3.2 Observing Unpleasant States in the Heart/Mind During the Creative Process

As I described in the beginning of this chapter, not having a predetermined plan for the creative process contributed to an attitude of openness and possibilities. However, it also contributed to a host of difficult reactions, such as frustration, insecurity, confusion, lack of motivation that continued almost until the very end. I imagine that I am not the only artist to experience such unpleasant states during the creative process but, for some reason, there seems to be a scarcity of literature on this topic. Shaw speaks of this to some extent, talking openly about the stress and anxiety that she experienced while creating a work of dance. “I was constantly living in fear of the future, worrying about the outcomes rather than being present in the moment” (Shaw, 2012, p. 2). Pelchat discusses some of the obstacles he faced in creating a work based on authentic movement, saying that he “systematically invalidated all the work that did not meet [his] expectations (1999, p. 51, own translation). Bienaise also shares some of the challenges she faced at certain points of the creative process working as a dancer with three different choreographers (2015). Finally, Deschamps speaks of

these difficult states as necessary parts of the creative process (“creative chaos”), integral to making the work. She invites us “to accept the part of suffering and unpredictability in all creative acts and allow a fully accepted creative expression to emerge” (1995, p. 35, own translation). Although I agree with her that these unpleasant heart/mind states are normal parts of the creative process, I believe that observing how they arise and operate is essential in understanding how to be with them more skillfully in the future. Indeed, this is precisely one of the potential benefits that integrating mindfulness meditation in the creative process offers.

Due to this promise, however, it was disappointing for me to experience and observe so many unpleasant heart/mind states since one of my secret hopes for this research-creation project was that integrating meditation practice would decrease the amount of suffering I would experience during the creative process. Indeed, the explicit aim of Buddhist practice is to reduce suffering, as illustrated by a famous quote attributed to the Buddha: “I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering” (in Fronsdal, 2001, p. 2). In this phrase the Buddha is not referring to the suffering that is an inevitable part of being human, such as aging, illness and death, but to the suffering that he considered optional. This refers to the ways in which we choose to respond to our experiences. According to the Buddha, the primary way of responding to experience that causes pain is that of clinging (wanting) or resisting (aversion). “When we cling, it is painful. When we try to hold our experience at a distance, to push it away, that too is painful” (Fronsdal, 2001, p. 4). Since Buddhism is not a dogmatic doctrine to be believed or refuted but rather a series of teachings that are to be tested for oneself experientially, practitioners are encouraged to observe their own experience and begin to take an interest in how their inner life operates.

In my case, I could clearly see that during the creative process I often experienced various forms of wanting and aversion. Some of the predominant forms of wanting I

noticed were: wanting the final result to be “good;” wanting the process to be more easeful; wanting what I saw on the videos of my improvisations to be “better;” wanting the dancer in me to be more impressive, visually arresting; and so forth. Aversion being the inverse of wanting, I noticed: resistance to what was actually happening; aversion to what I was experiencing; not liking what I saw; and so forth. For example, in my journal one day that I was reflecting more globally on the creative process, I commented: “Since the beginning, this pervasive sense of striving, wanting a final product that is creating a lot of pressure and stress...and a sense of dissatisfaction, wanting more...resistance to going to the studio, something that feels like a load, obligation” (Creative Journal, July 30, 2015, p. 3). These negative self-judgments, criticism, expectations and demands were clearly making the process painful and uncomfortable for me. Bienaise speaks of this as an evaluative, mental presence to oneself, one that consists in part of self-critical thoughts (2008, p. 67).

In retrospect, it became clear that this was often a result of watching videos of myself in rehearsal and not liking what I saw. I alternated, in fact, between a more embodied, kinesthetic awareness while moving and a more mental, visually based awareness while watching the videos of my rehearsals. Hence, the primacy of the visual over the kinesthetic in my choreographic “eye” engendered a more critical attitude towards myself. In retrospect, I wonder if using the video so assiduously was such a positive choice since it seemed to engender such an evaluative attitude. Indeed, Bienaise comments in her research project (2015) that she decided to stop filming her rehearsals when she realized that watching herself was taking her away from the sensory experience and inciting her to judge herself constantly. She declares that it was leading her away from “her research intention of examining her experience as it presented itself and, instead, leading her to focus on how she would have liked it to have been” (2015, p. 88, own translation). Although I was somewhat aware of this risk at the outset of my project, I insisted on filming because I considered that its

usefulness as a choreographic aid outweighed its dangers, especially since I was choreographing on myself. I had hoped that being mindful of my reactions would help limit the self-judgments and help me have a more objective view. Today, I realize that this is tricky terrain and am not sure that I would use the video camera as often in a future project.

As I have said, in Buddhist practice, we are taught to observe whatever states arise in the body and heart/mind without judgment or identification. The idea is to realize that we *are* not a state of body or heart/mind and that it is simply a passing phenomenon.

Whenever we identify with any of these factors . . . we reinforce both the concept and felt sense of self. Identification with mental factors creates the perspective of . . . “I’m restless,” . . . “I’m making an effort.” We build this superstructure of “I,” of “self,” on top of what are actually momentary, changing conditions. (Goldstein, 2013, p. 185)

If, however, we merge with a passing state, then we contribute to greater suffering for ourselves and others. In fact, Buddhist teachings point to the three characteristics universally shared by all conditioned phenomena: everything is changing, not “me, mine or I,” and causes suffering if we cling to it. However, if we actually understand these three characteristics deeply and experientially for ourselves, then whatever we are experiencing is lived in a more spacious, liberating way. In my case, through most of the creative process, I was able to clearly observe what I was experiencing but not so able to disidentify with it. For example, I might have a negative self-judgment while watching a recording of a rehearsal but part of me believed it, veiled as “discernment” in the service of the choreographic eye. Another example is from yet another day during which I was feeling listless and unmotivated in rehearsal and I noted: “Tired of feeling lost and unclear! I want structure!!... noticing frustration, boredom, lack of inspiration ... can I be with that? How to be with difficult heart/mind states?” (Creative Journal, June 30, 2015, p. 1). This shows that I was



aware of the difficulty I was having in just “being with” these states without being caught up in them. There is a key difference between just being aware of something and being able to be with it with friendliness and wisdom which helps lead to disidentification.

It is important to remember that the goal of meditation practice is not to “get rid” of unpleasant states of body and heart/mind by rejecting or repressing them but rather to better understand how they arise, how to be with them when they are present and what contributes to their changing or dissipating. In this way, through observation and understanding, some of these painful habits of reactivity may weaken and transform. It is not something that can be done through volition or willpower but rather the result of an ongoing process. Although I knew this very well intellectually, it was very difficult to not wish that these unpleasant states would just disappear. With time, I was able to more and more agree with Monk when she states:

As in dharma practice, creativity means staying present throughout the process; when desperation and anxiety enter, one remembers to go back to the breath, the space, stillness. One moves through delusions of success and failure, fame and humiliation, to an intent to create a work that is of benefit. This process demands the skillfulness, courage, faith and clarity of a warrior. In my experience, meditation practice has only expanded my vision. (2012, p. 3)

This ability to be equanimous even during the difficult moments is a skill that I have been slowly developing over the course of my meditation practice and one that grew over the course of this creative process.

#### 4.3.3 The Stress of Performing: The Self at Stake



As the date of the performances approached, a general sense of stress increased acutely and I decided it was time to take a closer look at what was happening internally. In meditation, we are encouraged to first recognize and be with states and emotions with the hope that the simple act of recognition might create some spaciousness between the “I” that experiences them and these states and emotions. However, if a state seems to be tenacious or recurrent, then it is recommended to look further and analyze why and how it arises. This is not to be done in an intellectual way but through observation and embodied intelligence (Brach, 2013). In investigating what it was that was creating so much stress and anxiety, I clearly saw that it was fear. I was afraid that I would not like my work and feel embarrassed presenting. I was afraid that others might not like the work and, perhaps, me. Although this was not a rational fear, it was present nonetheless and minimizing it did not help. I realized that this stress had a lot to do with what in Buddhism we call “selfing,” taking something personally, as if this performance and what people thought of it could reflect something fundamental about me or my worth. Indeed, when I designed this project, I intuited that looking more closely at the self would be revelatory, for as Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche states, “This ego-self we cling to is the source of most of our problems. Wherever we get hung up in pain and confusion, there we’ll find the ego” (2010). This was therefore one of the primary motivations for deciding to clearly observe what arose in my body, and heart/mind all through the process, since these are the elemental building blocks that I identify as “me, mine or I.”

From a Buddhist point of view, the *ego* is something made up by the mind. It’s the sense of self — a flash of “I” or “me” that we believe in and cling to. It’s the basis of our feeling of self-importance. It’s a story, a myth of self that we keep telling ourselves. That “self” is the center of our universe. No matter what we’re doing, our actions always come from, and reflect back to our sense of self-consciousness. (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 2010)

Hence, it was clear that the stress that I was experiencing in anticipating performing was related to this sense of self-importance, wanting to appear in a certain way and please. Again, what I found fascinating was the disjuncture between how my body and heart/mind felt about this. Although rationally, I believed that I did not care what other people might think as long as I liked the project, my body felt differently. This was yet more proof that I was not in control of my body and heart/mind states but that they each followed their own logic.

Interestingly enough, Buddhism is not the only worldview that proposes the view that the self is a construct and perhaps not as solid or independent of an entity as we may commonly believe. As I discussed in Chapter II, many thinkers in cultural studies, cultural anthropology, sociology, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, poststructuralist theory and post-colonial theory question the notion of an essential, stable self and instead, propose a view that is more dynamic, complex and relational. Dancers also speak of experiencing the self in ways that question the nature of the self, such as Ruth Zaporah, Deborah Hay, Emily Conrad and Barbara Dilley, to name a few. Sally Ann Ness, a dancer, cultural anthropologist and dance theorist, describes how in repeating a certain movement pattern over and over again, she increasingly had the sensation that her sense of self was sensorial, embodied and changing: “Me or ‘I’ now meant itself to be a limb, swinging and scooping freely through the air, “listening,” as it went along... Beyond the control of the faint echoes of the “I” of my ordinary self” (1992, p. 5). I particularly value these viewpoints since they stem from an embodied practice, a corporal epistemology. Although all of these approaches question an essentialist view of the self, each does so in its own particular ways. What Buddhism has to offer is a detailed explanation of the elements that make up what we take as the self (the Five Aggregates, see Chapter II), how they come to be, interact and dissipate, and how this exploration can either lead to greater suffering or greater wellbeing for oneself and others. The key for this is understanding the

impersonal and causal nature of the self which can come about through close observation of what happens in the body and heart/mind.

#### 4.4 Moving from Fear to Care

According to the Buddhist worldview, although we cannot necessarily decide what arises in our bodies and heart/minds, we can increasingly decide how to respond to it (Fronsdal, 2001, p. 4). Since I saw that the stress that I was experiencing was related to wanting to present a work that would reflect positively on “me,” I began exploring ways to encourage a more fluid sense of self that was less attached to outcomes. In a conversation with Sylvie Cotton on this topic, she talked about how performing is perceived as a threat to our sense of self. Our sense of self wants to appear ideal in front of others, be adored and emanate success.

Who practices? A self filled with fears and desires. Fear of what? Of its own strength and its own weakness. Desire for what? For expression and recognition. Projection contains both the heroic and the fearful. Experience oscillates between these two states. Who experiences all of this? Practice involves a dimension of research on this self that works with it-self all day. To do so, it is necessary to rest one’s spirit, to be here and accompany oneself. Present! (Cotton, 2011, p. 6, own translation)

In reflecting with Sylvie, we came up with some strategies to facilitate a more easeful state of self. The first was that of slowing down in order to fully experience what was happening sensorially, be absorbed in the task and less in my head. Being absorbed in the direct sensorial reception allowed me to forget myself and simply be with experience. The second was having a friendly inner attitude in order to welcome what was happening regardless of what it might be. As I worked with these strategies, I could feel that in each section of the work I became more and more absorbed in the work and less and less identified with myself.

#### 4.4.1 Sensorial Listening: Being in the Present Moment

As the creative process was coming to an end and I was about to perform, I realized that I had forgotten the basis of my research-creation project, which was to be aware of my body and heart/mind while moving. I had become so absorbed by the task of composing, refining and polishing the work from the “outside” that I had forgotten to fully experience it from the “inside.” An important element that helped me reconnect with this intention was having an explicitation interview the day before the first performance. I had never experienced an explicitation interview before but I had been curious to do so from what I had heard about it from colleagues and friends. It seemed to be a method for better understanding a subjective experience and perhaps extracting meaning from it. As Maurel explains, “the explicitation interview makes it possible to support the subject...as he makes the transition from pre-reflective consciousness to reflective consciousness, about a specified lived experience in the past, and more specifically a lived experience of an action” (2009, p. 59). I had asked somebody trained in the method to come and interview me with the hopes of better understanding my material and getting closer to its essence. I felt that it was important that I do all that I could, using all of the resources and tools available to me, to have as much intimacy and clarity with the material as possible so that I could embody and share it with fullness and satisfaction.

My interviewer asked me to think of a key moment from my last rehearsal in relationship to my research question and then proceeded to ask me extremely detailed questions about each micro-moment regarding the state of my body, heart and mind. I chose to start from the beginning of the piece and described the moment before going onstage. Having to remember these moments in such detail, describing what

happened internally, in the body, heart and mind, helped me remember that maintaining awareness while moving and performing was my priority above and beyond aesthetic concerns. This is because the practice of mindfulness meditation in action is precisely maintaining awareness of what is happening in these areas of the self, my main goal for this research-creation project.

Another helpful element appeared right before performing, when I realized the importance of asking myself the meditative question: “What *is* this?” throughout the whole performance. In fact, Lalitaraja speaks of having used this same meditative question in his own dance practice (2012, p. 151). Deborah Hay is also known for using long, *koan*-like “What if” questions such as “What if every cell in my body could notice the feeling of time passing?” (2000, p. 104). These kinds of questions are used in meditation in order to provoke curiosity and a sense of discovery during the long hours of sitting in silence, allowing one to plunge deeper into present-moment experience. This was useful at this point of the creative process since I now felt quite familiar with the material and as if I already knew what it was. By using this question while performing, I was able to drop below the surface and investigate what I was experiencing more fully. As a result, I suddenly felt like Alice in Wonderland, rediscovering things anew. This sense of curiosity was key in my quality of presence and allowed me to be present in the moment, open and receptive. The basis for my sensorial listening was kinesthetic because I found that it was the most grounding and useful for performing. However, despite the absorption that I felt, I was also aware of other sensations that arose such as sounds and heart/mind states.

As a result of this emphasis on sensorial listening, the rhythm of the piece was slow, much slower than my past works. When I began the creative process, I resisted the idea of making a “slow, meditative” piece. I wanted to show that meditation is not necessarily a calm and peaceful affair. Awareness is infinitely quick and inner life

can be very fast moving, intense and full of emotions. However, it is true that in general it is easier to be aware of something when it is slow. I realize now that despite my original intention to not fall into this cliché, I mainly chose moments in which I could take my time.

#### 4.4.2 An Attitude of Friendliness and Acceptance

The second strategy I focused on in order to encourage a greater sense of ease while performing was that of cultivating an inner attitude of friendliness towards what was happening. Indeed, it is important to remember that developing *Metta*, friendliness, is just as important as developing wisdom on the Buddhist path. Formally, mindfulness meditation consists of both kinds of practices, *Vipassana*, clear seeing, and *Metta*, loving-kindness. In fact, they are considered two sides of the same coin, two facets of the same enlightened heart/mind. As Diane Gould states:

Wisdom and Compassion are considered two wings of the bird of awakening; inseparable, each an aspect of each other, each needing the other to be its truest self. Wisdom without compassion can be dry and indifferent; compassion without wisdom can be mushy, saccharine, maudlin. (2012, p. 1)

In hindsight, I realize that I did not emphasize this attitude of friendliness enough during the creative process. Although in the beginning, my formal meditations were equally divided between *Vipassana* and *Metta*, during the rest of the time the informal practice was mainly biased towards *Vipassana*, self-observation, with little attention given to *Metta*. In retrospect, I remember Sylvie Cotton reminding me of the importance of cultivating kindness and equanimity in our first rehearsal together. In my journal from that day, I noted: “I realize now that simply observing feels cold to me, I need more *Metta*, warmth, compassion” (Creative Journal, August 13, 2015). Ideally, self-observation should always be infused with warmth and compassion in



order to assuage any tendencies towards self-judgment and criticism. Naturally, as the date of the performances approached and my stress levels increased, it became obvious to me that I needed to change approach and integrate more *Metta* into the process. Using *Metta* in this way is a classic strategy for calming anxiety and it is often told that the Buddha first taught *Metta* to a group of monks as an antidote to fear (Goldstein and Salzberg, 2001, p. 182).

It was interesting to observe that as long as I stayed focused on myself, there was a sense of fear regarding showing myself in front of others. When I began shifting from self-centeredness to including others in my practice of loving-kindness and acceptance, the fear lessened and transformed into a sense of connection and care. Indeed, this attitude of friendliness is perhaps what best served me throughout the whole process. It helped me dedramatize what was happening, gain some perspective and reconnect to my basic intention of presence and kindness. It helped give me confidence, calm, concentration and an ability to respond to the moment. Ultimately, it helped me be at ease and even enjoy what was happening, especially during the performances. Curiously enough, I have found very few references to dancers integrating these attitudes while performing, other than a brief mention in a text by Karen Nelson (in Blum, 2016). Once again, this points to me to the dearth of discussion in dance training, research and the professional milieu with regards to the inner tools necessary for performing with ease. So much time and attention is given to the body and so little to the heart and mind!

Connected to this attitude of friendliness was also a sense of acceptance. Although all through the process, I kept identifying with and resisting the states of heart/mind that I was experiencing, right before the performances, I chose to surrender. I was not satisfied with the work since I did not feel like it had reached its final version. It still felt like a work-in-progress and I was upset with myself for not having made

decisions earlier in the process and thus have given me the time necessary to let the creation mature. However, right before performing, I told myself that the material was what it was, there was no longer time to make any more changes, and this was the time to make the best of what it was, dance it in the fullest way possible. Here, my role changed from choreographer to dancer, and in this role my task was to make the most of whatever material I had been given, independently of what I might think of it. Most likely, I was able to make this switch thanks to a certain degree of equanimity that I had been cultivating all along. It was thanks to this attitude that I was able to embody the work so fully during the performances and thereby, bring the work to its completion.

Cultivating these attitudes of acceptance and equanimity served me well, especially while performing. I could feel a strong sense of steadiness and openness that supported me during the showings and after, during the feedback and discussions. This was most likely connected to a certain letting go of expectations and judgments, the piece was created, this was what it was, for better or worse. This gave me a sense of peace and grounding that I had never experienced to this extent before while performing.

#### 4.5 Relationship to the Audience: The Impact of Others

The audience was very present with me from the very beginning. I could feel their presence in the space with me even though it was imaginary. I would often talk to them during my explorations in rehearsals, commenting on what I was doing, how I was feeling, on their presence and on my relationship to them. In “Drunk,” I would talk and joke with them about being in a state of *défaillance* or permanent failure; in “Black Tarp,” I would reflect out loud on what it meant for me to see and be seen by them; in “Montreal in Winter,” a section that I eventually cut, I seated myself among

my imaginary audience in order to watch an empty projection screen and sense each other's presence; each section was created and composed with the audience present, even in their absence.

Indeed, the final work shows to what degree the audience was an essential part of the piece. The beginning of the final work consisted of me approaching the audience with my eyes closed until I (hopefully) touched somebody. This spoke to me among other things, of my desire to bridge the distance that separated us, of wanting to be near, even in physical contact with each other, in contrast to many dance performances in which the performers and the audience never meet. I then asked this person to accompany me to an empty chair that was placed center stage while I kept my eyes closed. For me, this evoked our mutual dependency, we both needed each other in order to make the piece work, the audience was as important as I was for the creation of this experience, a shared experience. In the next section, "The Impossibility of Communication," I also tried to bridge the gap between the audience and myself as we sat face to face and I spoke to them in an invented language. This suggested to me the difficulty in ever truly understanding each other even when using language, the abyss that remains between two people even while they may ache for intimacy. In the section with the tarp, as I mentioned, I explored what it felt like to be seen by them and to cover myself in front of them, questioning this code of performers showing themselves (perhaps, at times, even showing off themselves) to an audience that remains covered by the absence of light. In the piano section, I allowed myself to express emotions such as melancholia through music, my back to the audience, the hope being that we could share this moment together, not about them looking at me, but more about experiencing a state or an emotion collectively. My intention in the next section was to allow my energy and that of the piece and the room, which until now had perhaps felt a bit contained or restrained, to freely circulate in a brief explosion of movement and sound. I hoped that the audience could also experience a

sort of release vicariously, through me. Depending on the night, I addressed them more or less explicitly using movement and voice and allowed different states to move through me. Finally, in the last section, the audience was very much included, as I moved the chairs in relation to them, speaking, and sharing fragments of personal stories inspired by my imagination but that, hopefully, resonated with the audience.

After so much time imagining an audience in rehearsal, it was interesting to see how I responded when real people actually came into the space and watched the work. Depending on who it was and my state of being that day, their presence had a different effect on me. For example, I noticed that when Sylvie Cotton came, I felt at ease and confident while performing. However, when Katya Moutaignac came, I could feel some stress, expectations and holding back while performing. Both outside eyes were very supportive and positive, my mind told me that there was nothing to worry about, and yet my body responded differently to each one. In all cases, the presence of another helped crystallize some of what I had been working on both in terms of form and content. As Leduc states, “a dancer can dance in her living room...but if nobody other than the dancer sees it, it stays within the realm of her own subjectivity and not in that of an intersubjectivity” (2007, p. 5). Hence, from the very beginning, I could feel the desire to share my work with an audience and that, although this was first and foremost a research-creation project, I was also clearly making the work for a public. This seemed curious to me since part of me felt shy about being seen by others and preferred the solitude and safety of working alone in the studio. Nonetheless, I could sense this need for others and that, in order to be completed, the work had to be shared with a larger audience. I questioned this desire, wondering what the deeper need might be behind wanting the work to be seen by others.

One reason for this need might be that being seen by others offers us a recognition of our own existence, a validation, a confirmation that we exist in the eyes of others. As Krishnamurti (1987) explains, “we are constantly defining ourselves through our relationships with others” (in Pelchat, 1999, p. 13). In Authentic Movement, a movement practice developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s in which the mover moves with closed eyes and inwardly focused attention, as well as in Dance/Movement Therapy, the role of the witness is central (Chaiklin and Wengrower, 2009). The external witness observes the mover with an open, nonjudgmental attention, creating a container, a safe space for the mover to explore their inner world as embodied through movement. Although a dance audience may not offer that same degree of non-judgment and receptivity as an Authentic Movement witness does, due to the different nature of the contexts, it still remains that the dancer needs the audience as much as the audience needs the dancer. They are interdependent. “To see and be seen in the intimacy of true presence...both being witnessed and witnessing is an act of mindfulness” (Wong, 2016, location 742).

The other reason for wanting to share the work with an audience might have been that certain facets of the work could only emerge with the presence of others. This was especially the case because it was clear from the outset that I was more interested in sharing an experience than in showing or performing “an oeuvre.” Montaignac (2014) speaks of this as a “dramaturgy of the sensitive” in which a choreographer aims to create experiences that create sensations for the public, including visual, emotional, and sensitive. In fact, one of my main attractions towards the performing arts is precisely how it offers the opportunity to step outside of the conventions of daily life and enter particular and peculiar space-times. This is similar perhaps to what Foucault might have been suggesting by his concept of heterotopia as “a real and effective place” that embodies utopia: “a place that is *other* in relation to ordinary cultural spaces” (1994, p. 757). Curiously enough, both intensive meditation practice

and performance practice create contexts in which the experience of daily life is altered. In intensive meditation practice, although what one may be witnessing may on the surface seem ordinary, as we refine our capacity to perceive more sensorially and less conceptually, we begin to access extra-ordinary understandings regarding the nature of reality. Likewise, contemporary creation and performance offers a time and space that is outside of daily life, one during which one stops to listen, sense and watch. During this time, the usual codes of behavior are suspended, offering freedom to experiment with ways of being and doing that would otherwise be prohibited. Hence, the context of performance offered me the opportunity to share a sensitive experience with others that would otherwise not have been possible to do within the restraints and conventions of daily life.

#### 4.6 Aesthetics as Political

This desire to connect with the audience, even touch them physically, sit among them, speak to them and sense each other has parallels with a view of art proposed by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (1934) in which he proposed that the artistic experience took precedence over the art object. This corresponded very much with my own desire to share an experience with the audience rather than to present them with a dance object. I remember one rehearsal in which Johanna Bienaise came to see my work and I performed “The Chairs” section for her. I noted in my journal:

I sat and faced her directly, looking into her eyes. A moment of human connection, person to person. We looked into each other’s eyes for a while and, suddenly, I felt a great degree of closeness and intimacy that almost bordered on awkwardness. When she looked down, I did too. (Creative Journal, July 21, 2015)



It confirmed for me that it was this kind of simplicity and connection with the other that I was looking for in this project. I had been clear from the beginning that I was not interested in trying to impress, entertain, interest or otherwise perform for the audience. I was more interested in exploring what it meant to *be* fully, to sense all the dimensions of experience in the moment, in relationship to myself, the space and the others, and, in this way, hopefully offer the audience the possibility of doing so as well.

In this sense, I was aligned aesthetically and politically with a lineage of dance makers engaged in what Sally Banes termed the aesthetics of denial (1980). By this, she was referencing a whole generation of American postmodern choreographers in the 1960s who said no to spectacle and to the market logic that dominated professional dance. This was clearly articulated in Yvonne Rainer's No Manifesto in which she stated: "No to spectacle. No to virtuosity. No to transformations and magic and make-believe. No to the glamour and transcendency of the star image. No to the heroic. No to the anti-heroic." It is interesting to note that Yvonne Rainer studied with Cunningham, Cage, and Dunn, who were influenced by Zen Buddhism in their approach to art making, as I discussed earlier in this chapter. Hence, although I could feel a tension caused by wanting the work to be artistically successful for myself, I also knew that my first commitment was in art as research, art as experience and art as experimentation. I very much resonate with the following statement by Steve Paxton (1995, p. 61): "It's also why I don't particularly want to be in the market place in the normal way. To me it's [a] very alien place - what's going on in the market and how it affects dance." I was not interested in making something that fit into the logic of "higher, stronger and faster," part of what Debord (1967) calls the society of the spectacle, in which entertainment and consumption rule in the name of profit. Rather, I wished, among things, to heighten the audience's awareness of themselves and the expectations that they might have. What Cauquelin (1996) calls

the strategy of disillusionment (*décept*), is very much attuned to this interest in questioning and problematizing the audience's expectations rather than simply fulfilling them again and again. One of my favorite French dance/theater companies, Grand Magasin, plays precisely with such codes and expectations making work that to my eyes is fresh, surprising, poetic and humorous.

Indeed, I very much agree with Rancière when he states that:

Art is not political first and foremost by the messages and sentiments that it transmits regarding the world. Nor is it political by how it represents the structure of society, the conflicts or identities of social groups. It is political...through the kind of time and space that it institutes, how it uses time and space" (2004, p. 36-7, own translation).

In this sense, "Being With the Unknown" was also a political work. The slowing down of time, the paying attention to the moment, the unpretentious nature of the material all gave the audience an opportunity to become aware of themselves and their own inner life as they watched, just as I was doing. This quieting down and listening can be a radical act in a context such as Montreal, in which the pace of life is an accelerated one, in which we are often being asked to engage in multiple, externally directed activities at once. Hence, the influence of meditation permeated the aesthetics of the work, my presence and, perhaps, the audience's presence as well.

#### 4.7 The Moment of Truth: The Performances

In retrospect, it seems clear that many of the themes and situations that I wanted to explore during the creative process were not possible without the presence of another, of an interlocutor. As Pelchat expressed, "People need people" (1999, p. 11, own

translation). Perhaps this absence of others also contributed to some of the difficult heart/mind states that I experienced. It was much easier to be energized, creative and inspired when there was somebody watching, subtly responding. I realized this clearly on the first night of performing, as I experienced a profound shift in deepening presence and concentration. I directly felt that the presence of others heightened my own presence tremendously. I had become so used to being by myself, both in meditation and in creation, that I had forgotten the powerful impact of having others present. It was a completely different experience to know that it was the official performance with a full audience than being in a rehearsal with an outside eye. As Bienaise states, “A dancer’s stage presence seems to be activated in their encounter with the audience. If there is a dancer’s presence, it is that there is a spectator to recognize and identify it...” (2008, p. 26, own translation). Of course, I would argue that the dancer’s presence relies first and foremost on their own capacity to be present to themselves regardless of whether somebody else is there or not. However, in practice, it was evident that having a real audience had a significant impact on my own presence to myself.

Indeed, after so much resistance, stress and confusion during the whole creative process, it was rewarding to experience such simplicity, calm and friendly assuredness while performing. It seemed that I was finally reaping the fruits of integrating meditation practice so diligently in the creative practice. When I began the first performance, on Sunday night for a select, smaller audience, I remember feeling completely immersed in what I was doing, tasting each and every moment. Over and over again, I returned to the present moment, sensing what was happening here and now. Time seemed to disappear as well as my sense of self. In my journal from that day, I wrote: “I am simply the sensations, the contact with the smooth, hard floor, the light through my eyelids, the temperature of my skin, the sounds of the audience, a state of listening and receptivity. A channel.” For the first time in my life, I

performed savoring each and every moment, feeling that I was fully present for each one. There was a simplicity in my presence, not pretending to be anyone or anything, just a vehicle, a lightning rod for experiences and sensations.

#### 4.7.1 Reaping the Fruits of Practice: Not a “State of Grace”

This state of selflessness might be akin to what Csikszentmihalyi (2004) refers to when he discusses one of the characteristics of being in a state of flow as an absence of preoccupation with one’s self (p. 74). Indeed, I was refreshingly relieved of being “me,” and, instead, I was simply the experience. It seems important to point out, however, that I do not consider that I was in a state of flow as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (2004). The most important reason is that awareness, as understood in Buddhism and as I have experienced it, is not a constant factor but rather co-arises each moment with the object it perceives and then dissipates (Feldman, 2011). The analogy that is often used to understand this is that of analog cinema in which independent frames rapidly projected one after the other create the illusion of continuity. The same happens with awareness and with the inner states of body and heart/mind that were rapidly succeeding each other while performing. There was not one ideal state that was maintained but rather millions of quickly passing states, each one experienced uniquely, giving an overall impression of continuity that is actually a kaleidoscope of experience. Hence, it is not about achieving some ideal state and praying that it will last, as the idea of a “state of grace” might imply but instead, being able to have enough equanimity to be with any and all states that arise with non-identification and kindness. This capacity is the result of training and practice and not the capricious gift of some external gods or goddesses. Hence, although what I experienced resonates to some degree with Leduc’s statement that what “we mean by a state of authenticity, this state of total concentration, that often associated with a

moment of grace or ecstasy” (2007, p. 5), I am not comfortable with using the terms “authenticity” or “grace” for they seem problematic to me. Instead, I prefer to frame my experience performing as an ability to be connected to direct sensorial experience anchored in an inner attitude of friendliness and curiosity, qualities that are direct results of my meditation practice.

Indeed, as Lepkoff states:

Continuing to explore the physical details of this concept through the years, I have realized that "being present" is actually a movement and I have identified what is moving. "Being present" is the "movement of my attention." (2005, p. 1)

This is exactly what one discovers when one pays close attention to one’s attention, as meditators do. Through sitting practice, I also discovered that awareness (indicating the non-volitional aspect of attention) has a life of its own. A bird sings and my awareness is immediately called to it. A burning sensation begins in the right knee. Awareness follows. An urgent thought springs to the mind, awareness is there. And so on. The only time we consider that we are not “present” in meditation is when we are not aware of what is happening, such as a sound, a sensation or a thought. This ability to maintain a consistent presence of attention within a changing field of awareness is called “mindfulness” (Souzis, 1996, p. 20).

Hence, my overall impression was that although during the creative process, my skills and strengths developed from meditation were not always so evident to me, during the time of need, while performing in front of other people, these skills were present and available. They helped me transform a situation that in the past had at times been unpleasant, confusing and stressful, to one of presence, calm and enjoyment. Indeed, I experienced the second performance also with a great degree of absorption and tranquility. The beginning was more difficult, I noticed that while I had my eyes

closed, I identified more with doubts and fears whereas when I opened my eyes, I felt more grounded and confident. In my notebook, I noted that “the more I was in my head, the more identified I was with a sense of “me,” good or not good enough, and the more I was connected to my body, the work and the moment, the less “me” was present” (Creative Journal, September 1, 2015). The feedback from the audience was also very stimulating and positive and I was glad to hear somebody mention that they saw a lot of playfulness and humor in the work, something I was afraid might not be so discernible.

By my third performance, I noticed that I was no longer nervous beforehand. This was probably due to the positive experiences I had had performing the nights before and that I was more used to having an audience. While performing that evening, I could tell there was more of a sense of play and discovery, as I engaged with each section with a sense of curiosity and ease, taking my time. In fact, this served me well when during one section, suddenly very loud rock music came from above, impossible to ignore. I acknowledged it and incorporated it into what I was doing, which luckily fit with the energy of the music. Luckily, my creative process had mainly consisted of improvisations (albeit repeated), and so I was quite used to making changes and adapting to the moment. As Ruth Zaporah, noted movement and voice improviser, states, “For this to happen, the improviser must be relaxed, open and willing. He or she must feel the cues, listen to the invitations, hear the hints and move with the pulls. Improvisers learn that this is the easy way to go, this way of no resistance” (2014, p. 13).

The day of the last performance, I could tell that I was a bit tired, perhaps all of the stress and excitement of the last few days had accumulated and was now crashing. I was not very motivated to perform (how quickly we become blasé!) and tried to energize, telling myself this was the last night. As I began the performance I felt off,



not centered. Something in the density of the air, the quality of attention in the room felt different, scattered, compared to the other nights. Little sounds cued me to what seemed like a certain restlessness and impatience in the audience. As I approached the audience, I could hear the sound of children stifling giggles, breathing heavily. I opened my eyes just a bit in order to prepare my contact with them, I did not want to spook them and I wanted to reassure them that all was okay. I knew that I probably presented an unsettling sight to them, a blind lady advancing slowly towards them in silence with outreached arms. As I advanced, I experienced warmth and humorous compassion towards them, myself and the situation as a whole. However, during the next section, in which I spoke to the audience in my invented language, now eyes open, I had the impression that they were dead, their faces without expression, I could not sense any feedback. I cut short my monologue because I felt I was boring them.

Despite the difficulties that I was experiencing while performing, I tried my best to cultivate a sense of inner friendliness and perseverance. Nonetheless, I was aware that I was not as immersed in the experience as other times and that I judged myself for it. I projected onto the audience my own insecurities and fears. When it ended, I felt disappointed and upset. In talking with some members of the audience afterwards, I realized that my impression was that the presence of the children had kept us all in real time and prevented us from dropping into another space-time dimension. This raises an interesting question because with mindfulness, we are indeed connected to the here and now. However, what often happens with continuous awareness is that it allows one to go below the surface appearance of things and perceive differently from everyday ways. I thus realized that this work is demanding for the audience as well, it asks for a sustained attention, a capacity for staying in silence and being still that many children may not have yet.

Although I was sorry to finish the performances on this note, it seemed perfectly normal to me to have at least one of the performances be less successful than the others. I thought that it would be useful for me as a researcher to see how I dealt with a more difficult situation. I was pleased to remark that I had done all I could to stay positive and focused while performing despite my perception of the audience and my states. Once again, I appreciated the value of equanimity, the ability to stay steady through the ups and the downs of life, the praise and blame, the fame and disrepute, as they are inevitable. Again, the point of mindfulness meditation is not to reach some pleasant, blissful state and pray that it remains but, rather, welcome whatever state is here with interest, friendliness and non-identification (Brach, 2013).

In conclusion, I was satisfied to see that although throughout the creative process, I was not always sure that I could sense the influence of mindfulness meditation, the fruits of my practice manifested during the performances. In addition, the data analysis that I conducted after the performances allowed me to have a greater comprehension and compassion for the states of body and heart/mind that I experienced during the process. Therefore, all steps of this process have served to contribute to greater awareness, understanding and kindness, which is precisely the goal of Buddhist mindfulness meditation. This is also in line with the heuristic method in which the researcher is transformed by the research process. What was initially experienced as confused suffering has been analyzed and revealed to be of use in understanding the impersonal nature of self and how to move to greater acceptance and ease of experience. A worthy endeavor, indeed.

#### 4.8 Influences of Mindfulness Meditation Observed During the Creative Process and Performance of *Being With The Unknown*

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the key influences of mindfulness meditation that I noticed on the creative process and performance of *Being With The*

*Unknown.* I selected what seemed to me the most relevant themes that emerged both during the process itself and afterwards, during the data analysis. Now, I will summarize the results in terms of the four main areas that I noticed were influenced by my practice of mindfulness meditation. Indeed, it can be said that the integration of mindfulness meditation impacted the creative process and final work primarily on four levels: 1) on my way of embodying and performing the work; 2) the aesthetics of the final work; 3) working methods; and 4) my relationship to the material. Of course, there is some overlap between these four subdivisions but for the purposes of clarity and organization, I have categorized them in this way. In this section, I will detail these categories more in depth.

#### 4.8.1 Influences on the Performer

##### - Open awareness:

While improvising and performing, I often used open awareness, allowing my attention to move as it wanted, which is often used in mindfulness meditation. This allowed me to have both a global and focused attention, permitting me to be highly immersed in what I was doing and, at the same time, aware of and responsive to what else might be happening in the room.

##### - Ability to choose where I directed my attention:

Within global awareness, I often chose to concentrate more on kinesthetic sensations since I found these to be the most grounding and helpful for improvising, creating and performing. This capacity to choose where to rest my attention was a direct influence of my practice of meditation. Hence, in different sections of the final piece, I had specific instructions or intentions regarding what I paid attention to within the overall open awareness.

- Greater degree of present-moment engagement:

I felt like I was able to fully live each moment and not rush through it, distracted or preoccupied, more than I had ever experienced while performing or dancing before. This is precisely one of the main contributions of mindfulness meditation, that practitioners are better able to fully savor each moment without thinking about what happened or is to come. This helped me feel connected to my body, the material, the space and the audience which, in turn, allowed me to feel confident and receptive to what was happening.

- Simplicity, no need to impress:

Throughout the whole process, I could feel that the project called for an emphasis on simplicity. This was clearly an influence from mindfulness meditation in which what is valued is the ability to simply be with what is in the moment, without any need to change, improve or become anything whatsoever. This is exemplified in the title of a book by Ayya Khema, a Buddhist nun, called: *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere* (1987). Although, at times, I struggled with thinking that I should be doing something more or somehow better, I finally accepted that what I was doing was enough. In this sense, it became more about me being connected to my senses and hoping that this could, in turn, be perceived by the audience allowing them to discover with and through me. This was an impact from meditation, in which I am not trying to communicate or express anything, but rather, the emphasis is on sensing experience, being in direct contact with the sense doors.

- Beginner's mind:

I actively nurtured an attitude of curiosity, asking the meditative question "What *is* this?" while performing the piece. This helped give me a sense of freshness and wonder even when repeating sections that I had rehearsed many times. It encouraged

having a beginner's mind, the famous Zen concept referring to doing something as a beginner would, as if it were the first time.

- Greater attitude of kindness and acceptance:

Finally, I noticed, especially when there was an outside eye and during the performances, a greater attitude of kindness and acceptance towards myself and what was happening, including during moments of awkwardness and insecurity. I could feel that this was a product of the loving-kindness training that forms part of mindfulness meditation, both from the formal *Metta* meditations as well as in the overall attitude. This allowed me to experience difficult moments, moments of discomfort, with less reactivity and pain. Intentionally shifting from fear and self-centeredness to care and generosity was also a product of my meditation training. Connecting to my intention of sharing myself, the work, and allowing myself to be vulnerable in front of others were all fruits of my practice.

#### 4.8.2 Influences on the Aesthetics of the Final Work

Although it was not my intention to make a “meditative piece,” one that reflected clichés or common ideas about what integrating meditation in dance might look like, I must admit that the influence of meditation was highly visible in the final work.

- Minimal, using what was there:

There was no recorded music, set, special lighting, costume or special effects; instead, I used what was there. It was just the audience and I, in the studio, in broad daylight. Everything was exposed, visible. The music was our collective sounds; the set was what was already there; the lighting was the natural light and studio lights; I wore regular dance clothes. Even the color scheme was minimal, mainly black (the

tarp, my clothes and hair), white (the walls), red (the folding chairs) and wood color (the floor and piano). The space was empty except for the audience and a few objects that belonged to it that I incorporated into the work. All of the space was used as scenic space, including where the audience sat.

- Collage composition:

The work was made up of tableaux, scenes that were juxtaposed one after the other. I did not seek to impose a storyline on the material nor try to create an overall “meaning” for the work. This was inspired from meditation, in which very different moments succeed one another. The material was more implicit than explicit, allowing space for the audience to co-construct their experience. Room was left for the viewer’s imagination and sensibility rather than imposing my own interpretation.

- Contained mood, contemplative pace:

The mood felt contained, there were few expressive outbursts of movement and sound. It was more about suggesting an inner experience than making it manifest. It was calm in general, not dramatic or intense. This is an influence from meditation in which I am used to containing my experience internally, especially strong emotions. Indeed, there was a sense of taking my time. In general, the rhythm of the piece was much slower than my past works with short explosions of intensity. The silence, slowness and my state of presence were an invitation for the audience to also hopefully be more aware of themselves and each other in the moment.

#### 4.8.3 Influences on my Methods for Creating and Working

Integrating mindfulness meditation into the creative process also influenced my methods for creating and working.



- Allowing the process to unfold:

As I have said, whereas in the past I normally created with a certain idea or theme that called to me, this time I tried to begin the process as open as possible and see what would emerge from simply being in the space. I did not have a plan or vision for what the final work would look like or what methods I would use to get there. I wanted to let the process unfold as intuitively and organically as possible. I worked with what was there, in the moment: the space, the objects in the space, my imagination, the states of my body and heart/mind, and my voice. This allowed for a certain kind of creativity to flow from me, especially in relationship to the space and the objects in it. The hours spent alone in the studio, playing with whatever emerged, activated my imagination. This is similar to what happens in formal meditation, during which time one sits in silence and witnesses what emerges in one's body and heart/mind. The difference was that in the creation process, I embodied and enacted the arisings in my body and heart/mind and developed certain directions.

- Staying open:

For most of the process, I allowed a free flow of ideas and propositions. There was lots of improvisation although I almost always filmed and coached myself and then repeated the improvisation. I wanted to stay open throughout the process and not set the piece too early, thereby putting myself in a situation of being with the unknown, uncertainty. I had tried to replicate meditation in which one does not grasp or cling on to anything but rather follows what is happening in the moment. This was at times difficult for me and I craved more structure, decisions. Thanks to my process of self-observation, I was more aware of what body and heart/mind states arose and when.

- Taking responsibility for my heart/mind states:

During the difficult moments of the process, when heart/mind states such as resistance, judgment, doubt, or fear arose, I knew that they were contributing to suffering and that only I was responsible for them. Although I knew this cognitively and did my best to observe them without judgment or identification, it was often difficult to not be merged with them.

#### 4.8.4 Influences on my Relationship to the Material

As I discussed in Chapter 4.3.2, I often experienced difficult heart/mind states in relationship to the material I created. However, I was also able to notice the impacts of mindfulness meditation as compared to past creative processes.

- Clearly seeing the heart/mind states that arose in me:

I noticed judgment, doubt, expectations, stress, frustration, apathy and a host of other painful states that would often emerge. Although integrating mindfulness meditation did not make these states disappear, it did help me identify them more clearly, remember that they were ephemeral and subject to change, and do my best to not believe them or be overwhelmed by them. At other times, I noticed pleasant heart/mind states in relationship to the material such as enthusiasm, motivation, energy, confidence, curiosity, wonder and calm (see Annex H: Mindmaps of Pleasant and Unpleasant Heart/Mind States). This ability to clearly see what states were present was a direct impact of the integration of mindful self-observation during the entire process.

- Identifying less with heart/mind states:

It was intriguing and bewildering for me to see that these states seem to emerge of their own accord with little regard to what I would prefer, that is to say, I did not have

much control over them. Later, through my data analysis, I was able to see the reasons for their appearance and disappearance. Although I was often still partially identified with them, I could increasingly see that I needed to work with them actively in order to not be subsumed by them.

- Equanimity and acceptance of the final work:

Regarding the composition of the work, I only kept the parts that I felt were most essential. I discarded 80% of the material I had produced in rehearsal. This reflected perhaps a certain lack of attachment to the material and a freedom to choose more objectively what I thought was important. Indeed, right before presenting the work, I reached a state of acceptance with the material that gave a great sense of peace and tranquility. I detached myself from the work to some degree and was able to not feel so personally involved. It was no longer so much about “me,” a reflection of my worth as an artist or creator, and more just about the work. This gave me a great sense of freedom and wellbeing in presenting the work.

Hence, the integration of mindfulness meditation permeated all aspects of the creative process including my way of being in the studio as an improviser/creator, my working methods, my relationship to the material and even the aesthetics of the final work. Although I had not set these as goals or intentions, they simply came about as a result of this integration. Finally, I can now see that the entire work lives and breathes mindfulness meditation in all of its dimensions.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In undertaking this research-creation project, my central research question sought to identify the influence of integrating mindfulness meditation in my creative process and performance practice in dance. In addition, I was curious to see what aspects of myself would emerge, through a Buddhist lens, in order to better understand how I contributed to my own suffering or wellbeing during the process. Finally, I also wanted to discover if the integration of mindfulness meditation would make the process and final work more meaningful for me and, hopefully, for the audience as well.

The creation phase of the research-creation process took place over nine weeks in the summer of 2015 in Montreal, Canada. Each phase of creation lasted three weeks and also corresponded to the presence of a different outside eye who came to offer feedback and stimulate reflection regarding my creative process and research questions. Otherwise, I worked solo, both creating and performing the work, without any additional collaborators. It was a heuristic creation-research process during which I meditated formally at the beginning of each rehearsal for thirty minutes and conducted mindful self-observation of what was happening in my body, heart and mind as continuously as possible throughout the entire process. I filmed rehearsals and took notes of what I had observed in my creative journal. I presented the final work, *Being With the Unknown*, four evenings in a row in the UQAM Dance Pavilion in early September. After the performances, I stepped back from the process for a few months, allowing it to settle. Then, I conducted my data analysis using thematic

analysis and analysis through writing, as described by Paillé and Muchielli (2012). The research culminated in the writing of this thesis.

In this concluding chapter, I will briefly summarize the central findings of my study. I will also recapitulate some of the insights that I came to regarding which facets of myself emerged during the creative process and how they contributed to more or less suffering in my experience. This is linked to understandings regarding the connections between the body and the heart/mind analyzed in terms of the Buddhist concepts of cause and effect and the impersonal nature of the self. I will then discuss whether I found that integrating mindfulness meditation made the creative process more meaningful for me. I will also discuss some of the challenges that I faced and the importance of adapting meditation practice to the context of artistic creation. Finally, I will suggest that paying attention to what happens in the heart/mind as well as the body is helpful for all performers and that the next generation of performers would greatly benefit from having this kind of approach included in their training.

### 5.1 Summary of the Influences of Mindfulness Meditation Observed During the Creative Process and Performance of *Being With The Unknown*

As I discussed more in depth in Chapter 4.8, integrating mindfulness meditation in the creative process can be summarized as having influenced four main aspects: me as a performer, the aesthetics of the final work, my way of working and creating, and my relationship to the material. The following is a brief summary of these influences, readers interested in knowing more can refer to 4.8- 4.8.4.

- Influences on Me as the Performer:

- Open awareness
  - Ability to choose where I directed my attention
  - Greater degree of present-moment engagement
  - Simplicity, no need to impress
  - Beginner's mind
  - Greater attitude of kindness and acceptance
- Influences on the Aesthetics of the Final Work
    - Minimal, using what was there
    - Collage composition
    - Contained mood, contemplative pace
- Influences on my Methods for Creating and Working
    - Allowing the process to unfold
    - Staying open
    - Taking responsibility for my heart/mind states
- Influences on my Relationship to the Material
    - Clearly seeing the heart/mind states that arose in me
    - Identifying less with heart/mind states
    - Equanimity and acceptance of the final work

None of these influences were planned or even predicted, they were simply a natural consequence of integrating mindfulness meditation in all aspects of the creative process and performance of the work.

## 5.2 Somewhat Less Suffering: Deconstructing the Impersonal Nature of Self



Another one of my hopes for integrating mindfulness meditation in the creative process was that it would help reduce the amount of suffering I experienced while creating and performing. As I mentioned in Chapter One: Introduction, I had noticed in past creative processes that there were often difficult moments and experiences while creating and performing and I hoped that using mindfulness meditation would help me better understand what these difficulties were and how to eventually reduce them in the future. Indeed, as I have explained, mindfulness meditation fundamentally consists of self-observation with the aim of understanding the causes of suffering and eventually eliminating them (Analayo, 2003). During this creative process, I observed many difficult states; however, I did not yet understand them. It is important to remember that mindfulness meditation is not only about mindfulness, being aware of what arises, but also about making connections, understanding how body and heart/mind states arise and change and ultimately, what leads to suffering. As Sayadaw U Tejaniya exhorts: “Awareness alone is not enough! Having a desire to really understand what is going on is much more important than just trying to be aware. We practice mindfulness meditation because we want to understand” (2008, p. 5). Luckily, through the data analysis that I conducted after the performances, I was able to gain some insight into the workings of the states of body and heart/mind that I had experienced earlier. This was aided by a chart that I made summarizing what had happened in each rehearsal and performance in terms of content, formal meditation, state of the body, feeling tone, state of the heart/mind and any relevant notes, such as context (see Annex F: Extract From Analysis Stage 3, Table of Four Foundations of Mindfulness). What I understood was that every state that arose in the body and heart/mind made sense in terms of cause and effect, and was, thus, impersonal.

Causes and conditions is a key concept in the Buddhist worldview. By deeply understanding that everything we experience is conditioned by something else, we

begin to loosen our belief that somehow “we” decide or are in control of our experience. As Joseph Goldstein describes,

We can also deepen our understanding of selflessness by seeing the mutual causal conditioning between the mind and the material elements of the body. The body moves because of an intention in the mind, which initiates the action. This is the mind conditioning materiality. At other times, a bodily experience – of a sight, a sound or some sensation-may condition a mind state of enjoyment or aversion. This is the body conditioning the mind. (2013, p. 58)

It was very comforting for me to realize through this posterior analysis that each state had arisen due to certain reasons that were predictable and understandable. As I have explained, during the process I would often resist unpleasant states, baffled as to why they were arising, feeling that they should not be there, that they should be otherwise, and this just made the whole experience more disagreeable. As I better understood the causal relationships between the different factors in each situation, the resistance lessened. Understanding lead to acceptance and compassion, which were very different ways of relating to experience, ones that brought greater wellbeing and less suffering. Indeed, as Lalitaraja states, “Choreographic practice is only spiritual to the extent that it embodies the transformative enterprise” (2012, p. 148). Being aware while creating was not enough, it was necessary to understand and depersonalize what happened, and thus resist blaming or judging myself for experiencing difficult states. In the future, I hope to be able to understand the impersonal nature of heart/mind states and accompany them with greater kindness and equanimity during the creative process itself.

### 5.3 Somewhat More Meaningful

As I discussed in Chapter IV, in 4.1.3, the question of meaning is complex and remains an open site of investigation for me. As Bienaise states, “The term ‘meaning’ here is to be apprehended broadly, in that it can refer to an intellectual, intuitive, physical or emotional process” (2008, p. 96, own translation). In line with subjective aesthetics (Schaeffer, 1996, 2000), I prefer to leave this question open and allow each person to experience the work and make sense of it in his or her unique way. For, as Cage states, “The meaning of what we do is determined by each one who sees and hears it” (quoted in Lieberman, 2007). With regards to my own need for meaning as the creator and performer of the work, I am inspired by Bienaise’s (2015) approach towards the term “meaning” in French (*sens*), taking into consideration its triple dimensions as meaning, direction and sensations: “The meaning of my experience, the aim of the work, and its coherence with [my] lived somatic experience” (p. 206, own translation). For as much as pure formalists such as Cunningham may be satisfied by the mere “suchness” of the dance, I could feel the need for myself to connect to the material on multiple levels, at times purely kinaesthetically, at other times emotionally, or conceptually. These levels and others, oscillated and interspersed themselves in my subjective experience in a flow of impressions and sensations that were unique each time I engaged in the work. I do believe that having a sharper awareness of what was happening in the different facets of my experience (corporal, affective and cognitive), thanks to the presence of mindful self-observation, helped me clarify my relationship to the material and deepen it all the while retaining its kaleidoscopic quality of being ever shifting, ever multiple. Thus, using mindfulness meditation in the creative process did not provide any master key for unlocking some supposedly secret, hidden meaning but rather helped raise awareness of how I was relating to the material on numerous levels and making sense of/sensing it, moment by moment.

#### 5.4 Mindfulness Meditation as an Invaluable Tool for Performance Training

As a result of this study, it is clear to me that integrating mindfulness meditation throughout the creative process and performances was a powerful tool for enhancing these experiences. Although I had difficulty overall with the periods of sitting, formal meditation at the beginning of rehearsals and could not necessarily discern an immediate impact, I would continue using them in future creative processes but with greater freedom to experiment and adapt them as needed, for example, meditating at the end of a rehearsal, or doing walking meditation instead of sitting meditation. As I have said, meditation is also an art form and one that needs to be engaged with dialogically. The process of informal self-observation was key in allowing me to be more connected to the present moment, myself and the emerging work. I would highly recommend integrating elements of mindfulness meditation in the training of performers from all disciplines, including musicians, actors, dancers, and others. Developing the ability to finely sense from within not only the body and kinesthetic sensations, but also what is happening in the heart/mind is essential for using our selves as the primary instruments for artistic expression. Fostering attitudes of inner kindness and acceptance can offer an essential counterweight to the pressures and demands that training and performing can put on individuals. Hence, some possible benefits that I see resulting from incorporating mindfulness meditation both formally and informally in the training of dancers are:

- Greater awareness of what is happening in their bodies and heart/minds
- Greater ability to disidentify with what they notice is happening internally (and externally) and gain some perspective (by understanding its impersonal nature, states arising and disappearing due to causes and conditions)
- Greater ability to meet what is happening internally (and externally) with an attitude of friendliness and empathy

- Greater equanimity, ability to remain grounded and steady through the ups and downs of training and performing, criticism and praise
- Greater ability to center themselves and connect internally before beginning to move
- Greater connection to the present moment, especially via awareness of kinesthetic sensations, key for dancing
- Greater ability to direct their attention as needed, including the ability to redirect it in the moment (for example, self-judgment arises while performing)
- Greater ability to allow the movement and work to flow through them, less obstructed by their “selves” (ideas, judgments, expectations, comparison, etc.)
- Less need to “prove” themselves or their worth, not as much identification with the work (“it’s about me” or “it reflects my value as an artist”)
- Greater enjoyment of the process and less attachment to the results

I hope that this study will inspire others to integrate elements of mindfulness meditation in their own work even without necessarily subscribing to a Buddhist framework. It would be fascinating to conduct another study in which mindfulness meditation were included in the training of a cohort of dancers (twenty to thirty students) over a year and observe what happens. I look forward to engaging in dialogue with other researchers, artists and meditators in continuing to develop this field of study, creation and practice. May this work be of benefit to all beings.

### 5.5 Epilogue: Slogans for Creating and Performing

Lojong is a mind training practice made up of fifty-nine slogans that is part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition used to refine and purify the mind. It is based on a set of aphorisms that is said to have been transcribed by Chewaka in the twelfth century in Tibet. They are intended to help practitioners recognize their “awakened heart mind” both on an absolute and relative plane (Buddhadharma, 2005, p. 1). This involves

moving from ego-of-self to egolessness, in which we stop putting our own self-interest above everything else, and realize our fundamentally interconnected and interdependent nature (Ibid., p. 3). One such traditional slogan is the following:

Contemplate that as long as you are too focused on self-importance and too caught up in thinking about how you are good or bad, you will suffer. Obsessing about getting what you want and avoiding what you don't want does not result in happiness. (In Chödrön, 2003)

As a homage to this tradition of pithy slogans designed to help us in moments of difficulty, I have compiled my own list of slogans that can be used at various moments of the creative process. These are, of course, to be used creatively, readers are free to modify them as needed and create their own! Although I do not purport that these will bring the practitioner to full Enlightenment, working with them may help to free the heart/mind enough to experience less suffering, more fluidity and equanimity during the process. May they be of service to all creators and performers everywhere!

1. Connect internally and externally before starting to move. Prepare your body, heart and mind.
2. Work with what is there, both inner and outer. Maintain an open attitude.
3. Stay anchored in the senses, especially related to the body.
4. Allow yourself to be absorbed by your task and still be in a state of open awareness.
5. Take your time.



6. Go to the essence. Simplify. Keep only the best 20%.
7. Process over results. Follow what's alive for you.
8. Allow for a free flow of ideas and experiences. Play, investigate, be ridiculous.  
Take risks.
9. There is no grand meaning, just sensory experience.
10. Listen to what the piece wants. Get out of the way.
11. Stay curious.
12. Consider your use of Space. Time. Movement dynamics. Intentions. Transitions.  
Compositional structure. Relationship to audience. Sound. Props.
13. Actively foster an attitude of kindness and acceptance, including during moments  
of awkwardness and insecurity. Especially during moments of awkwardness and  
insecurity.
14. Include the audience. They are part of you and you are part of them. They are  
your friends, not your enemies.
15. Choose your thoughts. Drop the ones that create suffering, no matter if part of you  
believes them. Replace them with helpful ones.
16. Cultivate equanimity. Some nights are better than others. Some pieces are better  
than others.

17. Remember it's not about you. It's about letting the piece move through you. Be a channel.

18. You don't need to try to be or do anything. Just be it. Just do it.

19. While performing, ask yourself "What *is* this??"

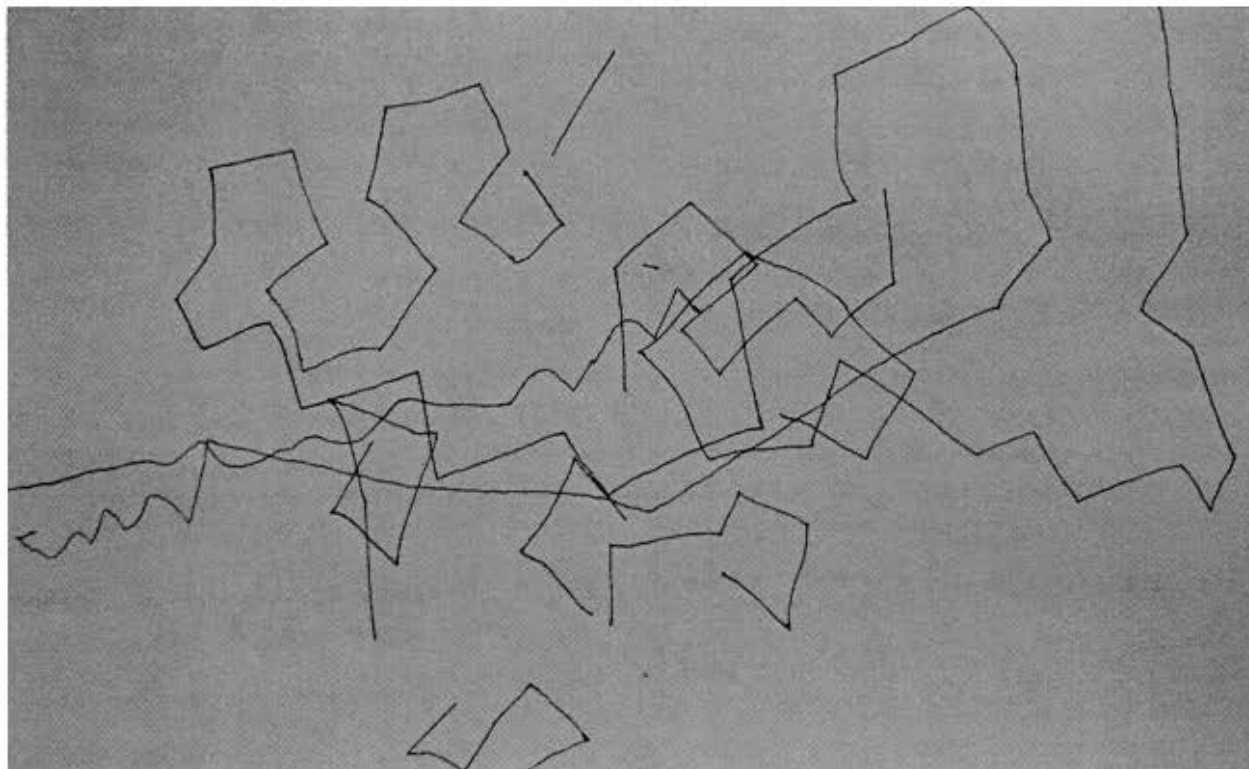
20. What if you took the ego out of it? What would be left?

## ANNEX A

## FLYER ANNOUNCING PERFORMANCES

Le Département de danse de l'UQAM présente:

## Être avec l'inconnu



Une recherche-cr  ation en danse par Monica Coquoz  
dans le cadre de la ma  trise en danse

31 ao  t, 1 et 2 septembre    18h  
Studio K-1150  
Pavillon de danse  
840 rue Cherrier  
entr  e libre

Conseill  res artistiques:  
Katya Montaignac,  
Jos  e Gagnon,  
Sylvie Cotton

Direction de recherche :  
Johanna Bienaise

**UQ  M | D  partement de danse**

## ANNEX B

### PROGRAM NOTES FOR PERFORMANCES

Depuis le début de mon projet de maîtrise, je tâte, j'expérimente et je cherche comment mettre en lien ma pratique de méditation Bouddhiste avec ma pratique artistique en danse. J'observe quels sont les impacts de cette mise en relation sur ma pratique artistique. Je suis intéressée de voir quelles facettes de moi émergent pendant le processus de création d'un point de vue Bouddhiste. Est-il possible d'accéder à un état de soi plus spacieux en création et ainsi faciliter une relation au travail créatif plus libre d'identification et d'attentes?

Mon processus de recherche-crédation consiste en le fait de méditer en studio et ensuite de créer, en utilisant la danse, l'art action, le texte, le dessin et le chant. Dans cette présentation, j'ouvre les portes du studio pour inviter le public à partager des moments d'intimité, d'échange et de questionnement. En tant qu'expérimentation ouverte, « Être avec l'inconnu » nous invite à réfléchir sur notre façon de faire face à un présent toujours changeant, toujours mouvant.

## ANNEX C

### EXTRACT FROM CREATIVE JOURNAL

July 20, 2015

Context:

First day back in studio after 2 week vacation in Boston. Happy to come back to studio. Also noticed helpful influence of having taken an Ashtanga yoga class in the morning, body felt limber and alive.

Meditation:

Mind felt scattered. I lay on the floor to meditate hoping it would help. It didn't. Perhaps this 15m and 15 minutes is not working, not long enough. However, I don't want to use more studio time for meditation. Maybe I could come in earlier and start before. See if 1h is better.

Studio:

At first, I didn't have much motivation. As soon as I started using the voice, I could feel lots of energy and creativity flowing. I tried lots of little games to get back into voice and body.

Sitting on a chair speaking in an invented language- the impossibility of communication

Fun to do, very natural, I've been doing this since as long as I can remember. Importance of actually saying smthg in my head, I think it improves it since people can feel/intuit what I might be saying even if words are incomprehensible.

Watching the video- I liked it (judgment). I think I will keep it. It's funny, safe. Can work on it perhaps with Josée.

My body still remembers- this was in relation to A. Funny how certain relationships are catalysts for creativity and others aren't. I'd rather not ponder that one too much ;) I like the constraint of sitting in the chair while singing. Very emotive, expressive, sensual. Using flamenco arms and hands (not on purpose, just noticed it when I watched video today). Bluesy voice, longing, lament.

Watching video: I like it but some judgment that perhaps too cheesy...darn!

Changing states suddenly-

Opera with straight lines in arms and hands; scared panting animal; lyrical voice with lyrical movement; reggae beat; Italian philosopher; whispering at little animal;

strong Spanish politician; flirty girlfriend; seaweed in the wind; paranoid Republican; Chinese opera; saying hello

Fun to do, surprising bc I don't know what will come next; though most of what came out was familiar, I had seen before.

Watching video: a bit bored, none of it really surprised or interested me; perhaps, could use greater contrasts or work with speed changes, also play with how long each part...and maybe just keep it as a warm-up exercise. Could be interesting to really explore it however and push it, see what happens when I do it over and over again...Try with Josée.

Flamenco-

Fun to do. I was surprised by how much my body still remembered it, considering it's been so many years since I've danced it. I missed the energy of it, sensual, contained, with sudden bursts of energy, musical.

Watching the video: I like it (positive judgment). Perhaps a bit narcissistic of me, but feels good to see smthg of myself moving that I like and think is attractive. It's just terribly off compas!! I got really excited about possibility of studying flamenco again regularly in Spain...I want every day! Worried about knees...maybe sneakers... And dispersal...

Doubt I will use it in show though bc totally random, unless I use it in some funky, unusual way...

Lines- I was playing with making lines with the body, using more contemporary/ballet vocabulary. Something satisfying about the symmetry of it, its order and harmony. Watching video: I like it, pretty much. I dance better than I thought. Makes me want to take technique classes regularly, train intensively for one year and see what happens. Not training as much as I'd like.

Sudden mvmt- was trying to play with the consigne of surprising myself with mvmt; doing smthg unexpected

Watching video: not so interesting, stays quite the same actually...lacks dynamics, variation

Surprise mvmt with voice- a bit more dynamic and varied, thanks to the voice but when I turned the sound off and just watched the body, it wasn't very different from before. How could I put what the voice is doing really into the body?

Voice interlude mvmt- more interesting than when voice and mvmt always go together. Watching video: I like it. Keep developing.

Super productive day today, feeling kooky, lots of energy, stuff just flowing.



## ANNEX D

### EXTRACT FROM ANALYSIS STAGE 1

#### CATEGORIZING INFORMATION

Themes/topics of creative work  
Notes about meditation  
Presence, mindfulness  
Meeting with friendliness  
Unskillful mind states  
Dance notes

July 21, 2015 Tuesday

Johanna watching

It was the first time that I showed anything to Johanna and I could feel some **stress** on my part. We had just talked about the process and I realized that I probably was not taking enough notes, and **the thought that I am not doing it well made me feel worried** and stressed. She noticed it and named it... "oh, you're feeling stressed!". I agreed with all she said, I felt like I was **not doing enough, not good enough**.

I just jumped into the presentation since I didn't want to stress more about it and just trust the moment. I started with the **chairs** bc she was sitting in one, low stress (I am not personally very visible or exposed), and we had just talked about it (chair duet). While it was happening, I felt some **anxiety and doubt**, not totally comfortable. I sat and faced her directly, looking into her eyes. A moment **of human connection, person to person**. We looked into each other's eyes for a while and then when she looked down, I did too. I did not want her to feel uncomfortable or intimidated. I did feel a bit uncomfortable while we were looking at each other. Then, I started moving the chairs and my anxiety lessened bc I was **more concentrated on the task and less on her or me**. At first, I **still felt like she might not be liking it bc of the serious expression on her face and so I felt a lack of confidence**. Slowly, as I got more into it, **I became absorbed** into the emerging story of the chairs. We were 2 and 2 facing each other, Johanna and I on one side, and the 2 empty chairs facing us. (After, Johanna told me that this part allowed her to drop within and enter a state of contemplation. She enjoyed this state, the timing.). As the chairs started coming alive and taking on a life of their own, relationships and history with one another, **I could feel emotions rising within me** as provoked by the chairs. In fact, what allowed me to become aware of this was **when Johanna was looking at me, I suddenly became more aware**

of what I was feeling which was actually not neutrality but *drama*, as one of the chairs suddenly left 2 others.

Then, I decided to sit at the **piano** since it was next to me. A bit of a sudden shift, didn't feel totally fluid as a transition (why?) but I just did it. Smelled the wood of the piano and then began playing. I really *enjoyed* playing, allowed an *emotionality, an expressiveness* to emerge, *felt good to release it through music*, somehow less compromising than through the body. Since Johanna was sitting right next to me, once or twice the thought crossed about whether she liked it or not. But I comforted myself by *going fully into the experience*. (Not allowing a doubt or fear take over but redirecting my attention more fully into the task- meditation strategy).

Then, I walked to the back of the room and hesitated btwn the mirror or black tarp. I chose the **mirror** bc less compromising also, since *I am not seen*. *I felt the fear that she might find it hackneyed but let it go, deciding to do it anyways*.

## ANNEX E

### EXTRACT FROM ANALYSIS STAGE 2

#### SUMMARY OF CREATIVE JOURNALS

##### June 8 – rehearsal #1

**Meditation:** Vipassana and Metta. Thought of importance of Metta to start. Somatic use of body, waking up, energizing, being BIG (Gaga, voice)...kinesthetic  
Wanting clearer lines...improv vs. form...  
beautiful to see (positive judgment) forms that I liked  
**Heart:** feeling of freedom, expressivity, release.  
**Mind:** observing, discerning/judging/coaching.  
**Influence of meditation:** awareness of mind and body

##### June 9 - rehearsal #2

**Meditation:** in relation to what wants to emerge with this character...off-balance, dysfunctional, allowing myself other ways of being, exiled parts of me to emerge.  
10 mins of Metta: reconnecting to friendliness, not about worrying but process  
Mvmt: aversion, not liking it, feels déjà vu, needs structure theme  
Watched the space. saying what I'm feeling at the moment; in-situ approach to the space. Moment of insight ah, my expectations/judgments that I project on you...  
Gaga warm-up: Kinesthetic sense alive, so heart and mind at rest.  
judging (not good interesting enough). Heart stressed (wanting, aversion, delusion)  
heart at peace; mind occupied by talking  
feel frustrated, don't seem to have ideas, drive, spark...no idea where this is going.  
**Meditation influence:** reconnecting to friendliness, value of process, being in the moment

##### June 10 - rehearsal #3

**Meditation:** 15 mins vipassana, 15 mins. Metta. Felt tired, unmotivated, not wanting to do anything.  
Half proud, half embarrassed to show her my videos.  
Exploring space, talking about what was happening. Honest, simple, real.  
Conversation- motivation and inspiration.  
**Heart:** unmotivated, motivated; uninspired, inspired  
**Mind:** Judging myself as I watched videos, both pos and neg; enjoying speaking out loud  
**Meditation influence:** sometimes in meditation also don't feel like doing anything, listless, bored, unmotivated...identification (not always disidentification).

# ANNEX F

## EXTRACT FROM ANALYSIS STAGE 3

TABLE of 4 FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

	Meditation	Body	Vedana	Mind/Heart	Notes	Meditation Influence
<b>Rehearsal 5</b> Lots of ideas!	<i>Vipassana</i> Difficulty concentrating <i>Metta</i> More calming.	Kinesthetic alive, sensuality.	Pleasant.  Neutral.	Energy, excitement, creativity, allowing. Discernment.		Allowing free flow. Existential themes.
<b>Rehearsal 6</b> Katya Showing what I have so far, quite a bit.	Skipped meditation bc of outside eye, didn't feel comfortable taking time.	Quotidian.	Unpleasant.  Pleasant.	Stress of being watched. Holding back Amused, sense of connection with Katya.	Presence of other created stress, expectations, trying to repeat past.	In the content (empty screen, black tarp, chair duo, mirror, exploring the space).
<b>Rehearsal 7</b>	<i>Vipassana</i> . Feels very scattered. <i>Metta</i> . Feels good.	Sensitive, skin, listening. Energy feels stuck.	Pleasant. Neutral.  Unpleasant.	Simplicity, no artifice. Watching video, judging.	Simplicity-too simple? Trying, stressed.	Choosing simplicity and ease over form/concept. Listening to moment.
<b>Rehearsal 8</b>	<i>Vipassana</i> Identification  <i>Metta</i> Pacification	Blindness, body listening, hesitant, cautious.	Neutral, pleasant.  Unpleasant.	No artifice, simplicity. "Trying" problematic. Self-doubt, criticism.		Mind and body in different states (clear separation + awareness)
<b>Rehearsal 9</b>	No mention wonder if meditating before kills playfulness?	Free play, voice gives me strength.	Pleasant.	Playful, wacky, confident, unafraid of judgment, no expectations.	Mind and body absorbed in tasks.	Don't choose mind state, just is! Can shift states from body.
<b>Rehearsal 10</b> Exchanging ideas+showing	<i>Vip+Metta</i> With Sylvie Stronger concentration.	At ease, confident.	Pleasant.	At ease, joyful. Presence of S. did not create stress.	Idea of mapping my states as they arise.	I may not be as doubtful as I think...

## ANNEX G

### EXTRACT FROM ANALYSIS STAGE 4

#### PRELIMINARY RESULTS

##### INFLUENCE OF MINDFULNESS MEDITATION OBSERVED DURING THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND PERFORMANCES

- 1) Open attitude, no preconceived ideas during the creative process, almost until the end since I didn't know what final shape it would take. I entered rehearsals open to what would emerge during the sessions, I did not have a prior plan or a vision.
- 2) Worked with what was there, in the moment. The space (in-situ approach), objects in the space, my imagination, the states of my body and mind, my voice.
- 3) Attitude of kindness and acceptance, including during moments of awkwardness and insecurity. Friendliness, process over result.
- 4) Emphasis on simplicity, no need to impress. Less is more. Exploring sensing the moment and being as real and transparent as possible.
- 5) Open awareness during the creative process and during the performance. Open awareness includes all of the sense doors (touch, sight, sound, smell, taste, mind/heart) so includes awareness of self, the space and others.
- 5) Within this open awareness, special attention was given to self-observation. This self-observation was viewed through the lens of *vipassana* meditation, the observation of my bodily sensations/states, *vedana* (feeling tone), and the states of my heart/mind. This will be detailed in great length later.
- 6) While performing, I noticed a much greater degree of present-moment awareness than I had ever experienced while performing or dancing before. I felt like I was able to fully live each moment and not rush through it, distracted or preoccupied. I felt connected to my body, the material, the space and the audience.
- 7) Taking my time, no sense of hurrying or having pressure to do something, to entertain or keep busy. In general, the rhythm of the piece was much slower than my past works, with short explosions of intensity.



8) Ability to concentrate more fully on what I was doing, to drop into it completely. In general, it was kinesthetic awareness but not always. I felt a high degree of concentration and the ability to make choices and respond in the moment. Absorbed by task, concentration.

9) Regarding the composition of the work, I only kept the parts that I felt were most essential. I discarded 80% of the material I had produced in rehearsal.

10) The work was made up of tableaux, scenes, that were juxtaposed one after the other. I did not seek to impose a storyline on the material nor try to create an overall "meaning" for the work. This was inspired from meditation, in which sometimes very different moments succeed one another. Sensory impressions follow each other with great variety and it is not until we interpret them in some way, that we create meaning. I think the quality of my presence is what created the through line.

11) The material was more implicit than explicit, allowing space for the audience to co-construct their experience. Room was left for the viewer's imagination and sensibility rather than imposing my own interpretation.

12) The aesthetics of the piece was minimal, black and white. The walls and floor were pale, the borders and chairs black (or red). My skin was pale but my clothing and hair were dark. There were few objects in the space and all of them pertained to the space (the piano, the tarp).

13) It was bare bones. There was no recorded music, set, special lighting, costume or special effects. It was just me and the audience, in broad daylight. Everything was exposed, visible.

14) The mood felt contained, there were few expressive outbursts of movement and sound. It was more about suggesting an inner experience than making it manifest. Calmer in general, not so dramatic or intense.

15) During the difficult moments of the process, resistance, blockage, doubt, uncertainty, wanting, I knew that this difficulty was due to my own mind/heart states. Despite this awareness, it was often difficult to not be identified with them and to choose other ways of being.

16) The themes evoked in each section had a link to meditation.

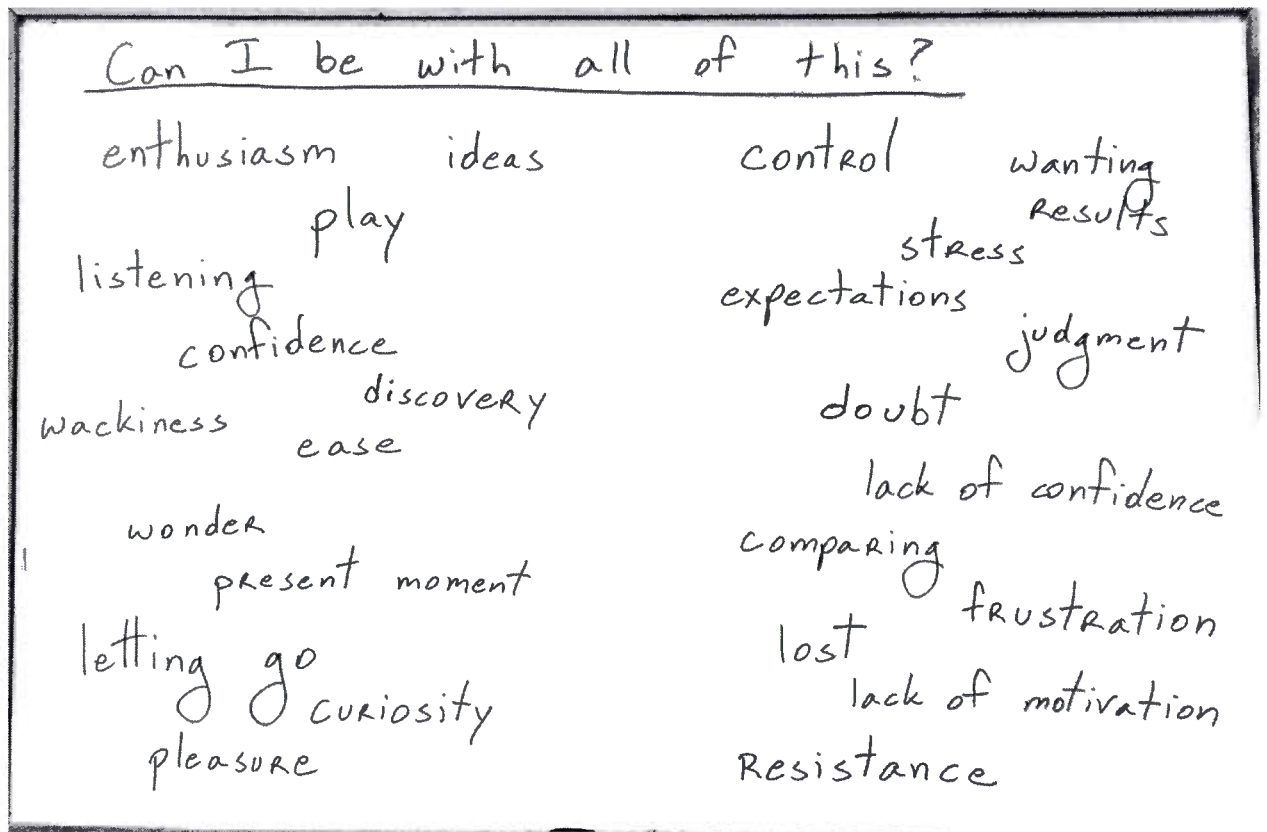
17) For most of the process, I allowed a free flow of ideas and propositions. There was lots of improvisation although I almost always filmed and coached myself and then repeated the improvisation.



- 18) All of the space was used as scenic space, including where the audience sat. It was a global use of the space.
- 19) Wanting to touch the audience, to be near them, to be one of them; a sense of connection, not division.
- 20) The silence, slowness and my state of presence were an invitation for the audience also to be more aware of themselves and each other in the moment.

## ANNEX H

### MINDMAP OF PLEASANT AND UNPLEASANT HEART/MIND STATES



## ANNEX I

### COMPOSITIONAL TABLEAUX

Blindness:

groping, searching for my way; excitement and loneliness of exploring

Exit Sign:

looking for a way out, want to get out of here

Drunk:

disoriented, confused, off balance, talking to the audience; un-ideal self

Chairs:

moving them with sensitivity; exploring their relationships, to each other, to the audience; inanimate objects become alive

Projections:

projection screen lowered, nothing on it, opera music playing, sitting together watching emptiness, the drama we overlay on nothing

Black tarp:

playing with being seen and becoming invisible, absorbed by a black hole

Piano:

expression, melancholia, emotions

Mirror:

playing with projections, observing yourself observing, who is observing who?

Impossibility of Communication:

can we ever really understand each other?

Changing States Quickly:

accelerated mood swings, exhausting

Nobody knows:

singing, existential lamentation (feeling of Fado, flamenco, blues); does anybody know why we are here? Does anybody seem to care?

My Body Remembers:

singing on chair, a woman is haunted by a memory

Weird Hair Lady:

too many thoughts, too many worries...just cut them out

What Can I Know?

my name, 2+2, my past phone numbers? my mother? All I can ever *really* know is just this, now...direct embodied knowing versus conceptual knowledge

Escaping Myself:

is it possible to escape myself? If I move fast enough?

Painting at the Wall:

The fluidity of sliding against the wall, kinesthetic pleasure

Fluid Floor:

The fluidity of sliding, curling and uncurling on the floor, freedom!

## ANNEX J

### PHOTOGRAPHS FROM PERFORMANCES

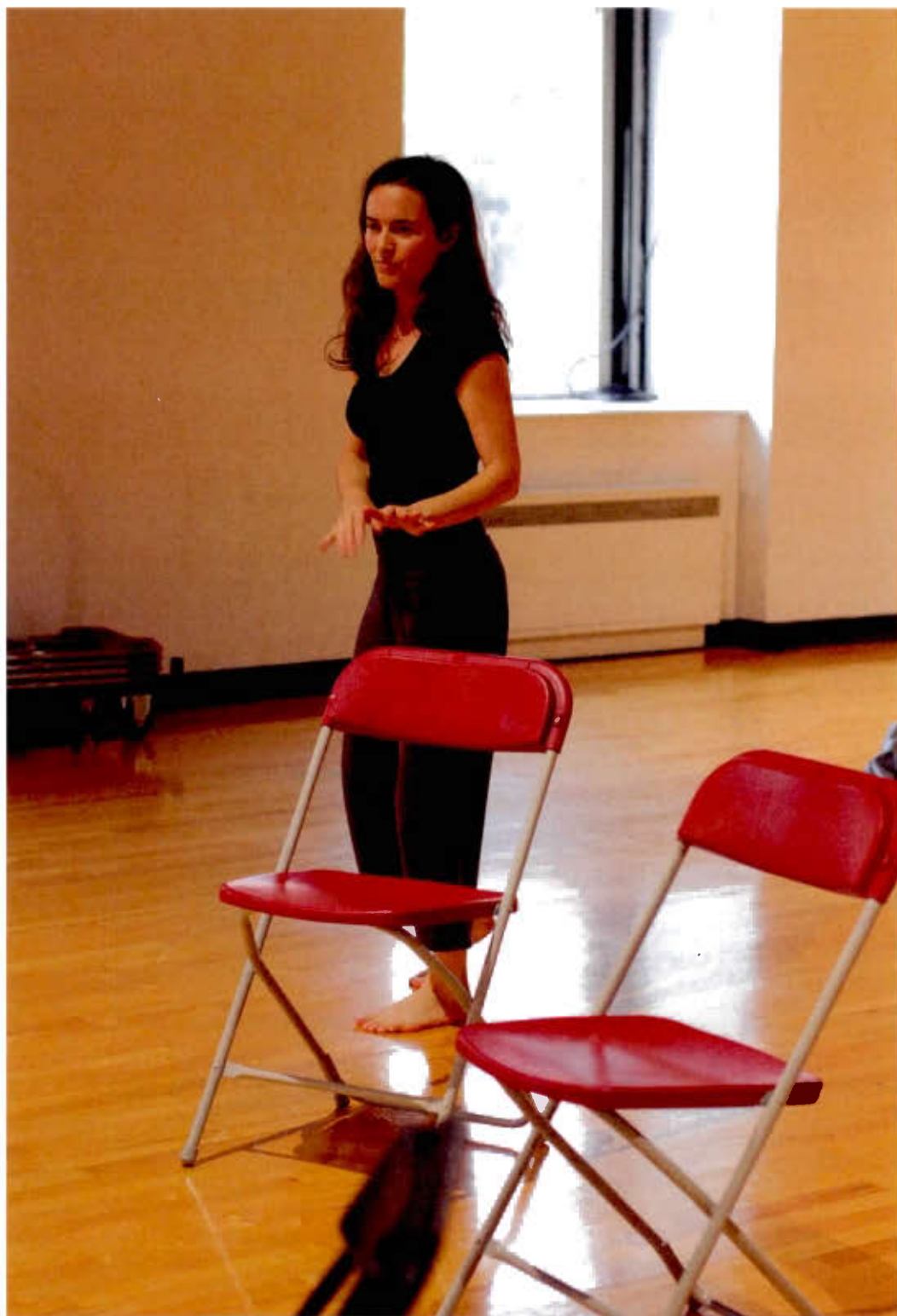


Piano section



Improvising with voice and movement, high-energy section





Chairs section



Chairs section towards end

## ANNEX K

### VIDEO OF PERFORMANCE

See accompanying DVD. Track 1 for short version, track 2 for entire version.

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