The process the ritual: Searching For Home Within The Self

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The process the ritual: Searching For Home Within The Self
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Foreword

This paper talks a great deal about cycles, judgment, and the self through the physical exploration of displacement vs. home in the body. In dealing with judgment, I found many contradictions that caused me to fall back into the cycle of searching for answers. For example, *The process the ritual* is an act of escaping judgment, but once one decides that he/she has let go of judgment, isn’t that a judgment? This is a huge dilemma as I try to argue for my breakthroughs. Part of this dilemma is that I have an extremely difficult time finding verbal language to describe sensorial, movement-based experiences. After all, I would not have used dance as a medium of investigation if I could articulate clearly through writing the physical research I have begun to make sense of in my mind and body. There are holes in this paper that cannot be filled through verbal language, they must be reflected upon and answered through viewing the dance video that accompanies this thesis. This paper aims to explain the ways in which my brain is beginning to grasp and categorize that which cannot ever be fully categorized. In other words, this thesis is just the beginning, a seed. The process is never ending.

This study is my biggest insecurity. I put a lot of pressure on myself to succeed so that others will respect me, but the more I change who I am in spite of people, the less I respect myself. I embarked on this investigation in order to find a meditative form that could help me overcome the displacement I feel in my body when I am trying hard not for myself, but for the sake of other people. I want to be able to perceive myself as I am and be comfortable, at home with that perception. Along my journey, I realized that the act of creating a huge BFA show and trying to write an academic paper about it was not helping me achieve my goal, but driving me deeper into the people pleasing cycle I am
constantly trying to escape. Although I fell back into my cycle of people pleasing over and over throughout this process (which is a contradiction in itself since I began this search in order to free myself from caring what others think), I do believe that I am walking away having shared my way of understanding my identity and self with an audience. I do feel that I have begun to shift my perspective and understand myself more deeply so that I may create positive change in my life.

Introduction

Imagine a sensation that carries with it a feeling of peace so powerful, it could be tamed into control and with practice, implemented within your body each day. How would you behave? Would you walk differently? See differently? How would others see you, with a shifted perspective or just the same as you have always been? These are the questions that came to me in the creation of The process the ritual, a twelve-minute work of movement art that seeks to undo the notions of separation between mind, body and identity in the self. How can a sensation of peace between mind, body and identity be accessed through movement? What does it look like to be at peace in the body?

The emotions within the human body are never-ending, but there is a place where one can adapt to and feel easy with the type of emotions he/she chooses to feel. In researching the sensations of fear and displacement, the feelings of home and peace, I discovered a process of breakdown, through movement, in which an individual can reform his/her perspective to find ease within the self. For this particular research, I define displacement as a sense of unknowing, or an unfamiliar commotion in the body. In opposition, I define home as a place of understanding, where one feels safe being honest
in his/her body. The parallel feelings of home and displacement cannot exist without one another or else we would not be able to perceive either. “We are parallel and inseparable parts of me,” John Birtchnell states in his book, *The Two of Me: the rational outer me and the emotional inner me*, (Birtchnell 5). Although one can never fully rid themselves of one of these sensations, I believe it is indeed possible to reach a sense of home and peace within the body, through embracing and then letting go of the physical and mental impacts of displacement.

In embarking on the process of creation, I began with two goals. First, I wanted my dancers to find their own understanding of home, honesty in the body. Second, I was interested in my audience both witnessing a group of young confident women at peace in their bodies and experiencing home in their own bodies as well. If many bodies experienced home/peace, the chances of my work making an impact increased. In order to meet these goals, I needed to let go of control and find patience with the process of experimentation and corporeal investigation. This was necessary because of the nature of my rehearsal process. Instead of teaching my cast movement phrases and setting them in a structure, I was leading improvisational exercises. I needed to be patient and allow my cast time in these exercises to investigate deeply. This investigation grew and morphed into *The process the ritual*, the final work that I presented as a part of Catapult.

Rehearsal Process: Experiments

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*My eyes land on a table. I know it is a table but I turn my head away and see something else, turn again and look at a water bottle on the edge of the room. I must turn*
my head and see something else. Don’t identify it just perceive it. Again and again, I turn my head to see something new. Gradually, I let go of my body. Thrashing through the space, turning my head so that my eyes can no longer categorize what I am seeing. I am lost in space yet I know I am in control of the space. I can mold it and see it how I need to.

“Find stillness,” Jesse’s voice speaks out. “See the space around you.” I see the space.

***

Through upsetting my senses and blurring my perception of reality, I found in my mind and body that clarity can come from distortion. One of my tactics in rehearsals then became to lead my dancers through exercises that upset their senses, blurred reality, and created clarity through distortion. My hope was that through exposing my dancers to exercises in distortion, their identities and senses of home in the self would surface more clearly and be able to be accessed more regularly.

Most all of the choreographic tools I used to build this work were learned this past summer at American Dance Festival (ADF) 2014. While attending ADF six-week school, I took a composition class from Jesse Zaritt, a faculty member at University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Jesse introduced me to an exercise he calls body sourcing, which stems from the Practicing Performance work of Deborah Hay. In leading body sourcing/performance practice, the facilitator uses a set of verbal cues to aid participants in finding a shift in perception of movement and new discoveries about the body. Hay investigates sight and the undoing, un-naming of what we see in movement, and seeks to “challenge judgments which limit how we identify the physical body in time and space,”
Holzman 6

(Hay). This research became crucial in the investigation of the self my dancers and I were working through. Imagining dance as having no limits helped unearth possibilities for how each of us moved through our identities and judgments, and each of us created captivating movement sequences each time we improvised. Using a concept called “turn your fucking head,” (Hay) Hay encourages movers to forget memories and history and simply see the space one inhabits. As I tried to lead my dancers through these concepts physically, I needed to be diligent in practicing with body sourcing on myself. In doing so, I faced the dilemma of contradiction. As soon as I recognized and labeled that I had undone judgment, I was judging myself and had to start the process over again. Letting go of my mental conceptions of judgment was extremely difficult and in order to succeed in my physical explorations of Deborah Hay’s work, I needed to direct my attention towards sensation instead of trying to define everything I practiced. Each time I made a discovery on my own; I was better able to lead my dancers in making breakthroughs in their own explorations.

In addition to working with Jesse Zaritt at ADF, I also took a composition class from Tere O’Connor, a renowned choreographer interested in the concept that movement in space and time is fleeting, and should therefore be investigated as such. O’Connor offered his class a list of dialogues to have with movement in the choreographic process that became my mantra for creating The process the ritual: look at it, listen to it, see what it is, allow yourself to go down pathways with it. For example, look at a set of movements and listen to the sound each creates. How does each vibrate the room? Impact your body? See the movements - a turn, a glance, a gesture perhaps. Follow a pathway of the information you already know (sight, sound) in order to make new discoveries of
what these movements can convey. Following O’Connor’s guidelines opened endless possibilities for movement, sensation and set choreography. I had endless videos of movements from my cast’s improvisations and I also had phrases that I had created. Trying to follow these guidelines with each piece of movement I chose to use in the final work was daunting. I was overwhelmed.

Carrying the work of Zaritt, Hay and O’Connor in the pages of my journal and in my physical body, I returned to Colorado and began rehearsing with Emily Pietruszka, Sophia Hernandez, Taylor King, Heather Woolley and Gabrielle Whitcomb. As I was interested in my cast members realizing for themselves an internal sense of truth and home, I used a body sourcing structure as a guide for leading rehearsals. A lot of my research, therefore, stems from the moving bodies I was studying. Below, please find a sample performance practice that I created based on my research with Jesse Zaritt. The language is specific and requires deep imagination and investigation.

Choose another body, being, thing: what does this body look like? Smell like? Taste like? Feel like? Embody the texture of this “thing.” What does your “thing” look like as a child? How does your “thing” move as an adolescent? An adult? Imagine your “thing” in its last moments of life or existence; embody the senses of your fading “thing.” Once you have said goodbye, let it go.

(Holzman Personal Journal)

I lead my cast members through exercises like this, once with the intention of investigating displacement and then again with the intention of investigating home-
juxtaposing the two sensations in the body made it easier to recognize each and therefore, to access each more efficiently. After completing a set of cues, I would ask my dancers to open their eyes, walk through the space, and consider their bodies now, relative to before we had started. What, if anything, had shifted in the body, in the mind? How was displacement different from home? What movements helped re-create the two perceptions in the body? Many of my cast members chose to journal post-practice in order to make sense of experiences and rid themselves of any residual thoughts. I collected and read most of these journal entries, making notes for myself about the progress and occurrences of my dancers. I also collected information by recording discussions at the end of each rehearsal. The voices included in the first track of the sound score are the voices of my dancers speaking on their discoveries post-practice. In addition to informing my research and becoming part of the sound score, discussions allowed my dancers to connect with one another and support each other through the progression of accessing displacement in the body—quite an upsetting feeling.

I used performance practices and improvisational exercises to set movements for the final piece and throw them away over and over again. Though I taught a few phrases here and there, we spent most of our time together in an experimental land, rather than a building land. It was not until the last four rehearsals that the final product, the ritual, really manifested. I call the final work a ritual because it became our way of demonstrating for others what we had experienced through the process of our rehearsals and it was our way of exploring displacement as a means to settle, at peace in the body.

As I worked to set movements and sections for the final piece, I kept returning to O’Connor’s words: look at it, listen to it, see what it is, allow yourself to go down
paths with it. These words gave me an anchor for checking my work. Was I being successful in answering my questions? Were my dancers still able to access states of being within the structure I had created? Was I doing what I had set out to do?

In the end, the audience was allowed to sit in-the-round and view the performance from all sides. As stated in the introduction, I was invested in the audience not only witnessing a group of young confident women at peace in their bodies, but also considering experiencing home in their own bodies. By making the piece an in-the-round seating/performance arrangement, I achieved three things. First, my audience had a greater chance for witnessing bodies at peace, and for experiencing home in their own bodies because of the intimacy of the performance space. Second, the audience became a part of the piece. Those viewing were also being viewed, and perhaps more aware of their bodies because they were being viewed. This invited the audience to relinquish themselves to the dance and be further impacted physically and mentally. Third and finally, I allowed endless entry points for the audience. This meant I had less control over their interpretation of the piece and as I stated in the introduction, a loss of my control was necessary to create room for experimentation and experiences throughout this process. Each night of the performance, I watched from a different place in the room. When I watched from the balcony, I was not as impacted because of the distance between the performers and me. Although I was disappointed that evening, my decision to allow in-the-round seating was positively reinforced.

With so many entry points, I needed to give my audience something more to clasp onto. Mark O’Maley, Lighting Designer and Technical Director for the piece, suggested that I research words and images to project onto the architecture of the space. Drawing on
my cast member’s journal entries, discussions and my own personal journal I drafted a list of words that projected onto the four walls during the performances of *The process the ritual*. Some of the words included: choice, perception of, fear practice, the process, the ritual, then see, see/be seen. In projecting these words, I hoped to give the audience a better understanding of our interpretation of what the performance meant, what we had been investigating, and allow them to understand more deeply what our ritual was about.

To prepare for each performance, my cast and I explored short versions of the body sourcing exercises we had completed during rehearsals. For example, instead of leading a traditional warm up, I would ask my dancers to access an inner conflict, emotional situation or struggle that each needed to work through during the ritual (the piece). I used cues such as, “what are you going to work through tonight? What does is look like, smell like, taste like etc. How does it impact your body physically? How will you find and let go of it during this performance?” By warming up with body sourcing, my cast members were able to prepare their bodies and minds for the performance practice of *The process the ritual*. Most importantly, each dancer was prepared to show their cycle of overcoming conflict and displacement to find peace.

**Impetus: Researching The Solo**

In the Fall of 2014 I enrolled in a class called Foundations of Buddhism. Raised Quaker and well aware of what peaceful communities look and feel like, I was inspired by the view points of Buddhism and began to relate it to my movement research. I practiced being mindful of what I was doing in my movement instead of just coasting. Exploring awareness in dance opened me and drew me in to the practice of presence in
all aspects of my life. Simultaneously, I was enrolled in Alexander Technique, a somatic practice that aims to integrate the whole self (mind/body) and teach a process-oriented perspective. In his book *Body Learning*, Michael Gelb writes on the principles of Alexander Technique:

> We often behave as though we were not one whole system but a compilation of different little personalities. Just as our necks and shoulders often do the work of our backs, so our emotions often do the work of our intellects, and vice versa. This uneconomical use of energy creates inner conflicts and can obscure an individual’s sense of identity. Such lack of inner harmony does not appear surprising when we look at the nature of the institutions that dominate our society.

(Gelb 35)

Incorporating identity into physical investigations became important for my cast members to reach the goal of home/peace. Each needed to let go of outside societal influences in order to come to terms with their perceptions of self relative to the four emotions being investigated (fear, displacement, home, peace). I sought to develop a method connecting the practices of Buddhism, Alexander and movement research.

The following semester, I enrolled in Advanced Composition and with these philosophies brewing deeply within my mind and body, I created a solo dance work. Originally, the solo had a twelve-movement phrase, which I repeated twelve times: the number twelve, for the twelve Nidānas in Buddhist philosophy. The twelve Nidānas are often referred to as the “twelve-fold formula,” (Jones 244) or path. Each life that is
brought into existence develops according to the order of the Nidānas, ignorance, formations, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death. If investigated consecutively, the Nidānas suggest a cyclical nature of events that are never ending and rarely changing. According to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, cycle is defined as, “an interval of time during which one sequence of a regularly recurring succession of events or phenomena is completed,” (Webster’s 563). Therefore, the cyclical nature of the twelve Nidānas can be described as a period of events that must occur chronologically and repeatedly. In light of this, the solo I created follows a formula in which the movements repeat and build in energy, then shift and break down, ending with the soloist rotating-seeing and being seen by the surrounding space. Figure 1 shows a chart of each Nidāna, cause, effect and explanation.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nidāna</th>
<th>Sutta</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avijjā</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ignorance in the last life</td>
<td>Karma-process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saṅkhārā</td>
<td>Formations</td>
<td>Volitional formations in the last life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viṃḍana</td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
<td>Re-linking (patisandhi) consciousness between lives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāma-rūpa</td>
<td>Name and form</td>
<td>Mind and body arising at conception in this life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salāyatanā</td>
<td>The six sense realms</td>
<td>The six sense organs in the child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phassa</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vedanā</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanhā</td>
<td>‘Thirst’, craving</td>
<td>Craving</td>
<td>Karma-process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upādāna</td>
<td>‘Fuel’, grasping</td>
<td>Grasping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhava</td>
<td>Becoming</td>
<td>Becoming in samsāra</td>
<td>Result-process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jāti</td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>Birth in the next life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarā-maranam</td>
<td>Old age and death</td>
<td>Old age and death in the next life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Jones 243)
As I kept looking at it, listening to it, and seeing it, the solo lead me down a pathway towards the eleventh Nidāna, birth. Something about the meditation of repeating movements with diligence freed my mind and became a way to escape the impacts of displacement and be okay with my self; be at home in my body. I investigated the birth Nidāna because I was curious about ending the solo with birth rather than death (the final Nidāna). Figure 2 shows a circular representation of the Nidāna cycle. It rotates in a counter clockwise position beginning with birth (at the 10’o clock position of the diagram). In the inner circle, birth is represented as a future effect that happens only after the current life is extinguished. I believe, however, that birth can also refer to a new beginning, a re-birth, and occur as a present effect. With this in mind, I became fascinated in birth as a way to liberate the self and escape the cycle rather than re-enter it.

Figure 2

(Bodhipunk 1)
I searched for a sensation of re-birth within the movement and structure of the solo. In showing drafts of the piece, I received feedback such as, “you seem to be floating in and out of consciousness,” “it feels like battling an impossible situation,” “I see you unwinding through movement,” and “how does the approach to repetition change over time?” (Holzman Personal Journal). I was pleased with this feedback because I aimed to create a sense of unwinding through repetition. In addition, I was interested in the idea of falling apart, falling in and out of consciousness and my audience seemed to grasp this from the solo. I knew I needed to keep building a larger work around the solo in order to keep pushing my research.

In the solo’s final form, Emily (performer in Catapult) repeats the cycle of the twelve-movement phrase five times. She dances to a slow song, a weeping and longing guitar. As the guitar sings, voices of the 5 women on stage appear and disappear from the speakers surrounding the space. “Everything is kind of connected,” “it’s hard for me,” “leave it behind,” “patience with the process,” “getting over it,” (Holzman Personal Journal). Emily repeats her cycle to this sound score in a meditative state. When Emily reaches the fifth Nidāna (the fifth repetition of the cycle), six-fold senses (seeing, hearing, breathing etc.), she experiences a shift in perception and begins to lose control of her cycle. Emily shifts at the senses because she is becoming present in her body, noticing her self. As she notices herself, she becomes displaced and must struggle through displacement to find a new perspective of home in her self. The consecutive order of the movements being executed breaks apart as Emily fights-shifting, molding, falling. When Emily finally reaches the end of her shifting cycle, Jāti, or birth, re-birth, she is truth. In a
pool of light, she rotates, showing herself to the world and simultaneously taking in the world that surrounds her. When she is ready, when she finds her clarity, her peace, her home, she closes her eyes and continues rotating. Existing in a new state, Emily allows herself to see and be seen in her truest, most honest form. The music fades.

In the end, the most important aspect of the solo became, how does the movement change over time? How does Emily use her process of movement to find re-birth and an honest sense of home in her body?

*The process the ritual*

As my research with the solo grew into a larger group work, I was challenged with fusing parts of movements and exercises together that were not created at the same time. For example, whilst Emily is moving through her process of re-birth, Gabrielle, Sophia, Taylor and Heather are engaging in their own processes. Similar to Emily, all four women strive to find their truest selves. The structure in which they do this is expanded so that the audience can gather more information about what is making the women on stage break down and why each surrenders to it. Emily’s role is an introduction, a foreshadowing of the process that the audience is being asked to witness. The group role is a zoomed in, more detailed version of what is being investigated and how it can manifest, breakdown and become clarified within the body. These two sections were not formed simultaneously, but augmented each other when viewed together.

Functioning as a unit in a system of walking patterns, the four group movers take turns being pulled away from and back towards the unit. In Figure 3, Gabrielle has been
pulled away. In a moment, she is sucked back into the unit and falls. The unit rushes to her, catching her body off kilter and replacing her on her feet. Gabrielle returns to her place in the line, walking, as the next dancer is pulled away and the unit must again, rush to protect her.

Figure 3*

My cast and I investigated the notion of falling for many consecutive performance practices/rehearsals. Interested in falling physically, falling emotionally, falling into and away from things, I included a section that demonstrated repetitive falling in order to reveal the effects falling can have on the body and mind. What fears arise with such a displacement of the physical body? I meshed these two sections (the solo and the group falling) together because I was interested in the amalgamation of Emily’s fierce execution of the ending of her cycle, and a group of bodies repeating a cycle of their own. I often gave Emily instructions such as, “imagine this solo is one sentence; fall through the movement.” While she is falling through her movement, the group is literally falling into
and away from each other, suggesting that both may be experiencing a similar sensation in different manifestations.

The movement score for this falling section is based on being pushed and pulled, falling, and how to recover and return to a unit within such an upsetting structure. I really pushed my dancer’s to challenge themselves with how far each strayed from the group and how quickly each chose to fall. At least once in each run of the piece, one of the falling individuals was not caught. I was curious how this played out as the dancers had free reign with their vocalization for this particular section. In giving a choice to vocalize, I hoped to give the performers an authentic forum in which to protect one another, and I hoped the audience would view the performers as humans, connect with them as humans, empathize and relate as humans.

When the four humans experience a shift in their process within the falling score, it is because Emily has reached the culmination of her fight against her cycle. She moves into her pool of light for the second time and, shocked, falls to the ground, writhing away to find safety from the truth. As she falls, everyone falls, through and around the space. I asked, “what is making you fall and why are you doing it?” Standing, Emily speeds through the movements of the phrase- essencing the cycle that she has broken from, all the while being surrounded by a group of falling bodies. Amidst the falling, Taylor is pulled to the upstage left corner and while Emily finds herself in the light, honest and true, the other four performers continue their breakdown and run after Taylor.

When I was a child, I had a reoccurring dream that I was being chased by something and no matter how hard I tried, I could not run fast enough, could never escape. The next section of *The process the ritual* demonstrates the fear one experiences,
whether in a dream world or the present reality, when escape seems impossible and no matter how fast you run, crushing weight pushes down. Moving in slow motion, the group continues to run, stuck in their places, unable to run fast enough, to get away.

Figure 4 shows Emily in her pool of light while the group is stuck in a slow motion run.

Figure 4*

Hands brush unwillingly, painfully against necks, in a beautiful representation of the fear of touch. The four women hang over to their sides, defeated, reverberating in their inability to escape. A shift. Sound overtakes the room in a cacophony. They are driving through the space, pulled towards Emily; conquering the room with pelvises and precise focus, clear in the intention of taking control. The four move together in time, break apart into their own worlds and come back together in time, again. Discovering their displacements and dancing with their fears, Taylor, Heather, Sophia and Gabrielle fall into a diagonal line with Emily. The shift is startling, as if the four did not know eyes
were watching. Slowly, sensing that the group has finally joined her, Emily shifts into a dance with herself. Figure 5 shows the diagonal line with Emily dancing alone.

Figure 5*

Meanwhile, in silence, the four finish their time as a unit with a section on Emily’s solo phrase work. The reference to Emily’s solo movement signals that the group, like Emily, has unearthed and recognized what they need to do to shift perspectives; what each must work out in order to find peace.

The greatest significance of this large group phrase/section is that the women are taking power in a situation where something is happening to them. Some of the movements demonstrate a lack of control while others are powerful in precision and intention. The women dance together, un-alone in their struggle, but remain individual in the specific fear or displacement each is working to conquer. When each has conquered,
she repairs, rejuvenates, reinvigorates herself through an improvisational score called “the ritual.”

Quiet guitar, the same song that played during Emily’s solo, seeps into the space like a memory. The women share with others experiences of processing emotions, specifically fear and acceptance of truth, in their dancing. Emily still rotates, eyes closed, at peace. Exactly what these things looked like was different for each of the performers in each rehearsal; therefore, the “ritual” section of the ritual in its entirety is improvisational to allow freedom of movement and expression. The goal of the score is to work it out—it being whatever each individual needs to process or get rid of in order to find home in their bodies and be with the truth. The dancers can use the following in “the ritual” score: “falling”, the “twelve Nidāna phrase” from Emily’s solo, any movements from the group unison phrase work and finally, their individual ritual. In our last two rehearsals, each dancer created an individual ritual based on home/displaced sensations. When completing their ritual within the “ritual” score, each dancer must be in her place in the diagonal line (formed earlier with all the dancers including Emily). This references the diagonal trajectory between the group and Emily when the group first took control in the unison section, and also references the first time all five performers came together. When the music fades, the group members slowly find endings to their improvisation and stand. Rotating in place, each of the four women gazes upon the space. Seeing. Allowing selves to likewise be seen by the eyes that gaze back—seeing and being seen in a pool of truth. Figure 6 shows the performers rotating just after the end of “the ritual.”
Within the turning section, each individual is seeing and being seen as her honest self. Escaping the crushing weight of fears, displacements, preconceived notions of whom we should become, how we should behave, what our identities should look like and where we should react within the body, the four women see the space and it’s inhabitants with confidence, honest vulnerability and power in who each is. Megan Boler, a writer on education that draws largely from Buddhism states, “I propose inscribed habits of emotional inattention as a way to describe the embedded, cultural habits of seeing and not seeing. These habits come to feel like one’s chosen self and identity, but are in fact as much social and cultural as they are personal,” (Boler 122). Much like Gelb’s words on Alexander Technique (see page 8-9), this passage states that seeing and not seeing (our emotions and the surrounding physical space) are habits developed by
culture, yet feel like identities that we must hold onto. I asked my dancers to let go of the
cultural habits and find the personal in order to connect with their true identities, not
identities that were perhaps created for them. When each feels she has reached and shared
her true identity, eyes close and peace fills the body. Figure 7 shows Emily at peace.

Figure 7*

The lights fade, so slowly that a shift in brightness can hardly be perceived. The
audience witnesses home/peace for almost a minute and the performers are awarded the
gift of relishing in their true identities before the lights fade completely and the piece is
finished. This was my absolute favorite part of the piece! We do not allow ourselves to be
vulnerable in front of others, to be looked at with confidence, to be honest. It is so
pleasing to watch the performers exist in this state for such a long time and gives me
hope for myself in my continuing search for honesty and vulnerability in myself.

Sound score
The final sound score for this work consisted of three songs. John Frusciante composed the first song called “Before The Beginning.” Using garage band, I overlaid clips of the performers speaking in rehearsal discussions post practice. I had a hard time settling on a song for Emily’s solo because I did not want to override her movement or overwhelm the audience with sound. The focus needed to be the movement. I chose “Before The Beginning” because it gives an ongoing feeling and quickly becomes background music, as it is repetitive with only a few instruments.

The second piece of music, “Nobody Weird Like Me,” was created by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. In the piece, the song plays during the group unison section, just as they begin to shoot through the space and conquer through movement. I chose this piece, quite last minute, for it’s rhythmic drive and variation in tempo. It allows the dancers to let go of trying to count (this phrase did not have counts which became a challenge as unison was the goal) the rhythm and just fall, attack, dance through the space. I was excited and pleased with the combination of the phrase work and this particular song because neither overwhelmed the other. The movement was strong, detailed, and personal and the song was loud, erratic and exciting. Together, movement and sound created a tremendous scenario for the performers to experience and the audience to watch, and really drove home the significance of the particular section.

The third and final song is, again, “Before The Beginning,” by John Fruciente. It fades in during “the ritual” section and plays quietly, like a memory. Again, it gives an ongoing feeling, yet the performers are demonstrating a shift, and escaping from the cycle. Using the same music from Emily’s solo, where she escapes the cycle, I hoped to clarify for the audience that what they had just seen in the group section was a zoomed-in
version of what Emily had experienced earlier. The sound fades, signaling the performers to truly come together.

**Encounters: Strengths, Weaknesses and Surprises**

Creating movement for this work was always so exciting and easy. In investigating honesty, I did not have to stress about the movements that came to me, whether they were right or wrong. I often filmed myself creating so that I could dance without thinking and then go back to the video to remember and refine sequences. I would also film in rehearsals, so that I could ask my dancers to go back and remember specific movements. This allowed me to capture movements in which my performers seemed most moved by, making the piece a mixture of movements I had created and movements that my performers were deeply connected to. Is also allowed me to watch my dancers more attentively and lead practices without getting caught up in “losing” movements-I could just enjoy the fleetingness of my cast member’s physical expressions of their practices. I was so lucky to have such strong improvisers in my cast. Each was always invested in the task or score presented and I was pleased with the willingness of all to jump in and work through difficult sensations in the body. Creating work is extremely vulnerable and I am grateful to have had such a supportive group.

My biggest challenge, and something that did not become clear until after production was over, was how to run rehearsal. I had never worked in a director/choreographer position before. I like to work in an improvisational, process oriented way, but the pressure of the deadlines made it difficult for me to find a balance between my creative process and producing a product. Frustration often filled me at the
end of rehearsals because my lack of knowledge for how to direct five bodies suppressed my creative thinking. Negotiating how to be an understanding human in situations of lateness, sickness etc. while trying desperately to be productive in the short amount of rehearsal time we had was really uncomfortable and I don’t believe I was very good at it. My stress was physically and emotionally clear to those who were working with me. I wish that I had been able to communicate more clearly through my words than through my body language and/or actions. In addition, I struggled with feeling like I needed to have the answers to share with my cast members. It sometimes took me days to process one single thought or inspiration from a rehearsal and I did not know how to transfer my lack of knowledge to my cast members and still move forward with creating a final piece.

Something that really struck me in this process was: the work told me what to do. I followed it on a journey and even as I write, the work shows more of itself to me. I did not choose the number five for Emily to complete the full cycle of her twelve-movement phrase. Something told me that this was the number the work needed and when I referred back to my academic research, the number five happened to be the senses. “Open your senses and you will see,” the work said to me. “You will hear what needs to be heard during this work, be patient.” Over and over I had experiences like this in my process. Surreal occurrences as if my art were a living, breathing entity, capable of functioning on it’s own, willing to share with me its beauty. I am surprised in my writing process with how everything fell into place and grateful for my letting go and focusing on the success I feel now that it’s all over.

In the future, I hope to reset this work on bodies that may or may not have any dance experience. With a much better understanding of myself as a director and the
completed work already built, I could spend most all of the rehearsal time leading body sourcing/performance practices. This would allow me to go much deeper into the research of the sensations and physicalizations of fear, displacement, home and peace. It would also allow me to share with more people than just my five cast members, the ideas of escaping identities based on cultural habits in order to simply be honest with the self and the display of the self. In addition, I would become more invested in how participants documented the process so that each might be able to hold onto their profound discoveries, much like I have in the process of creating a BFA show/thesis.

Conclusion

In concluding my findings, I began my process with an interest in finding home and peace in the body. This developed into an investigation of the cyclical nature of the structure of emotions in our bodies in society; specifically fear, displacement, home and peace. I believe I was successful not only in developing a movement practice (The process the ritual) that allows participants to access and make peace with their fears, but also in connecting my inspirations through a theoretical lens in order to create said practice. Buddhism, Alexander Technique and movement practices such as Deborah Hay’s Practicing Performance and “turn your fucking head,” were key in building my rehearsal structure and final work, The process the ritual.

In terms of Buddhism, I researched the concept of cycles, specifically the cycle of the twelve Nidānas, also knows as paticca samuppāda. Within this cycle, I became particularly interested in Jāti, birth. How can one find birth or re-birth within a difficult situation? What empowerment does a shifting of perspective bring to young women? I
used the creative process of movement and choreography to investigate in my own body and the bodies of my cast members what it looks like to be re-birthed, away from fear and displacement, to a corporeal sense of home. In addition to exploring Buddhism, I investigated the integration of the self- mind, body and identity that branches from Alexander Technique. In combining both of these methodologies, my goal became, how could I build a physical practice or structure in which the participants cycle through and come to terms with their emotions? I used Practicing Performance methods of moving to build this structure. In Practicing Performance, participants search to “discover and rediscover the body’s changeability,” (Foster ix) in order to develop awareness, intention and a sense of the self in movement. I challenged myself and my performers to find birth or re-birth and a sense of unity in mind, body and identity through physical practice for an audience, so that audience members could view peace while the performers experienced peace.

*The process the ritual* ends with each performer gazing and in turn being gazed at by the audience. Each performer is at peace/home with her identity, body and mind- each true and honest. In the forward of the book *my body, the buddhist*, Susan Foster writes regarding the body, “it gazes at those who view it with a generous invitation to be looked at,” (Foster xi). My hope, as this BFA process comes to an end is that all of those (performers and audience members) who participated in *The process the ritual* have a better understanding of what it means to have control over mind/body/identity, and what it looks like to exist in tranquility.
Works Cited

*All performance photography credit goes to Digabyte AMD by Daniel Beahm


