

{SATI} {NATYA} / MINDFULNESS IN MOVEMENT:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF PRACTICING MINDFULNESS IN IMPROVISATIONAL  
DANCE THROUGH THE LENS OF NON-ATTACHMENT

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Dance  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

December 2014

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: {Sati} {Natya} / Mindfulness in Movement: An Investigation of Practicing Mindfulness in Improvisational Dance Through the Lens of Non-Attachment

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Degree awarded December 2014

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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December 2014

Title: {Sati} {Natya} / Mindfulness in Movement: An Investigation of Practicing Mindfulness in Improvisational Dance Through the Lens of Non-Attachment

This thesis describes the unique development and execution of a practice of improvisational dance through the lens of non-attachment. The ephemeral nature of dance as discussed by Maxine Sheets-Johnston (1981) is compared to a method of engaging the world with acceptance of what is without expectation or judgment as described in writings on various Eastern concepts of non-attachment through mindful practice. Parallels are noted between the aforementioned writings and works on non-attachment by Sahdra, Shaver, & Brown as well as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* to demonstrate the capacity of improvisational dance as a mode of practicing non-attachment. The author's experience in exploration through her own improvisational practice is compared with other movement practices stemming from eastern traditions interested in non-attachment as a mind-balancing pursuit. Progress toward non-attachment as a result of this committed practice is quantitatively demonstrated through the use of a Likert-style scaled questionnaire.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Professors Christian Cherry, Jenifer Craig, and Shannon Mockli for their assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. Deep thanks to Professor Christian Cherry for his limitless patience, encouragement, and gentle guidance along my path. His knowledge of Eastern philosophies and improvisational practices proved highly relevant to my work and his constructive criticism was key in the shaping of my document. Special recognition and thanks to Professor Shannon Mockli who acted as Chair of this committee for the first two years of my work and allowed me the freedom to craft my process organically. Many thanks to Dr. Jenifer Craig, Chair of the Department of Dance, who offered her valuable questions and comments throughout my time in the department. The entire faculty of the Department of Dance at the University of Oregon deserves recognition and appreciation for their collective and individual support and feedback throughout my investigatory process. I am grateful to the School of Music and Dance for providing the resources to conduct my research.

My deepest gratitude goes to my teacher and mentor, Dr. Kelli Harrington, for imparting her extensive knowledge and positive energy to me over the last few years. In addition, very special thanks are due to Erinn Ernst for her continuous support as both colleague and friend. Thanks to the many students of dance who participated as witnesses to my practice and offered feedback and questions, as well as to my fellow graduate students for their wonderful love and support. Kellyn Rost, a fellow student of dance and Eastern religions and a significant source of personal support and encouragement, made

invaluable contributions to this project. Lastly, my family deserves my gratitude for their endless patience and love as I spent this time away from them.

For my father, Steven Black, who taught me the importance of self-reflection.

For my mother, Nina Black, who instilled in me a passion for the arts.

For my mentor, Kelli Harrington, who taught me to step into my fear one breath at a time.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“One of the remarkable aspects of [improvisational] movement is what happens when we are moving in a more or less spontaneous manner, fully conscious, paying attention, but without any limit on what we do.” (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82).

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to explore ways in which mindfulness can be practiced in improvisational dance through the lens of non-attachment<sup>1</sup> as subjectively experienced and documented by a single dance practitioner. The space of which the poet Rumi speaks, “a way between voice and presence,” (Barks et al. 2004, 37) is the space in which my movement practice attempts to accumulate experience. The development of this practice evolved organically through the course of my experiences in investigation. What began as an investigation of the benefits of a focus on non-attachment through the healing art of choreographic process gradually transformed into a unique phenomenological practice, which I am characterizing here as a mindful synchronization of body and mind / movement and thought, with an open and gentle simultaneous awareness of both internal and external stimuli. Spanning my experiences from my original inquiry into non-attachment in association with mindful movement to the current stages of my practice development, I outline in this document, my questions, methods, challenges, and reflections as I allowed them to carve a natural path alongside my examination of non-attachment in the creation of my own phenomenological practice.

While working through a period of “suffering”(as generally defined by Buddhism, clarified in the “definitions” section of this document) which was cultivating in me the desire for change and personal growth,I had been looking to movement as my vehicle for coping and self-soothingwith hope of moving toward healing, especially through dance. My exploration of the vast array of potential for cultivating positive change within the self through movement ranged in study of various practices; ancient traditions of dance as a revitalizing and healing practice throughout many regions of Africa,the establishment of Dance Movement Therapy as a clinical psychotherapeutic practice in America,and Anna Halprin’s beautiful facilitation of a practice of Authentic Movement. After one particularly challenging experience of loss followed by heightened physical suffering of injuries and illness, I was drawn to the rejuvenating practice of the postures of yoga. The practice is especially attractive to me as a practitioner of movement and lends itself well to the immediate physical needs of a dancer in training and/or recovery from injury.

For a short while, I practiced only *asana* (the physical practice of postures),as opposed to the postures in conjunction with the other seven limbs of yoga<sup>2</sup>, but over time found that to be an imbalanced practice for my needs as a whole human. In addition to a sense of lacking in my understanding of the purpose of yoga, Ialso felt a need to express myself creatively in my practice for which there was not ample room or facility in the confining space of the six-foot long, two-foot wide yoga mat. As a developing artist whose canvas is the body, I have often turned to the tools of time, space, and energy to craft my creative expression in response to suffering as a way to process and to expressmy experiences. I thus became interested in utilizing my skills as a dancer to

increase my understanding and seek positive personal growth. Through improvising dance, I discovered what was lacking in my *asana* practice: freedom of intuitive expression through movement. I had always known that *asana* supported my dance practice by aiding in injury prevention, increasing efficiency of motion, removing lactic acid to prevent sore muscles, and increasing strength and mobility. It also helped me develop a yearning for deep exploration of spontaneous movement and its potential to act as the physical basis of a phenomenological practice.

Seeking a more balanced and expansive practice to meet my creative needs, I invested in a deeper study of yoga which necessarily involved learning the purpose of the *asanas*, generally agreed upon in yogic traditions to be the preparation of the body for long periods of stillness and suppleness during which meditation can be practiced. The importance of meditation in an eight-limbed yoga practice cannot be overemphasized. Patanjali explains the purpose of yoga in his *Yoga Sutras*: “Yoga chittavirttinirodha” or, as directly translated as possible, ‘Yoga makes extinct the tendency of the mind to turn things around’ (Satchidananda 2012, 12). *Yoga* is the practice, *chitta* is the mind, *virtti* literally means “whirlpool” (or the ability to turn things around), and *nirodha* means to make absent or extinct. Yoga is a full practice of being a whole human; trying to achieve the desired state in which every aspect of a person is disciplined, strengthened, opened, aligned, and balanced through regular practice. This means that all aspects of mind and body are exercised individually and in unison, a complex structure of the layers of human nature, perception, psyche, ego, soul, etc. This same full-self

presence was somewhat familiar and accessible for me as similar considerations of all aspects of a dancer are often the subject of inquiry in the dance classroom.

The conceptual practice that captured my attention and curiosity most in my study of the eight limbs of yoga was that of “non-attachment.” The Sanskrit words *saparigraha* and *viragyā* can be translated as “non-possessiveness,” “non-coveting,” or “non-attachment,” usually understood in relation to tangible, physical possessions, relationships to others, or ideas and circumstances which we find appealing (Satchidananda 2012, 31-32). The idea struck me as being highly relatable to moving in the moment in performance and making easeful, spontaneous choices about movement. Initially, I sought to explore these parallel avenues through the choreographic process by setting work on other dancers, but recognized after some guidance that this avenue of investigation is, by nature, a deeply personal exploration and would be best experienced and documented as a phenomenological study in the first person. Subsequently setting out to craft and perform the work as the soloist inside of the process, I quickly discovered that attachments to my own judgments of my work and process as well as the fear of judgments of others were creating substantial obstacles around attempts at making clear choices and creating a set work with this intent. After much frustration early on in my process of seeking better understanding of non-attachment through movement, it became clear that my focus needed to shift. It was at this point that I tuned in to the inherent presence of non-attachment in the act of dance improvisation.

Through experience, I have learned that the mind of the mover must be present and attentive to the flow of energy and fluid shift of action in order to participate in an improvisational exploration. Spontaneous, improvisational movement requires that the mover observe and pass overall stimuli fluidly, the mind keeping up with time by following (as opposed to forcing) movement in motion (Albright 2003, 27). Such mindfulness and presence is commonly sought and practiced in both *asana* and many dance practices as well. Non-attachment is one of the earliest principles taught in the eight limbs of yoga because it is essential to becoming present; to remain unattached from the past while maintaining detachment from projections of a possible future puts one in the present, exactly where one must be in movement to execute an improvisation (Albright 2003, 26). This idea is expressed in Buddhism as the method of taking action moment by moment, which is the same as the method of accepting all conditions regardless of personal desire (Suzuki 1987, 118). My curiosity wondered “In what ways can this be practiced and understood through dance?” My experience has shown me that it is the duet of the mind-body dance that empowers me to tap into my potential for personal growth. I decided that I would develop a personal practice of dance improvisation for the purpose of cultivating a better sense of non-attachment to initiate positive personal change. Journaling, some video recording, and use of the Non-Attachment Scale<sup>4</sup> would be my methods of investigation, documentation, and reflection in this process. Later in my process I came to understand that what I was actually practicing was mindfulness in movement through the lens of non-attachment.



Focusing upon the original intention of presenting my work as an artist's offering, I decided to perform my practice as a "work in progress," an exploration of a budding movement practice in performance. This brought new questions to the work of the value and quality of mindfulness and meditation practices as art. The experience of preparing a meditative practice with an awareness of an approaching performance so early in the development was daunting, conflicting, even frustrating, and ultimately disruptive for me to the intention of the practice itself. Though this struggle was organic and, in retrospect, necessary for the progress and growth I ultimately experienced, I felt my work at this stage was somewhat lacking in substance and experience to be of significance for the intended scope of the investigation. After the performance and a period of reflection, I decided to revisit my practice in a different environment at a later date. A year extension was granted for a two-term leave of absence during which I would once again engage regularly in the private practice, this time without any intention of being witnessed. A thorough description of the development and experience of the practice prior to, during, and after performance is presented in the reflections. This investigation tries to answer the following questions:

- 1) What kinds of approaches to improvisation lend themselves effectively to a practice of mindfulness in movement focused upon non-attachment?
- 2) In what ways can it become possible for me to be both expressive and non-attached within a movement practice?
- 3) How do the experiences of a practice-for-performance and the performance itself differ from the experience of a private practice? Can this meditative practice be

valid as art in performance? As meditation with spectators? In what ways did (or did not) my experiences validate this?

### Significance

This investigation could add to the increasing collection of literature on improvisational practices in dance as well as the collective body of experiential research on mindfulness in movement practice. This work is a platform from which I can begin a life-long investigation of balancing mindfulness with physical action, specifically through improvisational dance. I aim to demonstrate the ways in which expressing the self through movement can bring one into the present moment, furthering the body of knowledge of investigations into non-attachment and movement practice for self-improvement. The field of dance may also benefit from my contribution to writings on perception in movement, meditation in performance, and dance as a personal practice.

### Delimitations

This study is delimited to the experiences of one individual –myself – a dancer at twenty-nine to thirty-one years of age living in Eugene, Oregon. The practice I have developed brought up many questions regarding dance improvisation in performance and the perception of witness to meditative movement. While I touch on these questions and my experiences with them, my focus in this work remains upon their relationship to my pursuit of mindfulness through the lens of non-attachment. The University of Oregon functions on ten-week sessions and scheduling for theater space is always a challenge. Prior to unearthing the true aim and final method of my investigation, a performance date

of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 was set for the performance of this work in a shared event with Carolina Caballero, a fellow graduate student in the Master of Fine Arts Dance program. Perhaps the most significant delimitation as seen from the perspective of traditional Eastern spiritual practices was my choice not to seek an individualguru<sup>4</sup> in this process. While I certainly had teachers in many forms along the way and gained much from each of them, I did not specifically seek out a dedicated guru to guide me through the shaping and refining of my practice, which is an aspect of disciplined devotion to the process considered to be of extreme importance in mostdefinable Eastern spiritual traditions (Tirha 2002, 161). Some might consider my lack of a guru as a prominent flaw in my approach and method because a student practitioner without guidance can spend great amounts of time floundering in the process of setting and refining a practice. I feel that my time spent carving my practice without a definite or dedicated guru was invaluable to me both as an artist and practitioner. The active participation of a guru would not have been fitting for the academic rigor and structure of this investigation.

### Limitations

This research process required that I rely on my experiences, journals, and video recordings of practice and performance for my reflection writing process. The process was not completely defined in advance and allowance was made for the development of my practice on my own terms. The nature of the practice therefore shifted along the process, included in discussion of the process and considered important steps in the development of the practice. The decision to continue the practice and examine my

experiences without the intention of performance was made after the formal presentation of my work. My original practiceseries therefore lacks the perspective of being one of two samples. The Non-Attachment Scale (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown, 2010) is utilized in this exploration to aid in the review of my individual experiences rather than to observe trends in a larger sample population.

### Definitions

To introduce my definition of *non-attachment* for the purposes of this investigation, I will begin with traditional Buddhist concepts from the *Vajrayana* tradition based on writings in the *Tripitaka*,<sup>5</sup> paired with the widely respected introductory Buddhist text, *What the Buddha Taught*, by WalpolaRahula, after which I will introduce my own definition of the term for my work based upon these writings. By quoting and explaining the *Tripitaka*, Rahula demonstrated that attachments are formed naturally and quickly in life; to release them would be to free oneself from a cycle of resisting inevitable change, increasing one's suffering as a result(Rahula 1974, 17). Attachment in this sense can mean a clinging to anything: tangible possessions, relationships, ideas, circumstances, emotions, experiences, etc. Even the certainty that something causing our suffering will last forever(or for much longer than one believes they might be able to tolerate) is a type of attachment. It is perhaps more attainable to understand what is meant by this definition of attachment by describing the antithesis of attachment, which would be most simply described as mindfulness and pure presence.

Attention to every detail of the moment in which one finds oneself when paying attention brings one to awareness that does not allow for the mind to retain most attachments.

The paradox here is that human attachments are inevitable. Attachments are required in fragile youth to begin to understand our world, our identity, and each other. Secure attachment is needed in order to begin to explore within, and then, without the self. These attachments form deep patterns of thought and behavior and can persist long into life, developing within the individual a need not only for things to which to attach, but *the need*, itself, for *being attached*. There is a sense of safety in consistency, thus humans will naturally seek consistency through attachment rather than recognizing the reality of impermanence and surrendering to constant change with grace.

It is important to note here that non-attachment is not an expression of “detachment,” but exists as the freedom between detachment and attachment. In this practice, one is not necessarily detaching oneself from one’s past (which still exists in the form of one’s nature informed by experience). Non-attachment is not a way of turning away from the world, but rather a way to engage it free of the biases and patterns that can develop over time. A philosophy of non-attachment allows for a present sense of awareness (for one cannot mentally be in the past or future if one is not attached to what has been or what might be) as well as swift adaptability and easeful centeredness regardless of circumstances. This appeals to me as a practice of centeredness and adaptability with a happy attitude; this is how I want to live in my personal, professional, and creative life.

The Dalai Lama XIV has expressed that “attachment is the origin, the root of suffering; hence it is the cause of suffering” (Hopkins 1988, 37). When I speak of attachments in this work, I will be referring to the negative connotation of a cause of suffering. Attachments of any kind can be a hindrance to presence and awareness in the moment. I began this process by working with memories to cultivate movement because it is within the body that physical and emotional experience is stored; a person can literally develop physical restrictions based on emotionally developed attachments (Shapiro 2006, 11-13). For a Western cultural version of non-attachment, I will refer to metaphors given by renowned philosopher Alan Watts in a lecture on the subjects of thought and transience:

The thing is, oneself is certainly not the stream of consciousness. Oneself is everything that goes on underneath that, and of which the stream of consciousness is a mere, uh, well it has about the same relationship to oneself as the bookkeeping does to a business. And if you are selling grocery, there is very little resemblance between your books and what you move over your shelves and counters. There is just a record of it, and that is what our consciousness keeps (Watts 1958).

It is this record of experience to which we tend to cling; as though that record is the experience itself. The record is not the experience, cannot be the experience, and only serves to show us that which can be learned *from* the experience if we happened to miss it the first time through; but it does not offer the learning. The experience is the point of life, the location of learning, and is fundamental to peaceful, balanced existence with minimal suffering. But we dwell upon the record as though it is what we *are* and what we *will be* because of the belief that it is what we *were* in a previous moment. Watts also

refers to Niagara Falls and the whirlpool to be found there as another example of this misunderstanding (Watts 1958). We point at Niagara Falls and say “look at this *thing* that *is*” and we see it as though it has always been and always will be, or at least will be for a period of time lengthy enough that it will be to us in our lifetime a single thing. What we miss is the blatant fact that it never was a thing, but only ever a *process*, constantly changing and morphing, each drop of water converging with the rest and passing through, moving on, never stopping. That which we call a thing, Niagara Falls, will someday experience enough change, the dramatic accumulation of which will be enough that we might recognize it as the process that it is rather than a thing which we can name and decide upon.

The Grand Canyon, another geological example, was not always the structure we associate generally with the title, nor will it always be. In fact, it is not for a moment the structure of which we think or relate. But we attach the label to it and call it a thing, for the sake of communication, as though it were lasting. These descriptions and examples resonate with me so deeply that I will apply them here to what I refer to as *attachments*. Thus, my definition of non-attachment is most accurately described as presence in every passing moment with an awareness of the constancy of change; in short, *mindfulness*. For the scope of this investigation, I define non-attachment as being a thoughtful freedom to adapt to changes moment by moment with ease; to experience *what is* with calm acceptance and an understanding that it is not always *what will be*. What especially interests me are the ways in which the emotional stability and ease of adaptability that

stems from non-attachment might be paralleled in the physical realms of improvisational dance through a mindful practice of movement.

Definitions of *mindfulness* are universal whether taken from schools of Eastern or Western thought. All traditions of Buddhism share the same simple description of mindfulness that is also utilized in Jungian psychology (as well as many other clinical psychology practices). Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention on the present. Through mindfulness, one's thoughts, emotions, physical actions, and energies can be observed from a kind of distance, free of self-judgment as to whether they are good or bad. Rather than waiting for the next moment or allowing the mind to linger in the past that is no more, there is an acceptance of passing time which allows one to live in the present moment and awaken to each new experience. Mindfulness in this document will refer to the attention to stimuli (both internal and external), awareness of impulse, and observation of reaction to both in movement, moment by moment.

I refer often in this work to “suffering,” which can tend to have very negative connotations in the Western world. I take my definition of suffering from Buddhist traditions in which it is understood simply as any and all afflictions of mind, body, and spirit, great or small. It is not meant to demonstrate dramatic or traumatic events or reactions, but rather anything at all which removes one from pure happiness, bliss, nirvana, enlightenment. The Buddha said “Life *is* Suffering” (Rahula 1974, 31). What this meant was that we all suffer from troubles great and small, ever persistent, and seemingly unique while truly all the same afflictions. The Four Noble Truths as taught early in the *Mahayana* Buddhist tradition describes suffering as being any of the following



afflictions, all of their many varieties, and much more: anguish, anxiety, dissatisfaction, discomfort, discontentment, frustration, misery, sorrow, stress, sickness, grief, loss, death, uneasiness, unhappiness, anger (Rahula 1974, 31-33). As I am obviously not an enlightened being and therefore always in some form of suffering according to the above definition, suffering will be used often in this writing to mean any of the aforementioned afflictions which plague one beyond reasonable tolerance as decided by the individual practitioner, in this case myself.

“Eastern philosophies” is a broad term used in this document to refer to a wide range of spiritual traditions, practices, philosophies, religions, etc. that share a common understanding of concepts such as non-attachment. For the purposes of this thesis, the major countries included in the term “Eastern” are India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. When I refer to Eastern philosophies, I am not referring to any one religious group or tradition, but rather the vast, collective group of varying cultures that have stemmed from religions such as Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Taoism, etc. The god/s of these religious groups can be understood as impersonal, differing greatly from the god/s of typical Western religious groups, which are generally very personal. That distinction alone sets the two worlds of philosophy at odds with one another (Easwaran 2008, 23).

A key concept of this thesis is the understanding of “phenomenological experience.” Dance phenomenology author Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has written much on the subject of phenomenological experience in movement. Her work is referenced in

this document as a primary source surrounding this concept. She explains of phenomenological experience: “[It is] at the same time a *multiple unity* and a *unified multiplicity*. Multiplicity and unity coexist because human consciousness exists as a *temporal multiplicity* (past, present, future) and a *temporal unity* (the synthesis of these units)” (Sheets-Johnstone 1980, 402). Simultaneously experiencing all that is happening within and without the body (or offering as much detached but open awareness to whatever is happening as possible) without judging, naming, lingering, or expecting, leads to a fluid experience of simple and profound presence to *what is*. When I refer to phenomenological experience in this document, I will be referring to the ideal state for my practice, the state in which principles of non-attachment apply quite directly and progress toward deeper understanding and achievement of non-attachment can be made.

The word “practice” in this document is used in two ways. First, it is used as the common verb referring to the repeated performance or systematic exercise for the purpose of acquiring skill or proficiency. For example, I practice improvisation in an attempt to deepen my understanding and application of non-attachment in my life. Second, it is used as a noun representing an application of disciplined, structured work on a regular basis. Just as practitioners revisit an *asana* (physical posture) practice on a daily basis, I will address and discuss my practice of improvisation on a weekly basis. The term carries with it an understanding of some respectful devotion due to an understanding that the practitioner has of the benefits of dedication to the activity. One might see a personal practice as a somewhat sacred time of self-improvement, and such practice may have ritualistic qualities surrounding the preparation, execution, or completion.

The specific type of practice referred to in this document is a “movement meditation”, a type of focused attention upon a pre-determined point (idea, activity, object, or other) while the body is in structured motion, also generally predetermined. This type of meditation differs from seated meditation in that the practitioner is generating motion and therefore activating the mind in ways that are not common in a seated meditation. In this case, the movement is improvisational dance and the structures of movement motivation vary. “Improvisation” will be defined in this thesis as spontaneous movement that stems from pre-determined internal and/or external stimuli. Dance artist Nancy Stark Smith has authored her own description of improvisation:

When you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the ‘Gap’. The more I improvise, the more I am convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps -this momentary suspension of reference point- that comes the unexpected and much sought after ‘original’ material. It's original because its origin is the current moment and because it comes from outside our usual frame of reference (Nancy Stark Smith 2003, 275).

The description of being somewhere “when you don’t know where you are” is the perfect description of my desired state within an improvisational practice, more thoroughly expressed in the review of literature.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This review of literature must begin with a clear explanation of the issue of human suffering since that is what motivates the work. Non-attachment is discussed and explained in both Eastern and Western terms and several analogies are given to demonstrate the idea in simple, accessible ways. Yogic influences for this investigation are explained to describe the long history of healing movement practices and some of their origins, which leads to a description of dance-specific practices and trends toward making dance a tool for use in expressive therapies. My reasoning for basing this practice in improvisation is explained between a review of literature on dance as therapy as well as reflections on key practices that utilize improvisation for similar reasons such as Anna Halprin's Authentic Movement practice (2000). By comparing non-attachment to concepts of phenomenology in Western philosophy, the reader is led to understand the parallels between the two and therefore the accessibility of one with the other through dance improvisation.

#### Eastern/Buddhist Philosophy

When the Buddha said "Life *is* suffering," what was meant was that there is not a moment of experience in existence for any sentient being in which one is completely free of all mental, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual affliction (Rahula 1974,

33-35). There is not one among us who has experienced even a single instant of pure perfection. There is always the presence of some sort of pain, some slight discomfort or discontentment, however subtle or insignificant, some feeling of lacking or desire, which drives us in thought and action. There are many acclaimed paths to minimize or even eliminate this suffering, some of which are said to lead to enlightenment, if one is so inclined to engage in such practice. Instead, viewing a practice of mindfulness through the lens of non-attachment is the intention of this investigation, for which an agreement upon and understanding of suffering as a constant presence in the life of every sentient being is required. Aikido Shodan and self-help author Dan Millman differentiates pain from suffering in clear terms:

Pain is a relatively objective physical phenomenon; suffering is our psychological resistance to what happens. Events may create physical pain, but they do not in themselves create suffering. Resistance creates suffering. Stress happens when our mind resists what is. The only problem in our life is our mind's resistance to life as it unfolds (Millman 2006, 43).

Another word in Eastern philosophy for this kind of “resistance” is “attachment,” or the clinging to something that has passed or that never came to fruition. Attachments develop naturally and constantly in human life; countering these developing attachments by practicing *non-attachment* to balance and calm suffering may bring one acceptance and peace (Rahula 1974, 17). In 2010, three scholars of psychology worked together to compare Eastern understandings of non-attachment to Western understandings of the word (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown 2010, 117). Though the terms “East” and “West” are used in a broad generalization here, an important and valid point is made by

understanding the wash of agreement over the two culturally diverse schools of thought, even considering the array of variation within each of them.

Beginning by identifying a general understanding and definition of the term *attachment* in the West (especially in psychology as laid out by Carl Jung), the authors describe the understood importance of identifying a secure foundation of “self” by attaching to guardians, self-identifying and individualizing qualities, ideas and understandings of the way the world *is* and *works* as a static structure rather than a rapidly changing process, which is closer to the reality of impermanence. As discussed in the definitions, attachments are generally recognized in the West as important foundational developments in the early stages of life for the individual to understand the world within the self before reaching beyond the self to interact with that world; it is a formation of security, which is seen as psychologically positive and crucial to a stable and happy life (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown 2010, 122). There is also a Western recognition of attachments as a negative aspect of development in that they can sometimes be based in anxiety and fear if not developed or experienced in a supportive, nurturing environment, such as the development of separation anxiety and abandonment issues in individuals who have entered their existence without the basic, consistent care that is required of infancy in our fragile species.

Overlapping this explanation of attachments as understood in Western culture, the authors point out that there are completely separate and even conflicting understandings of attachment in Eastern culture, especially prior to the influence of the Western world encroaching upon Eastern territories. Attachments are seen more in Eastern philosophies

and cultures independent of Western influence (particularly in Buddhist traditions) as being primary causes of suffering, as clarified in the definitions of this document. The authors summarize these differences nicely while at once pointing out the commonalities between the two worlds:

On one hand, the term attachment has opposing connotations in the two conceptual systems. On the other hand, the qualities that characterize “mature” persons in both systems are similar. Buddhists claim that a highly developed individual, who presumably practices non-attachment, feels both great autonomy and deep concern for others... This is similar to the notion in Western attachment theory that secure attachments in childhood, which involve healthy reliance of the “attached” child on other people, especially primary caregivers, provide an optimal background for becoming a secure adult who exhibits considerable autonomy, self-confidence, and lack of anxious conformity... Moreover, [Western] research has shown that securely attached people are more compassionate than their insecure counterparts... and there is evidence that securely attached individuals tend to be more mindful, an important psychological asset according to Buddhism. Thus, as odd as it seems, attachment and non-attachment, viewed from different cultural traditions, may mean similar things (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown 2010, 116-18).

There are those who would argue that living by a philosophy of non-attachment as defined in Eastern culture leads to a life of dullness and insensitivity, void of the passions and richness of human experience. Spiritual teacher EknathEaswaran wrote of the tendency to see non-attachment with a limited view, “we find it difficult to understand that the rare person who is able to receive good fortune without getting excited and bad fortune without getting depressed, lives in abiding joy” (Easwaran 2008, 52). The same can be said of reflecting upon one’s choices and seeing them as good or bad, success or failure. This demonstrates that judgment is a form of deep attachment, resulting from a

collection of smaller attachments to preferences or ideological paradigms, cultural norms, or personal experience.

Uncertain of what it would look like to see a practice of non-attachment manifesting as benefit in my life, I looked to the famous philosopher, Buddhist swami, and speaker Alan Watts for examples of how one might, in thought, carry or release an attachment of experience. Watts states that one may notice and release attachments easily simply by being aware and making a choice, which may become possible after a great deal of practice (Watts 1958). He tells the story of two monks crossing a river on foot who came upon a young woman struggling to cross on her own. One of the monks promptly picked her up, carried her across, and set her safely down on land, and in so doing he knowingly broke a vow of the renunciation of the touch of a woman. The two monks walked for some time in silence at which point the other monk said to him “I’m sorry, but do you know that you broke a vow back there by touching that woman?” The first monk replied, “Oh, but I left her back on the other shore, and you’re still carrying her” (Watts 1958). The monk who had carried the woman knew the higher purpose of his choice and did not hesitate to break his vow for that purpose, nor did he despair his broken covenant knowing he needn’t carry the weight of his decision beyond the very moment in which he acted. The monk who had been troubled by his friend’s actions was incapable in that moment of letting the experience pass over him without raising alarm due to his attachments to their vows. Both individuals had become monks after a great deal of time engaging in all prescribed practices, but one had achieved non-attachment in that moment and the other still struggled.



Through practice of meditation, mindfulness, *asanas*, or any other attentive devotion of focus, thoughts and images may rise and fall in the mind, and the practitioner can begin to witness the amount of energy and attention given to such thoughts and images, recognizing the frequency, time, and energy, though not necessarily through quantification or any form of measurement beyond a simple noticing. This seemed to be something achievable through dance movement, as dancers are often in the practice of observation of what is happening within and without the body. A dancer must not anticipate a moment ahead nor lag a step behind, but work to be present and aware in every moment of action. In a famous talk on meditation and mindfulness called “The Veil of Thoughts” (Watts 1958), Watts demonstrates through comparative religion that this kind of presence and mindfulness of the moment is an important lesson for everyone, not just the somatic practitioner. Releasing attachment to fears and emotions of a past uncontrollably distant and a future not yet come to fruition is key to achieving a peaceful, pleasant mindset. Watts states in clear and simple terms easily comprehensible by Western culture:

...The Sermon on the Mount... begins “Be not anxious for the morrow”. I have never to this day heard anyone give sermon on this subject. [Preachers] do occasionally refer to it, and say ‘Well that’s all very well for Jesus’, but the actual putting into practice of this, nobody will agree with. They say ‘it’s not practical to not give a damn about how you’re going to provide for the next day’s meals’ and all that sort of thing. But it *is* practical. It’s much *more* practical than what we’re doing, if you mean by ‘practical’ that it has survival value. ...In fact, you *can* take care of the morrow, but for the simple reason that you are no longer worrying about it. And thus it comes about that people who do not live for the morrow have some reason to make plans. But those who live for the morrow have no reason to make plans for anything because they never catch up with the morrow, because they don’t live in the present. They live for a future which never arrives. And that is very stupid (Watts 1958).

The connections and alignment of movement and non-attachment had become apparent to me, but I was still at a loss for a method of measuring or tracking my own ability to apply an understanding and practice of non-attachment to my personal life. A member of my thesis committee suggested the article that ultimately helped me shape and finalize my method in this practice. In the 2010 publication mentioned above, the authors attempted to develop for Western readers a sort of measuring system to allow those non-practitioners unfamiliar with Buddhist definitions of non-attachment to an awareness of their own abilities to practice non-attachment (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown 2010, 122). Calling upon a host of experts on Buddhist philosophy, these three researchers compiled a questionnaire to be answered with a Likert-style scale, offering a way of looking objectively at an individual's "level" of attachment. Recognizing that it is something of a paradox to attempt to measure, define, and catalogue one's ability to practice non-attachment, I chose to use the Non-Attachment Scale to look at shifts and trends in my attachment levels over the two intervals of my movement practice by answering the questionnaire once per week because I am a fitting representative of the population the Non-Attachment Scale authors were attempting to reach and study: a Westerner with little to no former understanding or practice of non-attachment in my life who has anxieties and insecurities which may benefit from such reflection and awareness (Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown 2010, 122).

The idea of non-attachment as generally defined in Eastern philosophies was at first foreign and difficult for me to understand. Fascinated by the concept and recognizing a gateway in through my field of study, I wondered about the range of benefits possible

for a practitioner pursuing the concept through movement. I came upon a 2008 literature review from Auckland University which sought to demonstrate the efficacy of utilizing Buddhist practices of non-attachment as psychotherapy and found that there is much to be learned from phenomenological explorations of emotional non-attachment (Dillon 2008). Such a practice is an exercise like any other, particularly that of meditation. The phenomenological nature of practicing non-attachment captured my curiosity as I was studying the phenomenology through dance experience. I saw a strong but unexplored relationship between dance and non-attachment and wanted to know more. I learned that overcoming attachment “means learning to have relaxed control over [the] mind through understanding the real causes of happiness and fulfillment, and this enables [one] to enjoy life more and suffer less” (Dillon 2008). Though I was not engaging in this investigation of non-attachment movement practice exclusively for direct psychotherapeutic benefits, I did seek an easeful experience of movement that would not harbor negativity or need for control or exact satisfaction. I was seeking contentment in experience by way of observing movement as the subject. This phenomenological method was at once both liberating and grounding as it allowed me to practice experience over judgment and offered a consistent way into my varying structures of exploration.

Once the connections between non-attachment and movement became obvious to me, I needed to find a method of practicing the former through the latter, specifically by means of dance in alignment with my background and training. Having no such structure on which to fall back, I looked to experts in Eastern philosophies and practices for guidance. American Buddhist monk of the Tibetan Marjayana tradition and PhD in

Comparative Religion, Lama Marut, suggests in his teachings of Buddhist practice for the Western mind that all religion, especially Eastern religion, was made into titled, definable sects first by outsiders who lacked understanding of the spiritual practices which they were witnessing (Marut 2009); he suggests that Westerners in particular, who tend to group their spiritual beliefs into wide religious standardized families, sought ways to understand trends of thought and belief as they encountered Eastern spiritual practitioners for the first times. It was first the non-practitioners who began to see practitioners as “Confucianist,” “Hindu,” “Buddhist,” “Shinto,” “Zen,” “Taoist,” from *this* tradition or *that*. In truth, he explains, the methods and practices were as wide and varied as those who practiced, handed down from private teacher to private student, and prescribed more broadly under titles by surviving gurus in subsequent generations of practice. In short, he suggests that it is arguable that traditions and trends only began to be bracketed into religious titles when encountered by newcomers from an opposing cultural background. The West lacked the cultural foundations and language to support an understanding and clear interpretation of the East and in reverse, the East lacked an awareness of the cultural divide as well as the tools necessary to address the West in ways that might have bridged the gap between the two. This teaching helped me understand early on that I needn’t seek an established practice, but that I could tailor my own unique path according to my needs and interests.

Alan Watts casually tells the anecdote that “a person goes to a friend’s medicine cabinet, opens it up and says ‘I am sick, I need medicine; any kind will do’. Well it won’t!” (Watts 1970) The antidote needs to be prescribed; it must address our needs as

unique individuals with unique paths. Of course we must understand our needs and tailor a practice to them. He reinforces that the function of these kinds of liberating practices is to make it possible for those interested parties to be freed from social hypnosis and approach their individual needs and paths. Understanding this, it is clear that the developing of a unique, personal practice that will enhance one's ability to release attachments with ease is one of the most centering and unquantifiably healing - albeit challenging - endeavors in which one can engage in life. My practice will extend far beyond this documented investigation and continue to transform, as will I. The freedom to tailor this practice to meet the needs of my own creative process allowed me to explore the various structures in which I felt I most successfully tuned in to mindfulness, thereby practicing non-attachment in direct translation from my movement experiences. This also means that I will be able to revisit the idea of presenting my practice in public as I make adjustments in the future and become well-acquainted with my needs in order to find a balanced movement meditation while being witnessed.

In the early stages of my work, I struggled with making choices in choreography because I continuously reflected and judged my decisions, often negatively. To reflect at all is to remove oneself from the present, but if we are going to learn, we must reflect. This kind of paradoxical logic is ubiquitous in Buddhism and many other Eastern religions and philosophies, bringing the practitioner into a neutral and open mind-set. The ability to see our so-called successes and failures in a light of pure experience and learning removed from the labeling of "success" or "failure" allows one to remain non-attached to those experiences as much as possible – that is, judgment free – for the sake

of growth. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki wrote, “Although everything has Buddha nature, we love flowers but we do not care for weeds... [but] for Zen students, a weed is a treasure... With this attitude, whatever you do, life becomes an art” (Suzuki 1987, 118). Keeping in mind this principle of acceptance and even appreciation for both what we cherish and what we do not, I moved to an improvisational practice in which I worked on letting go of judgment and exploring the experience of moving as a translation of non-attachment in movement, gradually freeing me from harsh self-criticism.

My new focus upon improvisation revealed a more phenomenological nature within my work as suggested in the introduction of this document. I began working on developing my practice as a ritual rather than a creative process and noticed a greater alignment of body and mind, bringing me to both an internally and externally phenomenological experience, enhancing my appreciation for each moment, even through frustrations and obstacles within the developing practice. Watts discusses the nature of phenomenology as being a sort of spiritual awareness, that which exists only in the present and changes at a pace that we cannot comprehend and yet intuitively feel when mindful and aware. He uses music as his primary example:

When you play music, it simply disappears. There’s nothing left. And for that very reason it is one of the highest and most spiritual of the arts, because it is the most transient. And so, in a way, you might say that transience is a mark of spirituality. A lot of people think the opposite, that the spiritual things are the everlasting things. But you see... the more a thing tends to be permanent, the more it tends to be lifeless. Nothing is so dead as a diamond. And yet, there is this idea of the most mineral things being the most permanent, and so they get associated with the spiritual; Jesus Christ is called ‘The Rock of Ages’, and even the Buddhists have used the diamond... as an image of the fundamental reality of the

universe. But the reason why they used the diamond was not that it was hard, but that it was completely transparent, and therefore afforded a symbol of the void which everything fundamentally is – not meaning that there simply is nothing there, but “void” meaning you cannot get any physical idea which will sufficiently define the core reality. Every idea will be wrong (Watts 1958).

Dance possesses the same ephemeral nature as music in Watts’ above example, lending itself perfectly to a practice surrounding mindfulness, presence, and awareness, requiring the dancer to be engaged in non-attachment, at least on a physical level. If every physical idea of “the core reality” (which I will redefine as experiential awareness, because there is no ‘ultimate’ or ‘shared’ reality according to Buddhism), as Watts puts it, will be wrong, then there is nothing upon which to linger in a moment of movement. No judgment, no reflection, no second thought or preparatory moment of physical action will be sufficient to bring one to a non-attached awareness of subjective reality, that which we call ‘experience’ which is the only reality any of us can know. If this is an agreeable point, then the only movement practice in which one can continuously attempt to return to this sort of “keeping up with time” would be that of improvisational movement.

The body was the perfect setting for me to begin an exploration of non-attachment, being a dancer. Dr. Reginald A. Ray discusses the use of the body for the purpose of changing the internal self. His book, *Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body*, describes the general process of achieving physical, emotional, and spiritual release through an *asana* practice in pursuit of enlightenment. In the very title, Dr. Ray suggests that something of great worth can be attained through the body; we do not *see* or *experience* enlightenment, we *touch* it (Ray 2008, 58). Interestingly, Dr.

Ray discusses the importance of remaining unattached to the body itself through this physically defined process, as such attachments to the body in any one moment can be as detrimental to personal progress as any other material or emotional attachment. Many dance somaticists have also recognized and discussed the ever-changing nature of the human body and so discourage attachment to the body itself, the way it may feel, look, or move at any moment. A dancing body is primed for such adaptability then, for dance is ephemeral by nature, as impossible to truly capture as any moment of lived experience. The quintessential representation of fluid change in movement is that which is improvised in the moment.

### Yogic Influence

The ephemeral nature of movement understood by dancers has been known to yoga practitioners for centuries, with thousands of years of recorded forms of practice, rituals, and ceremonies based in movement or a balance between motion and stillness, the varieties of which are as varied as the practitioners themselves. It is said in some traditions that the *asana* practice of yoga has been developed and undergone experimentation for over five thousand years. For centuries, cultures throughout the African continent have understood dance and rhythm to be the most sacred, healing, and connecting of all endeavors, and have even secured them as a means of preserving and passing on history in the oral tradition (Hale 1998, 27). The richness and variety of healing practices of movement throughout history suggest that humankind has an innate understanding that there is significant value in exploring healing and learning through the



body. This supports my cumulative life experience with movement, which has led me to this point of inquiry.

Alongside my explorations of dance movement as a healing process a few years prior to this investigation, I began to study and practice *asanas*, which are known widely in America as the physical postures practiced in a series of general patterns to prepare the body and mind for long periods of stillness and focused silence. Of utmost importance in modern American yoga training is to understand that *asana* is only one of eight equally important “limbs” of Patanjali’s prescribed path. Each of these limbs addresses aspects of the human condition through mental and physical engagement for the purpose of spiritual development. Among these limbs is the principle of non-attachment, a practice of respecting the law of impermanence, which offers a wealth of potential for a balanced life.

My practice is the physical unification of action and observation, a phenomenological exploration of approaches to improvisation that lend themselves to a practice of non-attachment. The tuning of attention and witnessing of the moment through a supple body is key in traditions which honor the body-mind connection as being the sacred space of convergence for a highly transformative, focused practice. Though the *asana* (postures) make up only one small aspect of a complete yoga practice, it is said by many masters to be the only path through which one can prepare the self for the demands of transformation. Mr. B.K.S. Iyengar, universally recognized yoga *guruji* (master teacher), spoke to a student of his beginnings in yoga:

I was an unhealthy child and I suffered . . . til the age of twenty-two, twenty-three. My guruji told me ‘if you do some *asanas* you may get health’, and this is the first time I’m hearing somebody saying that you gain health. But health only I realize after seven, eight years of practice... It took me seven years after yoga [*asanas*] to gain health! When health was not there, what can I think of philosophy? Tell me! (Churchill 2007).

To B.K.S. Iyengar, it was obvious that the body in play between motion and stillness is the first and fundamental gateway to unlocking and clearing the mind for higher thinking or learning. In the Hindu tradition, the removal of *karma* is what brings one closer to enlightenment, and karma - potential energy of future experience which holds one in the cycle of returning to life without release into nirvana, built up through experience of actions - is burned off first and most easily on the physical level through an *asana* practice. It is suggested that one cannot concern oneself with sorting the mind or the spirit until one has set the body aright; by organizing the body, one organizes the rest of one’s being. Dancers and yogis alike understand the importance of moving and preparing the body for the sake of the mind; a focused and disciplined ballet *barre* is to a well-trained ballerina as *Surya Namaskar* (or “Sun Salutations,” a primary series of postures) is to a committed yogi, the meditative preparation for higher demands of the mind and body and the daily, grounding physical practice that allows for progress, fine tuning, and awakening.

### Dance as Therapy

As stated above, organizing the body can lead the way to organizing the rest of one’s being. As the number of studies being conducted on movement practices increases, clinical therapy is expanding to allow for artistic movement in expressive therapies. In

the last century as the practice and performance of dance has expanded in popularity across the globe, it has become a significant subject of inquiry in clinical psychotherapeutic practice. The most commonly practiced model has emerged in the United States under the title “Dance/Movement Therapy” (DMT), though several other forms of movement therapy in clinical practice exist (Devereaux 2013). In 1999, Fabian Chyle published a thesis with literature review and an experiential study investigating the creative process in relation to DMT (Chyle 1999, 3). The experiential study focuses on the practical applications of elements of DMT and the interplay and necessity of creativity in the process. Chyle brought the group of participants into metaphoric movement explorations of care for the self and others and relationships. He allowed for chaos to feed the creative process of the group, rather than attempting to control or minimize the chaos, which I found to be most influential in light of the unstructured chaos in the early stages of my own process. He notes the extreme importance of the uniqueness of each as being the keystone of his method and the aspect of his work that made it a most fruitful investigation of how theories of creativity are related to change and growth through DMT (Chyle 1999, 60). My experience with chaos in the early stages of my process allowed me to mold my path creatively and on my own terms rather than struggling against the form and process of an external source (such as a guru or a specific, prescribed practice). The value of my uniquely shaped practice was once again validated and supported by Chyle’s successes in the aforementioned study.

The ability to ground and validate my work within the academic, quantifiable world was of great concern to me in my early stages of processing and planning. In

review of somatic literature, an article entitled “Neuroscience Meets Dance/Movement Therapy: Mirror Neurons, the Therapeutic Process, and Empathy” by Cynthia Berrol directly connected science and the arts through a review of literature spanning subjects of brain functions, therapeutic holdings, human development, artistic voice, and modeling and mirroring movement (Berrol 2006, 302-305). This was a key find in support of my own research. After identifying and thoroughly defining mirror neurons and how they function in various locations in the brain, Berrol explained the development of empathy and intersubjectivity by way of imprinting, attachment, and attunement, another example of how attachment can be seen as a necessary component of experience in the process of developing the self. In Berrol’s literature review, she draws parallels between concepts of physical and emotional mirroring in DMT and the function of mirror neurons. She describes Bill T. Jones’ well-known work, *Still/Here* (Jones, 1997), discussing the choreographer’s purpose and the development of the piece, which demonstrated the empathic development capabilities of movement both in creation and presentation. Direct mirroring may differ from indirect mirroring, or reflecting upon images and motions to mirror in retrospect, but the outcome is ultimately the same. This finding was significant to me as I transitioned from a creative process of proposed choreography to set upon others and/or myself into a phenomenological practice of improvisation in which I often noticed my tendencies to move in habituated formats and patterns, movements which had been demonstrated or taught in my personal history of technical dance study.

The Bill T. Jones’s work of which Berrol wrote was also influential to me in the early stages of my investigation. His most famous work offers a significant example of a

creative process that seeks to track and express traumatic and life-altering experiences (Berrol 2006, 312). He worked with hundreds of individuals to collect movement material based upon their experiences with death and dying, culminating in a work that looks at both the universality and uniqueness of facing mortality as defined by a specific series of relatable experiences (in this case, being diagnosed with a terminal illness). Jones embarked upon a groundbreaking path of observing the espoused experiences of individuals facing death to create a public piece for and on behalf of those with whom he worked. He gave a voice on stage to the suffering with which he was able to closely relate in movement and song and did this in an effort to bring light to subject matter that was meaningful to him. Similarly, my work (though not choreographic) inherently expresses my own experiences, giving a voice to any witnesses who relate to movements, moments, phrases, energies, desires, and thoughts, whether intentionally espoused through movement or not.

Many other studies on current applications of dance as therapy have offered additional insight into the less-recognizable mental and emotional benefits of movement as personal practice, affirming my perceptions of dance as an emotional, mental, psychological tool. For example, Anne Hurst recently investigated “The Lived experience of Creative/Therapeutic Dance” (CTD) through her phenomenological approach to research (Hurst 2010, 2). Hurst purposively sampled four participants with CTD participation and dance experience. Through phenomenological questioning in conversational interviews, Hurst collected data on each participant before and after every session that she then analyzed through careful reflection of themes and description of

details. Ideas of espoused and unespoused values emerged in her data analysis as she discovered that, while the participants were expressing the experience of healing through the sessions, they were largely unable to effectively articulate in verbal language that which their bodies and minds were understanding through these processes (Hurst 2010, 58). This resonated with me powerfully; I knew I was experiencing growth in my practice of non-attachment through improvisation, but I found it difficult to qualify or even express that growth in a linear fashion. Hurst collected countless excerpts from participants' writings illustrating directly the relationships they developed with CTD. Her study helped me recognize that my own "stuck" moments of floundering for articulation of experience were also a significant part of my learning process and should not be discarded as weak or fruitless endeavors.

Further validation of the unique development of my practice was found in the work of Ilene Serlin who wrote of her investigations of healing images utilized in many forms of dance therapies. I recognized her work as significant in relation to my own while I pursued the shaping of my practice. Her work has helped me in my process of method development; I have been able to adjust rules and parameters at my discretion with more confidence after reviewing her writings on the breadth of healing images and approaches to structure in therapeutic dance practices. Serlin discusses origins of trends of thought, healing techniques, and phenomenological experiences in movement practice throughout recorded history (Serlin 1993, 65-71). Through discussion of various movement therapy techniques, she leads the reader to understand that modern techniques in dance therapy are not singular, codified, or even based upon general theory, but rather

a conglomeration of images of ancient practices pieced together one investigation at a time. Serlin emphasizes that each practitioner can develop his or her personal approaches and styles of facilitation through personal exploration (Serlin 1993, 74); I recognized this to be validation of my work while I pursued the shaping of my own practice. This understanding has helped me in my process of method development; exercises outlined in related literature have been helpful, but I have been able, because of Serlin, to adjust rules and parameters at my discretion with more confidence.

### Improvisation

Many dance artists have utilized their unique artistic processes as a way to reflect upon and express experience, a non-clinical yet somewhat therapeutic approach to self-healing through expression. One notable artist whose exploratory work in dance as a self-healing art has influenced my processes is Mary Starks Whitehouse, original creator of what is now known as Authentic Movement, an ego-free method of allowing the body to guide itself into its uniquely natural or authentic pathways of improvised motion.

Whitehouse describes Authentic Movement by saying:

When movement was simple and inevitable, not to be changed no matter how limited or partial, it became what I called “authentic” – it could be recognized as genuine, belonging to that person. Authentic was the only term I could think of that meant truth – truth of a kind unlearned... It is a moment when the ego gives up control... allowing the self to take over moving the physical body as it will (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82).

Based upon my research and understanding, Whitehouse’s work perfectly mirrors Tibetan Buddhist teachings in many ways. Somaticist Carol Fields writes of a similar

Authentic Movement practice from a framework of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and is quoted directly in Whitehouse's book:

One of the remarkable aspects of Authentic Movement is what happens when we are moving in a more or less spontaneous manner, fully conscious, paying attention, but without any limit on what we do... When we say paying attention we mean noticing the feelings, images, thoughts, bodily sensations, lapses, compulsions, remembrances, sequences and emotional charges of everything that we are conscious of as we move (or do not move)(Whitehouse 2007, 81-82).

Fields clarifies that paying attention also does not mean compulsively noticing and memorizing every detail of event or thought and cataloguing the mistakes, which she says ultimately distracts from the authenticity of the movement in the moment. Rather, it is a non-judging way of being aware and letting experience wash over the self. Fields states of judging what is noticed: "that sort of effort can interfere with the flow of experience, which is very rapid and often very complex. Noticing means something more like... being receptive to whatever stands out in our consciousness" (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82). These clarifications were important to my process as I developed a practice of noticing. The quality of my awareness is valued over the quantity and detail of what I notice in hopes that the latter will grow as I develop skill with the former.

Fields touches on judgments as a point of observation as well. It is important in any mind/body practice (like my own), she explains, not only to notice, but to notice what it is that we are noticing and accept it rather than judge (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82). That being said, when a practitioner is caught up on judgments it is fitting to the practice to observe those judgments, but it quickly becomes detrimental to judge the fact that they are being made. The act of judging the self-judgment leads to a formidable tower of self-



criticism which halts the entire process of moving moment to moment, derailing the gentle attention and gripping the mind of the practitioner in judgments which could have been easily witnessed, accepted, and passed over. This was a challenging point for me as I attempted to find my way in to my various structures of practice and was only realized in my work after the defined period of exploration for the purposes of this document had passed.

Stemming directly from Whitehouse's original work in Authentic Movement, the work of her student and famous choreographer, Anna Halprin, has developed into a more refined practice which possesses both a freedom for the uniqueness in process which I seek in my own work as well as a set of guidelines to motivate progress for those who find themselves lost within the practice as she once did. Over a thirty-year span of practice and study, Halprin learned to be a practitioner, teacher of movement, witness, and facilitator as she played with structure to balance the authenticity of movement with life experience for the purpose of expressing and healing from within (Halprin 2000, 13). She has focused her work generally upon individuals suffering from AIDS, cancer, and other life-threatening illnesses, just as Bill T. Jones chose to do in *Still/Here* (Jones, 1997). From the start of her book, *Dance as a Healing Art*, Halprin makes the vital distinction between healing and curing: "To cure is to physically eliminate a disease.... To heal is to operate on many dimensions simultaneously, by aiming at attaining a state of emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health" (Halprin 2000, 10-12). Is this kind of healing quantifiable? Can I discuss the healing that has taken place in my own experience without limiting understanding of the experience itself?

Noting that a person may be cured without being healed and healed without being cured, Halprin makes it clear that her goal is not to cure or to dismiss Western medicine but to help her students approach healing, however unquantifiable a state that may be (Halprin 2000, 21). In Halprin's specific approach, which involves four components (sensation, movement, feelings/emotions, and imagery), basic movements are the starting point of personal expression as the dance is transformed into a person's life experience. In my own process of transition from choreography to improvisation as practice of mindfulness, I reflected these exact approaches by beginning with basic movements that represented significant experiences from my own life. The use of a witness as a holding space for the practitioner was interesting to me as an emerging artist, and I therefore allowed myself to gravitate toward presentation of my own practice in the first interval of my exploration.

Halprin's Authentic Movement practice requires pure presence and honesty about one's experience in the moment, and about allowing past experience – the accumulation of which culminates to the manifestation of oneself in the present – to be expressed effortlessly and without requirement of translation in movement. The past experience is there in the present, especially when one does not dwell upon it or intend to present it; it simply *is*. This understanding, paired with the intention to mend the self, brought Halprin to the creation of her own way of working through years of investigation, trial and error, piecing her work together from the information and experiences of her “real life.” She explains of the creation of her process:

This skill is the result of years of very careful development of process. To ask people to be authentic and to deal with real life issues, I had to develop real understanding about how to work therapeutically. I did a lot of Gestalt training. I did a lot of training in how to facilitate. I had to learn a lot about the nature of movement itself. I'm dealing with the power of movement and what happens when you move and you release authentic movement; how do you structure that? How do you work with structure? How do you work with the balance between structure and freedom?(Halprin 2000, 33).

A through-line seems to exist in much of her work paralleling my own ideas. In an interview with Vera Maletic, Halprin is quoted as saying:

I try not to separate the experiences of life [and dance] because we are in confrontation with our experiences, constantly, in art. And this brings me to an appreciation of, or an emphasis on, the relationship between personal growth and artistic growth. For the two must go hand in hand; otherwise there is no maturity that ever takes place... Everything we do in dance somehow or other usually relates to who you are as a person, and this affects how you see things and feel things and relate to people. Again, it's this non-separation of life and art, so that somehow or other it becomes a heightening process (Halprin 2000, 35).

Halprin recognized the great value of addressing life challenges and questions with dancing and dance making, as have many artists within the field. Her blend of pure honesty of experience with movement improvisation creates something unique, powerful, and revealing. She recommends practitioners of Authentic Movement do not move until they are "called" to move by the body or by their experience. The honesty of the body's voice is honored far above the spectacle of the presentation to the witness. In fact, the spectacle is not of observation at all, at least by the practitioner. The experience of expression is the essential element of her process, regardless of the witness, who is present to hold and preserve the space and accept the mover in support of their

expression. This may differ in intention from a commonly understood dance improvisation to which an audience might be invited. However, improvisational dancer and dance author Nancy Stark Smith suggests a similarity of the importance of experience, though her intentions as proposed in the following excerpt suggest an end goal aside from healing:

When you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the 'Gap'. The more I improvise, the more I am convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps -this momentary suspension of reference point- that comes the unexpected and much sought after 'original' material. It's original because its origin is the current moment and because it comes from outside our usual frame of reference (Nancy Stark Smith 2003, 275).

When looking to improvisation purely for improvisation's sake, the "gap" is the ideal realm for practice of spontaneous material generation. For the purposes of my practice, this "gap" is the space in which my mind grows silent and my body becomes the vessel of my expression and release of experience into movement language as well as my classroom for learning, undertaking new experience in the same moment, parallel to the release. It can be related to an understanding of "Samadhi" in yogic terms of deep, peaceful, unforced meditation. When I am lost in the "Gap," I am always at the crux of my own life; nothing else matters, there are no other concerns, questions, or stressors to address when I am in that mental and physical space accepting my phenomenological experience without *thinking*. I have lost myself and found myself at once. That which Stark Smith calls the "Gap" will be discussed more in the reflections of this document as it related to my experience in my work.

In *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, improviser Kent de Spain writes of improvisation as a tool for whatever we are seeking, dependent upon the structure we define (Albright 2003, 53). Reflection upon my experiences was a challenge in and of itself because of the phenomenological nature of the work. Kent de Spain's writing in particular was helpful to me in freeing myself from my own critical eye in my reflection process. He says of his notes on observations of a series of the improvisations of others - as well as his own - that he noticed he wrote in two ways: as an observer and as a subject. I noticed this of my own work frequently and, hard as I tried to unify the two experiences into one subject or object, it has remained impossible to keep the two from separating as I reflected upon my work. De Spain used descriptive words to define movement actions and, separately, words to define his somatic state; he noticed them all clustered within the same observational notes as he reviewed his sessions. I, too, recognized my own scrambled note-taking and reflection process within that which he described. What truly struck me about his perceptivity of improvisation, however, was what he had to say about the method of inquiry in improvisation:

If improvisation is a form of research, improvisational awareness is the scientific method. Through it, we become aware of our own theories and biases, our histories and desire, our delimitations and our methods, and even our results and conclusions. It is the weapon with which we cleave the good from the bad, the desired from the unacceptable – at least in a given moment on a given day. But that awareness, like the moments it is attached to, is fleeting. We can feel it ourselves through the process of improvising. To explore it in others, however, and thereby better understand the cultural and/or personal sources of our commonalities and differences, requires literacy and translation (Albright 2003, 54).

The first point made in the above quotation supports my work with fluid perfection. The suggestion that improvisational movement is the way in which we decipher “the good from the bad, the desired from the unacceptable – at least in a given moment on a given day” is in conflict with my previously dispelled work which presents that judgment of a moment or experience is entirely detrimental to my crafted process. If we accept his proposal of this idea as fact, it can be seen that it is within reasonable realm that both could be true; my process seeks to eliminate judgment but, in order to achieve this, judgment and experience must be present at some point.

### Phenomenology

When conducted mindfully, one important corollary of dance improvisation is the potential for a phenomenological experience. Improvising in such a way as to remain present in the moment of action means one must pay attention to what is happening and respond without thinking or planning. In this way, the mover is practicing a phenomenological awareness of both external stimuli (the impetus for movement, depending upon the structure of the exercise) and internal stimuli (the physical response initiated within the body). Many prominent philosophers and writers have discussed phenomenology by alternative names, each of them aligning with the same principles as non-attachment and elements of improvisational movement. As mentioned in the introduction, author Paulo Coelho writes of the importance of telling the personal story for the purpose of letting it go. As with non-attachment, this “letting go” is not a denial of the experience, but rather the acceptance of it followed by the immediate

acceptance of and respect for change, the coming experience of each new moment. Coelho writes, “I feel the way a warrior must feel after years of training: he doesn’t remember the details of everything he learned, but he knows how to strike when the time is right” (Coelho 2006, 42). This example shows that experiences of the past are still very real; however, the person who exists now after having lived them - rather than the narrative that person still carries - makes them real. The expression of past attachments through choreographed movement was the launching point of my investigation. This was a helpful starting point as I began to explore points of connection between movement and non-attachment.

The body of work in phenomenology of dance provides another well-developed viewpoint when considering the parallels of movement and non-attachment; dancing prepares an individual nicely for awareness and acceptance of change. By understanding that each moment and movement is unique, dancers work to master presence in the moment while moving, avoiding lingering behind or squinting into the future with judgments or plans. Preoccupation with what is past or what may come will distract the dancer from the moment. Especially in dance, a moment is all there is and the point is to move through it sincerely. It must be recognized, however, that some practices of dance may be more disruptive to this process than others. French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, said, “Thinking a movement is *destroying* the movement”(Merleau-Ponty 1962, 46). His main philosophical focus of phenomenology often seeks to understand the natural alignment of movement of the body and non-attachment as discussed in other

terms. Philosophical dancer/writer Maxine Sheets-Johnston's detailed explanation of the phenomenology of dance demonstrates the relationship of the two:

Phenomenology has to do with descriptions of man and the world as man lives in-the-midst-of-the-world, as he experiences himself and the world, keenly and acutely, before any kind of reflection whatsoever takes place."... "There is an experience, and the experience must be had in order to be described; the trick is to develop a method of description which takes nothing for granted, and which does not falsify or reduce the effect of the experience itself (Sheets-Johnstone 1980, 399).

"A method of description which takes nothing for granted" could be interpreted as a form of non-attachment practice, especially when emphasizing the sincerity of the experience. Buddhism would suggest that one would make the mistake of falsifying or reducing "the effect of the experience itself" because of one's attachments to what might be *good* or *bad*, *better* or *worse*, *this* thing or *that*. Sheets-Johnston's views therefore align with Buddhism in that attachments disable our ability to stay present in the moment and limit our capacity for taking in experience; this compromises much potential for learning and growth. Her work is based upon the founding phenomenological theories of Edmund Husserl, one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work also focused on phenomenological experiences as they pertain especially to the physical body and his writing has been compared to Rudolph Laban's work on perception in movement in recent years. Merleau-Ponty believed that the body is the threshold for knowledge, as evidenced by the act of walking; the task is quite complex and takes much practice, yet it is so completely innate in humankind (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 30). Where, then, does such intelligence live if not



explicitly within the body? In her discussions of finding this kind of intelligence within the body and mindful movement, Sheets-Johnston explains why it is difficult for humankind to remain unattached and present by breaking down the logic of the dimensions of the human mind. She writes, it is “at the same time a *multiple unity* and a *unified multiplicity*. Multiplicity and unity coexist because human consciousness exists as a *temporal multiplicity* (past, present, future) and a *temporal unity* (the synthesis of these units).” (Sheets-Johnstone 1980, 402). Because part of the natural function of the human brain is to both compartmentalize and synthesize these units of experience, it can be challenging to allow synthesis to take place, especially while entrenched in a community of people with plans, expectations, and deadlines. But when synthesis does occur fluidly, the effect is a remarkable awareness free of attachment and judgment. The act of improvising dance movement is a perfect method by which to experience and experiment with this synthesis through the synchronicity of body and mind.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This investigation took place in four segments: Early Development, Pre-Performance Practice, Performance, and Private Practice. I will detail their organic development and the findings that helped me shape the personal practice it has become for me. My method has been unfolding from the beginning of this process. The original intention was to experiment with unearthing potential benefits of maintaining a focus on non-attachment through the choreographic process by crafting and expressing stories in movement. The Early Development stage was the initial building period during which I experimented with choreography as a tool for practicing non-attachment. This exploration gradually transformed from a creative process into a practice of improvisational movement that I refer to in this document as the “Pre-Performance Practice.” The practice led to the “Performance” phase in which I presented my practice on stage for an audience. The “Private Practice” phase of my process came months after the performance, a secluded investigation of movement as a tool to practice non-attachment without any intention of inviting the “external gaze” via recording or live witness.

Comparison between the different approaches (including journal entries and responses to the questionnaires associated with each) revealed many obstacles along the

way. These then helped shape the most appropriate practice for the goals of this investigation, as discussed in the reflections. Written journals and audio recordings of my experiences and thoughts on each interval helped me reflect upon the practice development from a more distant, non-attached perspective. The Non-Attachment Scale<sup>3</sup> (NAS) developed by Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown in 2010 was used in both versions of practice as a tertiary indicator of progress by reflecting upon my practice and responding to the questionnaire once per week.

### Early Development

The “Early Development” interval of my practice took place from September to November of 2012, a period of approximately nine weeks. The first rehearsals began with three two-hour sessions per week in a private space on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at the Gerlinger Annex of the University of Oregon. When scheduling space became problematic, I occasionally held rehearsals in a spacious back yard of a local friend’s home, a large warm-up space at the University of Oregon’s Robinson Theatre, and, most commonly, in the 18’ by 20’ living room space of my own home. Plans for the performance of my work were set and approved twenty-two weeks prior to the date of the concert, March 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. To prepare myself both mentally and physically for these sessions, I often began with about ten minutes of warming movement, stretching, and breathing exercises followed by ten minutes of silent meditation in stillness. The physical preparation focused upon the unique needs of my body at the start of each practice while the mental preparation was intended to calm and clear my mind and increase my focus.

My typical meditation practice began with me finding a comfortable position on the floor, either seated or lying in *savasana* (corpse pose, lying on the back with arms and legs relaxed and open along the floor) and taking a few moments to physically settle and bring my attention to my breath and the sensation of the fluids within my body settling with the pull of gravity. I then began counting numbers as far as I was able, restarting when I noticed my mind drifting or diverting. A timer was used to help budget preparation time so that I would begin to choreograph after no more than thirty minutes of total preparation.

Crafting began by creating small gestures which represented points of disillusionment in my life, a choice inspired by the writings of Paulo Coelho who emphasized the importance of “telling our stories”; an expression he felt necessary to release ourselves from past experiences and find balance in the present (Coelho 2006, 24). For memory and reference, I recorded a series of movement motifs I had developed in the first several rehearsals and began to attempt arranging and phrasing their themes into larger sections of movement. I would set up a camera ready to document my choreography, move for a bit, decide on a little phrase or a few gestures that might be fitting, record, and review.

The most pervasive question produced by this early phase was “what does it mean to practice non-attachment – the total flexibility, adaptability, and contentment of mind – in the choreographic process?” Some clarifying answers to this question were found, but not until the final phase after the performance - Private Practice - did it take a shape that

had lasting resonance with me. Journaling and audio recording my impressions helped me track questions, challenges, and responses through each rehearsal; at the end of each session and periodically throughout, I recorded my thoughts as well as the most salient moments of the two hours, examples of which are shared in the reflections chapter of this document.

The challenge of making definite choices for choreography while working with a non-attached mindset proved difficult very early on in my creative process. There was more conflict than ease to be found in my attempts to apply principles of non-attachment to the setting of my choreographic work. Without attaching myself to preference, which must necessarily be based upon biases (which are also essentially attachments) whether realized or not, what reason would I have to select and set movement? Upon questioning this, I found myself completely lost in the beginning and unable to set more than brief phrases or motifs without experiencing much frustration over my own dissatisfaction with the compositional structure, gestures, phrases, etc. I was perfectly aware at this point in my process of the idea that judgments are natural and not necessarily detrimental in a practice of non-attachment when observed and passed over (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82). However, these self-imposed critical judgments were distracting and disorienting to the point that I was analyzing the judgments, and then judging the fact that I was reflecting in that way, compounding upon my attachments in an exponential fashion.

The ephemeral nature of movement was perfectly suited for a practice of non-attachment as evident in every aspect of my research, yet the practice of setting

choreography was becoming more of a deterrent than a practical vehicle for my attempts. This led me to alter my process, allowing for the natural carving of my investigation's path. In truth, the main disruption of my process was the realization that, because I was planning for this work to be seen and, ultimately, judged by the witness, I was fearful of the response the work might receive. I recognized that I was *very attached to the hope that it would be appreciated* when I had not come to appreciate it fully myself. This led to a lot of anxiety, which provided evidence that my mind was dwelling more in the non-existent future than in the present. Literally, I was attached to fears and expectations of a generally negative response that had not yet come to fruition. Something in my approach had to shift, and I was too attached to my expectations to see what needed to change for some time.

Upon recommendation, I began to look at the work of Anna Halprin as a reference for dance movement practices which were intended to aid in the healing process. Her work inspired me greatly and it was, at times, tempting to take on forms of her structured, time-honored practices. I stayed the course in the end as I noted that she came to her own work through what she referred to as her own invaluable "real life" experiences which helped her carve her unique path (Halprin 2000, 11). Her mission was to help others approach healing through movement, and she did so by studying gestalt and facilitation while working out ways to apply these skills to the imparting of her movement practice. My own focus differs in that I aim to practice mindfulness for myself through movement, focusing upon applying non-attachment to each step of my process.

In Halprin's refined practice of Authentic Movement, comprised of four categories (sensation, movement, feelings/emotions, and imagery), she suggests that movement can be a catalyst for healing through expression. She defines healing as an emotional and spiritual recovery from traumas both physical and mental, no matter the scope of the experience, based solely upon the needs of the individual, and she clarifies that one may be "healed without being cured and cured without being healed" (Halprin 2000, 21). In her work, she invites witnesses to bolster and support the experience of the mover, a way for them to be "heard," their experience validated and recognized by sharing with other beings in their community. Just as with my own evolving process, she set basic movements as the starting point of personal expression and allows the dance being performed to transform into the expression of a person's life experience. Without taking on Halprin's exact practice or method as my own, I looked to her work as a reference for an established understanding of self-expression through movement in support of healing the self or cultivating change, progressing toward a decided goal of positivity. This respected artist's life work existing along similar veins as my own helped me take a step forward with confidence and greater trust in my unfolding method.

The use of repetition in this stage of practice seemed at first to be an obvious sort of choreographic attachment. As I studied, I found not only justification for such repetition, but a deeper understanding of how the tool of repetition can actually serve to melt away attachments. Alan Watts teaches the purpose of mantra recitation and why even those who do not understand the language of the words being formed use it in meditation, the reasoning behind which applies brilliantly to the practice I was building

for myself. He explains that a practitioner will chant a mantra repeatedly and that, while some prescribe specific requirements of the form or meaning of the mantra, any word or phrase will suffice (he uses the example of the word “body” and demonstrates that after a series of repetitions, we may begin to detach the sound from its meaning, letting it dangle in the mind without anything to attach it to, eventually causing the mind to notice the peculiarity of this suddenly foreign and meaningless sound that somehow has familiarity but no identity. It is after this point of removing attachment, he explains, that the mind of the practitioner can be allowed to experience more the vibration of the sound than the associations once attached to it. This experience can eventually lead to the recognition of that same experiential opportunity in all things, to experience the vibration (or what is called *suchness* in Buddhism) of everything. Through that process, the mind may eventually realize, as Watts states:

The vibration, that energy of the sound, *is* what there is. That’s the energy of the cosmos. That’s what’s going on. And everything that’s going on is a kind of a pulsation of energy... and that’s what we’re all doing. Only, we look around, you know, here we are, we look around, we’re people, we’ve all got faces on... we talk and we’re supposed to be making sense, but actually we’re all just [vibrating] in very complicated ways, you see? And we’re playing this life game. The thing is that if we don’t get with it, it passes us by. That’s alright. You can miss the bus, it’s your privilege. But it really is a great deal [the point] to go with the dance and to know that that’s what you’re doing instead of agonizing about the whole thing (Watts 1958).

To use words as a tool to overcome our slavery to words could be a tool translatable to repetitive motion, which I experimented with in the early stages of my practice. To visit a movement in repetition whether consecutive or disbursed over the course of the practice can be a method of freeing oneself from the meaning of the movement. One of my goals



of the second interval of my practice developed to utilize this exact form of mantra meditation in movement so as to “sink in” to the moment, forget what the movement might mean or how it might be interpreted, valued, or otherwise critiqued, and to bring myself to a point where I was able to “go with the dance and to know that that’s what [I was] doing...”

Over the next several practices I contemplated my experiences with repetition and improvisation and began considering the relevance of both to my work. I was encouraged by friends and mentors to look at the work of Anna Halprin, Miguel Gutierrez, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, William Forsythe, and many other icons of dance improvisation. Halprin’s work resonated with me deeply because of the intention behind Authentic Movement. Other artists interested, impressed, and inspired me, but I wanted to approach my work very independently as my purpose was not to be seen or generate material but to practice this art of balanced non-attachment. None of the artists I reviewed seemed to speak to my questions or focus, though their investigations were interesting to me. I was hesitant to take on the exact methods or philosophies of one artist and instead drew from their writings and workshops a series of games to utilize in my own improvisational play. Halprin’s work being the most resonant with mine, I was tempted at times to follow her structures for Authentic Movement, but wanted to avoid directly piggy backing upon her work. I therefore restricted myself to my own impulses and the principles I was beginning to explore in Buddhist philosophy as stated above.

Reflecting upon the cathartic experience of becoming lost in movement repetition and improvising adjustments to my choreographed phrases, I recognized that improvisation was *the* key contributor to the catharsis I had experienced and that it would be beneficial to my practice to bring more improvisation into my work. The realization that setting choreography was becoming a major roadblock to understanding non-attachment in movement led me to review Halprin's process of Authentic Movement and reconsider my methods. What I found was that the relationship between non-attachment and improvisational movement was indisputable to the point that I needed to shift from setting movement to moving freely as a practice. Experimentation with improvisation at this point proved extremely beneficial; my frustration eased and my enthusiasm for the work was renewed. The question of improvisation in performance was still unaddressed at this point, but the power of my process evolving into a personal practice of improvisation was undeniable to me as I explored the boundaries and possibilities of improvising around the phrase work already set. My tendencies to judge and criticize my work dwindled (though not entirely at this point), and I felt that I was tapping into a practice like that of *asana*, allowing me to explore a concept in movement that suited my unique needs within each moment. I decided to leave behind my choreographic efforts in favor of investigating the potential of improvisation to practice non-attachment in movement practice.

#### Pre-Performance Practice

This next phase of practice spanned a time period of about ten weeks, from late November 2012 to February 2013. Focusing on improvisation opened many doors in my process and I began to recognize the potential of a personal movement practice modeled to meet the needs of the practitioner. My rehearsals from this point on consisted of short sessions of improvisation. The sessions ranged in number per rehearsal from three to six, depending upon time spent writing and reflecting or reviewing material and experience. A timer was used to aid in my process, allowing me to monitor the length of each run. I jotted notes between runs on my experiences with issues such as focus length, distraction, timing, boredom, sensation, choice-making, impression, exhaustion, working through injury, vocabulary, etc. In addition to these notes, my journaling process also followed the suggestions of Carol Fields' description of "noticing" when practicing mindfulness in movement: "When we say paying attention we mean noticing the feelings, images, thoughts, bodily sensations, lapses, compulsions, remembrances, sequences and emotional charges of everything that we are conscious of as we move (or do not move)" (Whitehouse 2007, 81-82). Reflections on the latter set of criteria were more informative of my mental and emotional state before and after each session and helped demonstrate the progress made in the short term.

After moving away from repeatedly critiquing my choices in the choreographic process, I reveled in the freedom of moving without self-critiquing, planning, or setting and rehearsing phrases, but rather letting the movement flow from me, keeping up with time in mind and body. Focused attention was the key to this practice; take in stimuli, note, name, and respond, then move on and forget what had happened. Directly accessing

the ephemeral nature of dance (Sheets-Johnstone 1980, 401) highlighted many connections between non-attachment and improvisational movement; each practice fluidly revealed itself as a metaphor for the other.

The first goal of this new approach to my work was to be mindful, and that mindfulness sometimes led me to a state of “losing myself” in the dancing, similar to the state of *Samadhi* in which the mind drifts not to other thoughts but to emptiness, though the meditator is not aware until they return from that state to either mindfulness or mind chatter (Marut 2009). This *Samadhi*-like state was ideal for achieving a fulfilling practice and became a state that I hoped to achieve at least once in each session. Often times my chosen structures were complicated to the point of distracting me from achieving a meditative state. The article from which I borrowed the Scale to Measure Non-Attachment expressed the technique required for any sort of meditation: committed meditation requires “persistent but gentle interest” (Sahdra, Shaver, Brown 2010, 117). My structures therefore needed to be clear and simple enough for me to maintain a gentle interest while also being interesting enough for me to maintain my focus and involvement.

Throughout the Pre-Performance Practice, I allowed myself to play with structured games: selecting a body part and allowing it to lead me in drawing or responding to the architecture of the space, experimenting with variations in dynamics through repeating phrases or motifs from my former choreographic phase, inverting or reversing any bit of material which was memorable from previous moments of

improvisation, etc. This was an uncertain but playful process that was both troubling (due to the approaching performance) and liberating from my inner monologue of criticism. One particular complex game I enjoyed quite a bit as I felt it translated directly against non-attachment, causing me to look the issue in the face, so to speak, in movement. I improvised freely, but the goal was to keep my eyes tracking the spaces where I had just been. For a while, this meant my eyes traced my pathways on the floor a moment behind my body. Challenging as it was to continue moving without the aid of my eyes to see where I was going, I grew tired of having my eyes cast always downward and began looking for the directional lines of energy which I had just produced. Again, the complexity outgrew the effect and I moved on from this structure after a few sessions.

Boredom and distraction being the issues they were for me in the beginning of these isolated sessions, these games helped focus my attention slightly more and forget being seen. One of my most challenging improvisational games was the most complicated of the structures I devised. After reviewing pages of my journals written during the early stages of my work prior to transitioning to an improvisational practice, I reflected on the writing and then began highlighting words that stood out to me based on my impulses that day; examples include “stuck,” “spontaneous,” “perpetual,” “meaningless,” “waiver,” “stillness,” “striking,” “perception,” and “time.” I began to blacken out all but one syllable of each of the highlighted words, rewrote those syllables as a sort of gibberish sentence, memorized the sound of the gibberish in a trail of nonsense words, and spoke the nonsense as I moved, responding to it in movement. This complicated game served to hold my attention for the space of two practice sessions, at

which point the complexity seemed too high to support my meditative goals. The idea of motivation for movement was interesting, but the actual practice of this particular structured improvisation was complicated and the process weighed down the execution. Quite a bit of work went into the planning and preparing of the structure (journaling, highlighting words, blacking out syllables, memorizing sounds in phrases of gibberish, then finally improvising movement inspired by or in response to said gibberish), and ultimately I found myself wanting a simpler set of guidelines. I quickly moved on to new structures.

Despite my shift toward improvisation, I held on to several of the motifs and phrases from my choreographic phase as markers for my work with the intention of avoiding lapsing into the self-criticism and negative self-talk common in my former stages of creative process. I found this helpful for a short while because it offered referential material to fall back on in moments of floundering from whatever structure I had selected. At this point, I was still recording my rehearsals, but soon found that device equally as restricting as setting choreography; if I disliked what I saw after reviewing five minutes of improvisation, I would tend to hold onto those judgments and allow them to influence my next practice, getting caught up with concerns of style and presentation rather than responding to the moment freely. Eventually I chose to stop reviewing the footage and then stopped recording altogether. Use of the video camera became important to me again later in my preparation for performance, but it was not until after I had returned to my private practice months after presenting the work that I realized I felt that way because I wanted to evaluate my work once again before it was seen to be sure I

was presenting something I would consider “satisfactory,” “interesting,” or “performance worthy.” While interesting to me as a dance artist, review of footage did not serve my purpose in relation to a practice of mindfulness centered on cultivating non-attachment. Reflections on what my desire to present “good” work meant in relationship to Eastern philosophies of non-attachment are addressed in the reflections.

The greatest challenge for me in this stage of practice and development was the knowledge that I would be presenting this practice in the very near future, desiring it to be appreciated as a sacred space when I had not come to fully appreciate it myself. Just as it had been within my attempts to set choreography, anxiety overthrew my attempts to maintain focus upon my work, evidence that my mind was dwelling more in the non-existent future than in the present which was a direct violation, so to speak, of my entire focus! Still, I was interested to discover if the performance of this work could be a unique experience, completely different from those in preparation and true, private practice. Nearing the concert date, questions arose about the viability of meditation as performance work as well as practice and preparation time required for meditation in performance.

The correlation between the encroaching concert date and my decreasing ability to practice non-attachment was obvious. My responses to the NAS questionnaire each week proved that I was becoming gradually *more* attached to a world of ideas and expectations, especially regarding the concert. I wanted the performance to prove something affirming about my new practice to others and myself. I judged the performance before it was even happening, creating an attachment about what it would be

like and why that would not be satisfactory. My emotional experience the week of the concert was very telling; had I taken the NAS survey immediately before and after the performance, the results might have reflected the most extreme answers toward attachments possible. Moments before going on stage, I reflected upon my progress toward realizing non-attachment in my life over the course of the practice and recognized that this could not be the culminating event of my investigation. I knew I needed more time with my work and wanted to revisit the practice in a different setting and structure, though I did not know what that would look like at the time.

### Performance

Performing in concert gave me an opportunity to explore my practice as an artist making an offering, once again reflecting upon the work of Anna Halprin as referential inspiration. Halprin's model took the form of audience as witness to support in the artist's process and experience of expression while mine was based on the fact that I had a performance date with the initial expectation of presenting choreographed work. Once my path changed course, I kept the performance plans intact and decided it would be a healthy challenge to present my practice as an offering, an artist's rendering of supremely private experience on display as a work in progress. What this would mean for me as performer was that I needed to become well acquainted with my practice in advance of the performance date. Still sifting through practice possibilities at the point of performance meant that I would be presenting not only a work in progress but also a private practice in progress on very deliberate display, disrupting the solace and privacy



of my attempts at mindful movement. It meant putting a time frame on the work, selecting and somehow planning to perform to music in a finite time frame, and receiving the audience response after the fact. Consideration of all of these factors went into the planning of the piece in advance, which left me wondering how the practice might be different without preparing to be seen. Ultimately, it was the experience of the performance of this work that led me to revisit the practice at a later date without offering myself as spectacle to a crowd of witnesses.

As a method of tracking where I had been in the space as well as a way of setting an artistically devised environment for the audience, I chose to adorn the stage space with about two dozen piles of crumpled crepe paper ranging from white to yellow to red in color. On camera, all the paper read as white. I chose to set the crumpled paper in piles because the material caught the air easily and was therefore moved by the passing energy of my dance, but it did not spread over the space of the stage in a way that would allow the witness to notice paths being traced in the material; I had hoped to touch each of the two dozen piles in my fifteen minutes of improvisation simply to know that I was aware of my environment and responding to it thoroughly.

In reflecting upon the performance, I was able to make choices toward moving my practice in a more fruitful direction. Each point of dissatisfaction and frustration with the performance experience lead to questions and revealing answers, which brought me to reconsider my approach and redirect myself to a fully improvisational practice. The practice that evolved after the performance came as a result of the perceived experiences

of failure that came before. I later reinvestigated the same practice as a purely improvisational exploration completely in private and found wonderful results in terms of understanding and practicing non-attachment, discussed in the reflections chapter of this document.

In the months between the performance of my nascent practice and my return to it as a private endeavor, I thought of my work often and wondered how it might evolve in sessions free of witnesses or the pressure of presentation. I devoted my spare time to studying Buddhist and Hindu philosophies through talks and readings by Alan Watts and Lama Marut (my chosen teachers of Buddhism) as well as the study of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Baghavad Gita. I revisited the eight limbs of yoga and looked more closely at meditation techniques, specifically to improve a practice of non-attachment. Death and impermanence meditations, which focus the practitioner on the impending changes of life, were of great value to my process as I prepared to return to improvisational movement (which is as impermanent as it is unplanned). My perspective on my past work shifted and I was able to recognize the importance of being where I had been and of accepting where I am at any given moment along this path. The need to evaluate each step and to assign "success" or "failure" fell away as I came to recognize the nature of my process. *Mindfulness* is the key to my experimental research and non-attachment is the lens through which I see my practice and entire process. I began to seek information on practicing presence and mindfulness above all other readings on attachment and improvisation as a practice of mindfulness leads to a more natural ability to let go of attachments.

## Private Practice

After the performance, I took a hiatus from my practice for a short time and then returned to it with a fresh mind in an effort to experiment with the work in a completely private, personal setting. The “Private Practice” interval took place from early September 2013 to early January 2014, a period of about fifteen weeks. I chose the space of my own home as the setting for my practice, usually selecting the open living room with wood flooring, if only as a starting point. On one occasion, the practice took place at an open and empty park near the Willamette River in the sunshine and, on another, in an empty alleyway behind my home.

I planned and committed to a thirty-minute practice three times per week over twenty-two weeks; the number of weeks chosen was to reflect the same length of time spent in pre-performance practice while the length of the practice was set at only thirty minutes because this interval of devotion would be much more defined than the last, requiring less time to prepare, play, plan, and finally practice. One reflection session after each practice was all that was needed for the private practice interval. Most of these practices took place after a full hour or more of *asana* practice, so no physical preparation was required. To prepare myself mentally, I engaged in five to ten minutes of meditation before beginning most sessions. Preparation of the space became an important factor in this interval of practice as I was working in smaller, more intimate spaces in general. Taking this direction from readings on devotion to meditation practices, I cleared and

swept my space, adjusted the lighting to be soft and calming, opened windows to welcome in cool, fresh air, and sometimes burned incense or sage prior to beginning the practice to help dedicate the space and my energy to it. This was done as recommended by my meditation teacher to invest the self in the practice and show devotion and respect for the time and space dedicated. As with the original pre-performance practice, I utilized the Non-Attachment Scale (Sahdra, Shaver, Brown 2010, 116) to reflect upon my “level” of non-attachment once per week. I commented on noticeable shifts from my weekly responses, viewable in the appendix.

## CHAPTER IV

### REFLECTIONS

#### Introduction

The great Je Tsongkapa, founder of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, began his text on the "Three Principle Paths" with these words: "As far as I am able, I will explain..." (Gyatso 2005, 3). This is precisely how I would like to introduce the reader to my reflections upon this investigation, for it is not without an awareness of the insufficiency of language to express what I have learned in mindful movement that I write this chapter. It is also clear to me that what I have experienced and have come to learn as the potential of committed practice can also not be directly translated from one subjective perspective to another. In an effort to document my process and learning for myself, I will share this work with an understanding that the reader will take from it that which is applicable to their own experience. It is my hope that the translation is accessible and perhaps even significant to someone else's practice and experience as well.

Ironically, it is at the end of my documenting of this process (for the purposes of this thesis work) that I have come to the profound recognition that a documented reflection upon my experiences, at least as a measurement of any accomplishment or conclusion to be added to the archives of the "knowledge" of humankind, is inherently hollow or, as the Buddha might put it, *empty*<sup>6</sup>. This is not at all to suggest that the experience as a whole has been without value, but rather to express that both the process

of this thesis work and the recognition of the futility of the efforts of documenting, describing, and presenting experience as a quantified or qualified “success” or “failure” – due to the paradoxical nature of attaching myself to my practice of mindfulness through an understanding of non-attachment – has been, in contrast, absolutely necessary to my progress within the practice and therefore invaluable. It must be understood that, in any given movement practice, the method and process will become as unique as the subjective experience of the individual, regardless of how shared or universal to a like-minded community the path may seem. To reflect upon my process in as organized a fashion as possible (though the experiences blend and seem to me to formulate one cohesive whole), I will discuss each interval of practice as presented in my methods: Early Development, Pre-Performance Practice, Performance, and Private Practice.

### Early Development

The first rehearsals were some of the most challenging for me. The question “what on earth am I *doing*?” ran through my head as if on repeat. From the start, setting movement seemed blatantly contradictory to my purpose which I was professing at that time to be to increase my ability to practice non-attachment, and the thought “what does that even *mean*?” collided with the first question so often it made me dizzy. My crafting was slow throughout the early stages. I would choreograph, record the work on camera, and review it only to feel complete dissatisfaction with what I was seeing. In reviewing the notes from that time, I have to laugh at how many times I put pen to paper to commit to my excitement over something I had created, later scratching over it with scribbles

explaining why it wouldn't work. I wondered, as I had barely just begun, "What could possibly be so dissatisfying at this stage?" And yet there I was - stuck. In focusing upon solidifying work for the purpose of *releasing* attachments, I was bringing all of my attention directly to my attachments; there is no better way to be attached than to concentrate upon how many attachments one might have.

After several weeks of confronting my attachments and developing frustration through being overly critical of every choice and gesture, I had little more than a dozen short phrases to show for my time. One of the largest impediments I realized at this point was that I knew I was to be the soloist performing this choreographed work. As I have a bit of stage fright, this caused anxiety to pool and I caught myself endlessly evaluating the work from the audience's perspective; months before I was to step onto the stage, I was imagining what it might look like, hallucinating a future which had not yet arrived, while telling myself that I was working with this very important concept of non-attachment. Attachments to choices in regards to movement material, phrasing, structure, and meaning tended to weigh me down in my crafting process, alerting me to the conflict between setting work in process and releasing experience in each moment. How exactly could I evaluate my own choreography *without* a set of attachments based in biases and preferences that are, essentially, attachments to ideas, experiences, or preconceived notions themselves?

Working with my phrases which told stories of the most significant moments of disillusionment in my life was somewhat cathartic at times, but generally only in

moments when I was able to forget that I was to perform the work and focus entirely upon telling my story to myself and no one else. I thought often of Paulo Coelho's writing in *The Zahir* in which he prescribes the telling of our stories to process experience and move forward (Coehlo 2006, 24). I focused my intention upon accepting my history and then moving past it as he recommended through story telling; at least that is what I was doing in my mind. But to continuously repeat those phrases in rehearsal, attempting to stitch together some cohesive sense of story through the bits I had created, was to revisit them, dwell upon them, stew in them. Frustration built as I walked redundant pathways in the studio and after an hour of work I could not allow myself to keep or hold to any choices I had made. My choreography therefore never seemed set and I constantly made changes in hopes of finding something agreeable that would speak to me satisfactorily. But again, what was I *doing*? What frustrated me even more in these sessions was the fact that my responses to the Non-Attachment Scale were consistently negative with little to no change in how I rated myself at the end of each session. I felt that no progress was being made and that I would not be able to demonstrate what I somehow knew was inherently available to me but could not access. Upon reflection, I see that I was working through attachments to the process as I unearthed the process of practicing non-attachment. Just as Jung suggests infants need to develop attachments to make sense of their state and place in the world, I also needed to experience attachments in many forms before I was able to recognize and release concern for them.

The experience that led to the most significant change in my process occurred during a rehearsal in which I had become particularly frustrated with my choreography



and process in general. I had been occasionally utilizing moments of improvisation as a tool to free myself from the monotony of a crafting rut, sometimes stumbling upon material that interested me and recreating it into short phrase work. At one point, my frustration with deciding upon and setting choreography was so great that I simply stopped choreographing altogether for the remainder of the rehearsal and moved freely without any purpose except to move in ways that “pleased” me. By this process, I very naturally fell into a pattern of repeating a favorite motif, enjoying the alignment of gesture and breath, having no impulse to deviate from the repetition. I was not at a loss for more movement, but rather content to stay and relish in the synchronicity of breath and movement pulse. I repeated this motif for over a minute with a clear mind free of disruptive thought or self-criticism, unintentionally settling into what I later learned was a form of meditation. The *chittavritti*, commonly referred to in the West as “mind chatter” or “monkey mind,” was no longer running through my head, no inner monologue twisting every moment of experience into unnecessary analysis. It was not until later when I finally moved on from that movement and slipped with ease back into the phrase I had been working on, that I recognized the moment for what it was. Much like with *Samadhi*, it was not until I returned from the moment of clear-mindedness that I realized where I had been mentally: in deep, effective movement meditation.

When I returned from this meditative moment to the phrase with which I had been working previously in frustration, I noticed I was moving more articulately and freely, expanding upon the phrase with more ease, pleasure, and satisfaction or contentment with my choices moment by moment. During one hour in which I had hardly moved due to my

vexation, I gave up on my process and chose to disregard the timeline and phrase work entirely; I was going to *dance* and I was going to do it however *I wanted*. I can see the irritation in the pen marks on the page from that rehearsal, inscribed just before the moment of release into improvisation. I was fed up with myself not being able to demonstrate this *thing*, this idea that I knew was relevant and present but could not seem to reach or realize. The words “screw it” appear among the scribbles, a hole scratched into the paper at the point where I crossed the “t.” The next page is covered in excited jottings over the experience that followed.

Music blaring and heart pounding, I danced until I was exhausted and breathless, stumbling again into the repetition of one of my set motifs. Swinging my arms contralaterally and aligning the motion with my breath, I stayed with this motion just enjoying the synchronicity and pleasure of feeling free in movement choice while not at all eager or pressured to move on to something new. The pulse was delightful, my mind was quietly at ease, I was not searching or evaluating but just being present to that motion. When I did choose to move again, I was almost surprised to find that I seemed to desire to return to my choreography, but to move through each phrase as it came to me in new orientations and orders. At once I noticed a new freedom and articulation to my movement. I felt lighter, clearer, and physically warm and invigorated. Though I was ready to approach my work again, I wanted more of that kind of experience.

This experience inspired me to shift from a *creative process* to a *creative practice* of improvisational dance. It was at this point that I began to more clearly define my goals

for my work; I was interested in somehow finding greater understanding and more accessibility of non-attachment specifically through dance improvisation. The exact method to achieve this goal was still unclear, but I knew that improvisational dance was a valid point of access for me and should be further explored.

### Pre-Performance Practice

Once I had moved toward improvisation in lieu of choreography, I continued to cling to my choreographed gestures and phrases, using them as landmarks in time and space. I did this for a few reasons: to motivate material when I felt lost, to keep some semblance of the work in which I had engaged thus far, and to offer a sort of loose structure at a point in my practice when I had not yet set a specific frame for myself. The question of structure came up repeatedly as I reviewed my newly emerging practice with my committee. How was I going to structure the improvisation so that my work was more than an open movement session? What kinds of structures are more appropriately oriented toward practicing non-attachment? Is that demonstrable to the witness or not? If not, what might the witness see of the structure? All of these questions weighed upon me heavily as I faced a rapidly approaching performance date. The NAS survey proved valuable at this point as a tertiary indicator of my progress in working with non-attachment and as a method of considering the qualities of being non-attached. Revisiting the same thirty questions each week required that I respond according to how I felt I had conducted and considered my life over the past week of practice rather than how I have conducted myself over a long period of my life. While the shifts in responses were often

subtle, the weekly responses (demonstrated by averages in the appendix) showed significant adjustments toward attachment during two important shifting points in my process: the time leading to the switch from choreography to improvisation and the weeks leading up to the performance of my practice. This reflects the impact that the original choreographic process and performance of a nascent practice had upon my ability to apply non-attachment to my life. It was important that I made adjustments to my original project and began to work with improvisation instead of setting work.

My rehearsals at this point, which I began to refer to as “practices” or “practice sessions” consisted of short improvisations lasting up to about ten minutes. When structure was still lacking, I put on music that moved me at that particular time (sometimes a random shuffle of a genre, sometimes a selected playlist), set a timer for ten minutes, and moved in the open space, doing this as many times as possible in the two hour sessions. In my notes, I can see that I was still lost at first, searching for some evidence that my process was in fact helping me “reach” this ideal of *being non-attached*. Still not knowing what that meant or how to explain or define it, I recognized that I was on the right track in improvisation simply because of the in-the-moment nature of it. In my journaling, I wrote quite a bit about the challenges of maintaining focus on new movement and how I regularly returned to my phrases and gestures to play with them in an improvised format. One example described my right arm raised at the height of my shoulder, elbow bent at a right angle, hand held in a blade shape above it, swiping swiftly from behind my back to this position and then over my head, across my neck, and back again to the angled position which I called “to the square.” This brief gestural phrase was

originally performed while kneeling, but in my improvisations I would find myself lost for more movement without knowing why and return to this phrase in a new frame. One recorded instance shows me running and leaping across an open space wildly flinging my arms when suddenly I stop myself at the far corner of the room by swiping my hand behind my back and up “to the square,” proceeding through the rest of that phrase in grand, sweeping gestures much more lofty and with a smoother quality than originally choreographed. This kind of play with variation served as an overall structure for the pre-performance interval of my practice.

In reflecting upon my improvisations, it was often natural to write of the objective mindset, which required the removal of all critique. However, two new obstacles presented themselves after I had settled in to this improvisational practice: 1) the challenge of determining a set structure for my improvisation was surprisingly damning to my focus and investment in the practice in this phase and, 2) the challenge of preparing and refining my practice to the point of allowing myself to be seen free of the mind chatter and anxiety that had been disruptive to my former process was seemingly impossible in this infant stage of investment. The ability to focus on the present moment and release attention and attachment from all other external and internal stimuli had not yet been strengthened to the point of public performance quality.

My chosen solution to the first of these two obstacles - the challenge of selecting a structure for the improvisation - was to allow myself the freedom of letting that structure be malleable based upon my needs in each session. The choice came intuitively

as a response to my need for flexibility; as I was working through multiple personal grieving processes in the early stages of my exploration, my focus and interest fluctuated significantly over time. A simple structure of seeking surprise by following music set at random via Pandora™, my own iPod™, or a borrowed music device, etc., was satisfactory in one week of rehearsals whereas experimentation with movement response to visual stimuli was more interesting and engaging in another. For a few rehearsals, I moved in ways that I felt expressed what was weighing on my mind in the moment of movement while attempting to let my gaze track a second behind me, my body trusting the space to hold me through unplanned motion as I visually tracked only the space where I had been, the moment I had just left, virtually acting out a direct physical translation of “attachment” to the past.

Other improvisational games were used as well, many of which were borrowed from well-known improvisers. A favorite of my games was to respond to the architecture of the space in movement. This became boring quickly without any other rules for the structure as I was well acquainted with the spaces in which I worked having studied there for over two years. The game then became paying such close attention to the details of the space so as to allow myself to notice something new, some crack in the concrete of the walls or thread dangling from a curtain over which my eyes had perhaps passed but not appreciated before. This proved challenging in an effort to practice non-attachment. When my physical responses to visual stimuli interested me, I could not help but mentally linger a moment behind my movement to enjoy what had taken place. A movement or phrase would be expressed and I would automatically respond with

thoughts such as “Oh! I *liked* that! It felt good, I want to try that again” or “That’s *boring*, I’ve done that before.” This created a fascinating layering of experience, a rapid flow of taking in visual stimuli, responding with movement, considering what had been produced while moving on at once, practicing reducing the lingering attention upon previous moments as the direct practice of non-attachment in movement. Each game lent itself to the practice of non-attachment in a slightly different way, but each required me to respond to something in movement and notice where I was getting caught up in judgments of my choices or holding to impressions of past moments. The physical practice was to keep moving the body and the mental practice was to let the mind follow without moving forward or lagging behind. Over time in the practice, I hoped to experience the lines between movement and thought blend, manifesting the affects of each practice in the other.

Where was my mind during these games? In what ways was I accomplishing a practice of non-attachment? It was in my search for structure that I realized the importance of mindfulness in my work. No matter what structure I had chosen, if I was able to lose myself in the movement of the improvisation, I felt I had achieved some form of meditation. I was becoming apprehensive about the approaching concert just a few weeks away, but I was moving more and feeling satisfied with that fact. It was a very real challenge to improvise with minor injuries throughout my body and exhaustion played a large role in my lack of motivation to work. I was so relieved to read Kent de Spain’s writings on dance improvisation when he referenced Eric Shoefer’s “intentional fallacy” demonstration in an “A”/”B” conversation with the self:

A: Okay, so what do you want to do now?  
B: You know.  
A: Do you want to move?  
B: Sort of, but my body is hurting and I don't feel like movinnnnnggggg.  
A: Well okay. Then what do you want to do? What's the problem with this character work? Why not keep exploring different characters?  
B: But I don't want to explore characters. I don't want to.  
A: Why don't you want to? Huh? Okay. Okay, if you just want to move, then just move. You are moving.  
B: Yes, but I'm tired of moving without having the other parts of my brain be a part of it.  
A: Well then, let's see. What do you want to do then? Do you want to go back to voice, or do you think you should start, start, start with the story?  
(Albright 2003, 22-23)

Countless times I had similar conversations with myself. Almost exactly the same conversation arose, actually, with only minor differences due to the nature of my work as opposed to his. De Spain continues to quote Schoefer as explaining that this sort of schism might come from the dichotomy of the mind as performer and audience, regardless of the presence of a witness. I realize in retrospect that I held myself as my own audience in critical evaluation of every moment of my practice until, suddenly, it was the day of the performance, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

Questions weighed heavily on my mind as I prepared to present my practice to an audience of witnesses. "What have I accomplished within this practice?" "What is the audience about to witness and what is the value of that witnessing?" "Have I achieved greater understanding and application of non-attachment in my practice and in my life as a result?" "Is this practice valid regardless of the answers to these questions?" Complex and layered as my practice had revealed itself to be, I took the stage knowing the audience would be having the experience of viewing a performance while I would be



having the dual experience of performer and focused practitioner. As I reflected upon the strength and integrity of my practice prior to the performance evening, I recognized that I could not speak to the efficacy of the practice due to my growing attachments to my desired outcome in performance.

In reflection, I can see that non-attachment was not realized in the “Pre-Performance Practice” because I was treating the practice as a rehearsal for the purpose of final presentation rather than as a private ritual for personal growth. As stated above, the NAS showed a shift in trend toward a more attached mindset in the weeks approaching the concert. This shift demonstrates the struggle I was creating for myself by presenting my practice publically while harboring a variety of expectations for the experience and myself. I struggled to find similar liberty and transformation of experience as I had when I first applied improvisation to my work. The more I focused upon the approaching concert and my “acceptable” or “successful” execution of my practice in public, the more challenging I found it to practice. My NAS responses clearly reflected the tension building within me; I experienced a few painful losses and sudden changes in my personal life during this same time period and it was fascinating to reflect on my weeks through questions that directly pertained to responses to loss and change. Even before the performance, my NAS surveys showed that I was not improving in my actual ability to achieve non-attachment. Looking back, I can see that this was a necessary step for my needs in the process. I needed to clarify my intentions in my work, and splitting the intention between performance and practice was cultivating confusion and frustration within me.

## Performance

By the time I took my space on the stage at the Dougherty Dance Theatre (at the University of Oregon in Eugene) to perform the practice that had just been born, I had a way of describing the meditative state I sought which is directly related to non-attachment: I called the approach of this state “going in.” I was asked by my committee chair what I meant by this phrase immediately following the performance and could not express an exact definition. As detailed in the review of literature, Nancy Stark Smith’s “gap” is an excellent demonstration of this state (Stark Smith 2003, 275). My mind becomes silent, my body becomes a vessel of all my focused creativity in *expressing* and *discovering* in repeated patterns; the movement is new, but there is always an expression and then a discovery of what comes in movement immediately after that expression whether the space between the two is a millisecond or several minutes.

The most significant way of knowing that I am present in this state, this “gap,” is by evidence of the return from it, when I suddenly am aware that my mind chatter has returned and that it had been absent for a space of time which I was not concerned with measuring. This quiet-mindedness did occur a few times during my performed practice, but the overabundance of concern (read “attachments”) for the audience perception and my own expectations for my work, as well as my vivid awareness of the audience as a whole and as individuals, prevented me from appreciating those moments until much time had passed. Months later, I was able to review footage of the performance with a more objective mindset (though not entirely free of unnecessarily harsh self-judgment).

I have received feedback about the impact this setting had upon some viewers, including “an astounding scape which drew me in wondering if you would touch every bit of space” (Haight, 2013) and “a beautiful texture spread across the stage by the movement and energy generated by the dance” (Morton, 2013). At the end of my performance, I recall looking around the space and realizing that I had left at least 6 piles completely untouched. I laughed at this, grabbed a broom, and helped the stage crew sweep up the space.

I recall a moment in performance of feeling lost, repetitive, and insecure in my intention. I stopped moving, noticed my heart rate, brought my awareness back from its concern for what the audience was witnessing to what I was experiencing, and took a breath; it was too hard to breathe. I took another breath; lungs were too tight. I inhaled deeply and expelled all the air I could manage without collapsing. It exited my body as a strange, animalistic, breathy howl. For a moment, I wondered how my audience would react to that. I recall very clearly seeing my mother’s face in my mind, my sister’s uncertainty about the entire experience, my committee, my students, friends, strangers... My mind passed over all of these faces in that moment, and I said to myself “STOP IT. None of that matters. MOVE ON.” And I did. Even in watching the footage after that moment, I have no idea what happened beyond that point. I remember feeling the coolness of the floor on my skin, skidding across paper and flooring as I attempted to slide into a pile that had been previously untouched, a floor burn I earned in that moment but did not feel until hours later etched into my leg. If there is any indication that the mind is not present with the body, it is that the mind does not register the pain of the

body. Adrenaline was obviously pumping hard and fast and I was not able to maintain a calm and mindful state in performance. I remember the shock that took me by my solar plexus when I recognized the end of the music and knew my performance time was coming to a close though I had not yet felt that I had been “going in” for what I considered in that moment to be a sufficient amount of time; sufficient for what, I still do not know. My own expectations - my own attachments - were dictating my thoughts and reactions.

During the months between the performance and my return to my practice, I avoided reviewing the footage of my rehearsals and performance entirely. It had been interesting as an artist to see the material generated in my pre-performance sessions, but it did not seem to serve my purpose as a practice of non-attachment because I was too tempted to judge the work harshly. I had stopped recording my sessions some weeks prior to the performance. The exception to this was a series of three showings in which I invited witnesses and fellow department dancers Rachel Winchester, KellynRost, Kim Ames, Megan Duling, Olivia Shaw, and my own thesis committee – Shannon Mockli, Christian Cherry, and Jenifer Craig - to offer feedback prior to the concert. Feedback ranged from questions about the nature and structure of the improvisation to comments about the strength of the movement and the powerful feeling of being “drawn in” to the moments when I seemed “lost” or “carried away” according to my peers.

The weeks leading up to the concert date made me question the validity of my work as a performance piece. As I have previously stated, I am not pursuing the same

process of Anna Halprin in her work with Authentic Movement, though I did appreciate her allowance to invite a witness, a trusted observer, to receive the work and respond if motivated so the mover knows they have been heard and supported (Halprin 2000, 25). I was curious as to how my audience would perceive my work throughout the early stages of development but, ultimately, their response has proven to be of little importance to the nature of the process. In fact, I will now say with confidence that the practice I have formulated is not suited for performance, at least not at the level of practice at which I am currently working. I have read of monks, yogis, Tai Chi practitioners and the like who can engage in public practice without distraction after thousands of hours of dedicated practice. Perhaps when I reach that level of experience in my own process, I will be able to be witnessed without being concerned about being observed and without the witness affecting my work.

Performing my practice to a large audience proved to be ineffective for me in terms of achieving non-attachment. This was recognizable both by my written reflections on the performance and my responses to the NAS each week. However, the experience of performing the practice was foundational to later realizations within my practice; my abilities to recognize, acknowledge, release, and learn from attachments have increased significantly. It was ultimately my attachments to choreography in performance that brought so much frustration in preparation for the concert. I chose to hold to several phrases of the choreography I had developed originally in order to create landmarks for myself and offer material upon which to fall back in case I became lost on stage during the improvisation. However, it was the getting lost that would have set me free.

The experience of performing my practice on stage for the first time was overwhelming due to its incipiency. At the same time, it was a valuable and revealing experience, exposing potentials and weaknesses within my practice at least to me if not to the witnesses as well. Ultimately, the experience was successful in bringing me to realization of non-attachment, though not within the performance. Whether or not performance of this kind of practice is a viable method of realizing non-attachment was not ascertained in this single performance experience; the greater benefit came as a result of experiencing the various frustrations of attempting to understand and achieve non-attachment within the practice, seeing the flaws and failures, and reflecting on the causes and results of the attachments I had developed along the way. There were moments within the performance in which I was able to let go and be completely present to the moment, but overall the presentation served more as an indicator of deficiency, a valuable measurement by which I was able to later strengthen and deepen the practice.

### Private Practice

When I returned to movement, I could not forget something said by Alan Watts which struck me as being applicable to this practice: “You cannot think without words” (Watts 1970). I was not certain at first if this was true; we can think in numbers or images or emotion, but it is not quite the same as processing a problem through to the conclusive resolution. It is arguable that this statement may or may not be true depending upon which school of philosophy being discussed. But if it is evident for a person that one cannot think without words in whatever form, can one improvise in dance without

choreography or what one might call “moves,” “steps,” or “skills”? If not, is the reliance upon these things still considered improvisation? If I move through a series of “steps,” let’s say, which I was taught in a number of classes – a drop swing, a lunge, a *pas de bouré*, and a turn – regardless of how I play with them in sequence, am I really improvising? At the time of my performance, this is essentially what I was doing. I had taken movements I had previously set and practiced a number of times, and I played with sequencing and dynamics when I was lost for movement material on stage. I wanted my private practice to be truly improvisational in every session. In retrospect, I can see that this, too, is an attachment. To fixate upon the definition of improvisation and what constitutes improvisational movement is to neglect the very nature of the practice of moving mindfully in pursuit of non-attachment.

I was drawn to improvisation in the first place not because I am a brilliant improviser, because, quite frankly, I am barely a decent one if we are gauging improvisation by the ability to be ephemerally present in mind and body, keeping up exactly with time in both ways. I do tend to waiver toward reflection upon the last moment or preparation for the next. But that is precisely why this practice is so valuable to me as a unique individual; it is a *practice*. I do not practice yoga or meditation because I am a brilliant yogini who looks fabulous in *asana* or a powerfully concentrative mind who commands the settling of my emotions at my will; I am neither. I am me. I am not even the ‘me’ that I was when I wrote this... a moment ago. I am a process. So to take on a practice of improvisation to be seen in performance and documented as that which I am capable of is complete folly for me as a process. Perhaps in another several hundred or

thousand hours of practice I might be ready to be witnessed without being too influenced by concern for the external eye. For now, my practice is best suited to a private and sacred space.

Sometimes these private sessions in my home migrated to the stairs, the upper chambers, or even the kitchen when inspiration led me there. These spaces, being much more limited than my original environment of studio space, required that I subdue my energetically driven movement vocabulary and take on more subtle, muted tone of movement. My adrenaline-driven “engine” of energy on stage was not at all present in these quiet, thoughtful practices. Though some were more playful and jubilant based upon my state of mind at the onset of the practice, movement sessions in smaller spaces of my home were generally more reserved by necessity of the space (lack of a sprung floor for ease of high-space work including jumping, walls restricting locomotion, etc.). I found that these spaces merely appeared restrictive but actually offered a more suitable environment for my needs in my early, rather undisciplined stages of practice as I struggled to understand what it was to engage in “persistent but gentle attention” as described by Sahdra, Shaver, and Brown (2010).

During the practices in which I was exposed to possible onlookers, no consideration of being seen was made and no concern for the response of the witnesses was present as I was not there to be seen nor were onlookers there to be present as witnesses; they became more of a mobile but matte aspect of the scenery, fixtures of the space though not necessarily fixed. I found that they had little impact upon my practices



on the two occasions I practiced in public spaces (which were generally not crowded), significantly less so than my prescribed audience had in the theatre. Practicing in these new spaces with a more subdued energy than that of my pre-performance practice created a very different set of experiences. I found that I could very easily get lost in the moment while in the privacy of my own home and luxuriate in the space of not knowing where I was or what I was doing. The entire practice came so much more fluidly and naturally when there was no thought of presentation. The smaller space allowed me to release attachments to the idea that I needed to fill a large space with grand movement and suddenly a gesture was enough, inevitably leading to long stretches of flowing movement, some of the most enjoyable moments of movement I have ever experienced. The reason my practice would sometimes flow into my kitchen or up my narrow stairway and into a bedroom was because I would become so lost and engrossed inside my practice that I would surprise myself with an unexpected fall or locomotive movement that naturally carried me toward another part of my home as I recovered or responded to the unexpected act. Losing myself in that way was both thrilling and grounding; finding myself in the stairwell without having intended to go there meant that I had been lost exactly in the moment, completely carried away by movement, mindful but not driving. *This* was the practice I had been intending all along.

Any good meditation guide will ask you to first observe your breath. One of the easiest ways into a meditative state is through listening, which shuts down the tendency to project thought and opens receptors of the other four senses as well. “Persistent but gentle attention” is easily attained by listening to the environmental noises around us. I

had a difficult time in the first of my private practices because I practiced in the open space of my living room and I happen to live within a few hundred feet of train tracks. Every hour or so a train passes and I am unable to ignore the fact that what I am hearing is a *train*; there is a label associated and I cannot help but acknowledge it mentally. I learned through trial and error to sanctify my space by clearing, cleaning, and then preparing my practice around the train schedule. I was fortunate to have a roommate who had a similar movement meditation practice and had to learn to work his schedule in a similar manner.

The listening to the environment is effective, but attention on the breath is of particular importance. I learned in my practice of *asana* that the breath is, on one hand, something that *happens to* us whether we consciously think about it or not and, on the other hand, it is something that we can *do and control*. *Pranayama*, or “life force breathing” / “the breath of life,” is a fundamental principle of yogic practice as outlined in the eight limbs of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. After some practice of breathing and bringing awareness to the breath, it can be understood that the voluntary and the involuntary are one in the same; it is all one *happening*. The question relatable to my movement practice is “can movement be considered a voluntary action or an involuntary action?” The answer, again, is that it is *both*. Arguably, the movements of the fluids, the lungs, the heart, the synapses of the brain are all involuntary. Seeing movement as both voluntary and involuntary as one happening changed the way I saw my private practice.

With a new perspective on the voluntary and involuntary being present as one unified experience, I began to notice real potential for the expression I intended in my chosen movement as being present in the same moment as the release of unplanned movement which at once revealed what was being held within me as well as that which was awaiting my attention in the next moment. To put it more simply, I fell away from trying to describe what could not be said in movement and instead let my experience fall from my body in motion. I subsequently became more present to the moment while expressing the experience of which I had kept physical record locked away somewhere in the subconscious of my body. The most noticeable difference to the external eye between my pre-performance and private practices might be the scale of my movement. While I prepared in pre-performance practice in large, open spaces to prepare work for a spacious stage, my private practice was held mostly in my moderately sized living room and the tone of the attention called for more gentle, modest, or subdued movement. There were times when the movement in my private practice became boisterous and strong, even reaching the high space with jumps and inversions, but generally it was simpler and more subtle in vocabulary as the focus was on my attention to the moment.

My structures for private practice are still fluid, but I keep them as simple as possible and they almost always begin with a period of stillness and listening followed by attention upon the breath before movement begins. I say “almost” here because there have been times when my practice began spontaneously while music was being played and the energy lead me to explore. These were some of my more energetic and enjoyable practice sessions in which the element of play held an important role. The practice as it is

today is still in its earliest stages of development. At this point, I have established a routine of sanctifying space, preparing my body and mind, and committing to ten to twenty minutes of uninterrupted movement improvisation which generally takes place in silence to allow me to always come back to listening when I am distracted by stimuli. Filling ten to twenty minutes of time with focused improvisation has become a much less daunting task, almost always achievable so long as I am not interrupted by external stimuli. With no performance intended in my future, this practice has become a sacred space, as special and important to me as that of *asana*.

The NAS became useful again in my private practice and the survey responses reflect a general flow toward tendencies of more non-attached thought and action. With clear intentions set for my private practice, the review of thirty non-attachment-based questions became one of my favorite rituals of my week. The questions led me to conduct an honest review of my thoughts and actions over the week, which proved to be a direct agent of thought and action. Reading statements that described attached or non-attached mindsets caused me to start to notice those mindsets everywhere, not just within myself. *Non-attachment* became the most popular word in my subconscious mind and I began to experience a manifestation of many opportunities to practice it in my daily life. This practice has been slow in development and challenging from the start, but hindsight has given me the perspective of one who can now be grateful for all that it has brought to life. I have created a life-enhancing practice, custom built for my passions, skills, and needs, and I can engage with this practice for the rest of my life if I choose. A large transformation of perspective has taken place within me over the years I have spent

developing this practice, and I see the end of this documented work as the culmination of my early efforts within the process, a jumping-off point for the integration of improvisational movement practice into my larger life practice as a whole.

My way through this research and practice development has been uniquely organic, seemingly backward at times working from the answer to the question and back to the answer, which was then found in a new light. If we look again at Alan Watt's review of Carl Jung's criticism that Westerners should not practice yoga because it was not meant for them culturally, the metaphor he gave was perfectly fitting to my own struggle to prescribe my personal practice from my subjective experience and perceived needs. What I have ended up with is a practice which fits me perfectly and has been sculpted and fired by my own process of trial and error, similar to the process of development Anna Halprin exercised as she developed her ground-breaking practice of Authentic Movement (Halprin 200, 20-22). This practice might not be fitting for everyone seeking movement meditation or mindfulness enhancement, but it has cultivated within me a sense of wonder and awareness of unpredictable possibility as a result of pursuing my own path with diligent commitment. In his talk on "The Art of Meditation," Alan Watts suggests cleverly, "by going out of your mind, you come to your senses" (Watts 1970). I can think of no better way to summarize my experience. I need not look back on my challenges with dissatisfaction nor look forward to future possibilities with anticipation of lessons unlearned. I only need be here, in this moment, observing, responding, practicing.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion to this investigation, I will address the research questions stated in the introduction of this document. I will discuss the value of my investigation as a whole and assess what others might glean from my exploration should they desire to embark upon a similar practice. These conclusions are the cumulative result of reflecting upon journals, rehearsal videos, audio recordings, the performance video, and the reflections chapter of this document.

In response to my first research question, “What kinds of approaches to improvisation lend themselves effectively to a practice of mindfulness in movement focused upon non-attachment?”; the goal that revealed itself in my practice was to achieve a state of phenomenological awareness, leading to a movement meditation in which I could become “lost” in my movement, present in the experience yet so deep in the moment of movement that I would be unable to describe what had happened an instant before or what would come in the following moment. As I explored a wide variety of improvisational structures in both the pre-performance and private practices, I discovered that the key to achieving phenomenological awareness was to first practice simple mindfulness. Mindfulness in my movement experiences was most achievable when the structure of improvisation was simple.

Some of my most and least successful improvisational structures (in terms of allowing me to achieve a mindful practice) are described in the methods and reflections

of this document. Whatever the chosen structure, simplicity is a requirement for mindful practice. Otherwise, the practitioner may spend their time grappling with the structure itself rather than on attention and awareness within the process of moving. Just as with seated meditation in which the mind focuses gently upon a happening (breath at the tip of the nose, a sound, the vibration of a chant, the movement of the lungs, a thought mantra, etc.), the practitioner must find one point of focus that can expand and lead to an awareness of many simultaneous happenings. This broadened awareness is the gateway into the “lost” state in which the practitioner does not know what has happened or will happen as they move continuously. Such experiences yielded the most positive responses in terms of non-attachment and felt most relatable to what I have learned of non-attachment in my research.

The second of my research questions, “In what ways can it become possible for me to be both expressive and non-attached within a movement practice?” has an answer that stems directly from the results of the first question above. It is in the sequencing from movement, to mindfulness, to expanded awareness, to losing oneself in the movement, that the mover can become both expressive and non-attached. Applications of non-attachment directly to the movement practice occur within the phenomenological state of awareness. Once the practitioner moves beyond focused mindfulness to a broad awareness of simultaneous events both within and without the body, the movement flowing from the body becomes a direct expression of the subconscious mind, outputting fluid responses while simultaneously inputting new stimuli and, subsequently, outputting more responses in a constant flow until the attention is lost and the practitioner’s

awareness is caught or settles intentionally upon a stimulus. Expression and meditation (or the beginnings of non-attachment) may oscillate within a practice session rapidly or slowly. The more time I put into my practice, the less expression became the focus and the more a fruitful phenomenological awareness was achieved, yielding the most non-attached responses in journals and surveys. Like any practice, this exploration must be allowed time and consistent effort to flower into something beneficial.

My final research question is “How do the experiences of a practice-for-performance and the performance itself differ from the experience of a private practice?” The answer to this question according to my experiences is simple, yet exclusive to my experiences; a more seasoned practitioner might find different results. In my experience, the practice-for-performance and performance of this investigation was too heavily loaded with expectations (attachments) for the experience, results, and response to the performance to allow for progress to be made toward non-attachment. The presence of even a single witness was distracting and disorienting as I attempted to both perform for an audience and keep my attention upon the goals of my practice. This kind of movement meditation may be valid as a presentational art form if performed by individuals with extensive hours of practice experience, but the presentation of this practice so early on in my personal approach proved ineffective in terms of achieving non-attachment. The experience became recognizable to me later as an important learning experience for my needs in the process, but I recommend to anyone seeking a similar personal practice that they first invest several years in the practice itself refining their approach and reflecting upon their experiences before presenting the practice as performance art.



One of the greatest benefits of conducting a practice such as this is the freedom to craft and shape the practice to the specific needs of the practitioner. This practice can act as a sort of template for anyone interested in deeper investigations of improvisational movement, phenomenology, or non-attachment. The structure of practice can be adjusted to meet the needs of different personalities, lifestyles, interests, and abilities. Dancers interested in improvisation can especially gain from reviewing the parallels outlined in this document between phenomenology, non-attachment, and improvisation. Any individual interested in adopting a practice of non-attachment can benefit from using my approach through improvisational movement exploration. It is recommended that further investigations be conducted by applying this practice for an extended period of time to multiple dancers with no knowledge of non-attachment or Eastern philosophy, utilizing the NAS as a main indicator of progress over time.

## APPENDIX A

### PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

“An Evening of Two Master of Fine Arts Choreographic Movement Projects” was presented at 8p.m. on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 in the Dougherty Dance Theatre of the Gerlinger Annex at the University of Oregon. This was a shared event with my fellow MFA candidate, Carolina Caballero, who produced the concert with me. Presented first, her work was titled “Not About Me” and mine titled “{Sati} {Natya}” (translated from Pali to mean “Mindfulness Dance”). The title of the work includes artistic utilization of brackets to emphasize the equal importance of mindfulness (“sati”) and dance (“natya”) in the work. It was intended for the witness to understand that, for this artist, practicing one without the other would be a completely different endeavor. Tickets were sold at five dollars each with a total of ninety-seven sold for the one-time performance. Our revenue from the production totaled four-hundred eighty-five dollars which we used to cover costs such as commissions for collaborating artists, photography, costumes, videography, and printing. We held a technical rehearsal on February 24<sup>th</sup> and a dress rehearsal on the 28<sup>th</sup> of the month. The dress rehearsal was video-taped with the department camera, and Robert Uehlin recorded the formal performance with a higher quality piece of equipment. A complete list of production crew can be viewed in the appendix.

Kenji Ota created the sound score for {Sati} {Natya} based on a loose structure I created for him. When Kenji and I met to discuss my vision for the project, we discussed my developing process and selected our palette of instruments. Discussions of my vision

lead to the sketching of a visual timeline consisting of a long image expressing dynamics shifts through peaks and valleys accompanied by descriptive words marking off the separate sections as I saw them happening. Time was marked in intervals over thirteen minutes, which expanded to fifteen minutes in his final draft of the sound score. I suggested playing with meters, especially odd, loping meters like  $7/4$  and  $5/4$ . The result was an interesting sound-scape which I chose to hear in its entirety only three times prior to the performance. This deliberate choice was intended to retain for myself an element of surprise in the music, using its path as my motivation for movement and an overall structure in time. I allowed myself to listen to the incomplete score three times prior to the performance to approve of the length and become familiar with my sound cues for closing the practice.

## APPENDIX B

### NON-ATTACHMENT SCALE (NAS) SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1 = Disagree Strongly      2 = Disagree Moderately      3 = Disagree Slightly  
4 = Agree Slightly      5 = Agree Moderately      6 = Agree Strongly

#### Scale Item

1. I can accept the flow of events in my life without hanging onto them or pushing them away.
2. I can let go of regrets and feelings of dissatisfaction about the past.
3. I find I can be calm and/or happy even if things are not going my way.
4. I have a hard time appreciating others' successes when they outperform me.
5. I can remain open to what life offers me regardless of whether it seems desirable or undesirable at a particular time.
6. I can enjoy pleasant experiences without needing them to last forever.
7. I view the problems that enter my life as thing/issues to work on rather than reasons for becoming disheartened or demoralized.
8. I can enjoy my possessions without being upset when they are damaged or destroyed.
9. The amount of money I have is not important to my sense of who I am.
10. I do not go out of my way to cover up or deny my negative qualities or mistakes.
11. I accept my flaws.
12. I can enjoy my family and friends without feeling I need to hang on to them.
13. If things aren't turning out the way I want, I get upset.
14. I can enjoy the pleasures of life without feeling sad or frustrated when they end.
15. I can take joy in others' achievements without feeling envious.

16. I find I can be happy almost regardless of what is going on in my life.
17. Instead of avoiding or denying life's difficulties, I face up to them.
18. I am open to reflecting on my past mistakes and failings.
19. I do not get "hung up" on wanting an "ideal" or "perfect" life.
20. I am comfortable being an ordinary, less than perfect human being.
21. I can remain open to thoughts and feelings that come into my mind, even if they are negative or painful.
22. I can see my own problems and shortcomings without trying to blame them on someone or something outside myself.
23. When pleasant experiences end, I am fine moving on to what comes next.
24. I am often preoccupied by threats or fears.
25. I am not possessive of the people I love.
26. I do not have to hang on to the people I love at all costs; I can let them go if they wish to go.
27. I do not feel I need to escape or avoid bad experiences in my life.
28. I can admit my shortcomings without shame or embarrassment.
29. I experience and acknowledge grief following significant losses, but do not become overwhelmed, devastated, or incapable of meeting life's other demands.
30. I am not possessive of the things I own.

## APPENDIX C

### NON-ATTACHMENT SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following table is a numeric interpretation of the results of my non-attachment weekly questionnaire. The table is divided by “Pre-Performance Practice” (comprised of the first twenty-two weeks of practice from early development to performance) and “Private Practice” (comprised of the second twenty-two weeks of practice which took place months after the performance date). Questions 4, 13, and 24 are negatively worded statements while the rest are positively worded statements. An answer in agreement with a positive statement reflects a tendency toward non-attachment while an answer in disagreement with a positive statement reflects a tendency toward attachment. Likewise, an answer in disagreement with a negative statement reflects a tendency toward non-attachment while an answer in agreement with a negative statement reflects a tendency toward attachment.

This table was created by separating out the positive and negative statements and finding the average response for each by week. Lower numbers in the “Positive” column indicate responses generally expressing attachment while higher numbers in the same column indicate responses oriented toward non-attachment. Conversely, low numbers in the “Negative” column indicate toward a non-attached mind set while higher numbers in the same column indicate tendencies toward attachment. It can be seen in this interpretation that my ability to apply non-attachment to my personal life during the first series of practice fluctuated slightly with some progress around the time I switched from

setting choreography to playing with improvisation. Ultimately, my ability to maintain the practice of a non-attached mind set decreased as the performance date approached. The point of significance on this chart is the “Private Practice” section, which shows the progress made toward non-attachment with only subtle fluctuations over the twenty-two weeks of exploration.

APPENDIX D

MEAN NAS RESPONSE NUMBER BY WEEK

Pre-Performance Practice			Private Practice		
Week Number	Positive Statements	Negative Statements	Week Number	Positive Statements	Negative Statements
1	3.37	4.66	1	2.78	5
2	3.66	4.66	2	3.04	5
3	3.48	4.33	3	3.26	4.33
4	3.96	3.33	4	3.22	4.67
5	3.74	4	5	3.41	4.33
6	3.48	4.33	6	3.33	5.19
7	3.22	5	7	3.48	4.33
8	3.74	4	8	3.74	4
9	3.22	4.67	9	3.89	3.67
10	4.26	3.67	10	3.96	3.33
11	3.41	4.33	11	4.19	3.33
12	3.41	4.33	12	4.22	3.33
13	3.44	3.67	13	4.19	3.67
14	3.89	3.67	14	4.31	3.67
15	3.74	4	15	4.6	3
16	3.41	4.33	16	4.54	2.33
17	3.26	5	17	4.67	2.33
18	3.19	5	18	4.86	2.67
19	3.44	4.33	19	4.67	2.66
20	3.26	5	20	4.71	2.71
21	3.04	5	21	4.71	2.33
22	2.63	5	22	4.86	2.26



## APPENDIX E

### ENDNOTES

1. Non-Attachment is being defined here as expressed in the Definitions of this document, heavily based upon the definitions from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras:

Swami Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Reprint ed. (Integral Yoga Publications, 2012), 31-32.

2. In most traditions, *Asana* is only one of eight limbs, prongs, or paths to enlightenment. The physical practice itself is only one part of the balanced whole and, without the other seven aspects of practice, it is said that one can become less balanced and separate themselves further from enlightenment, becoming attached to one particular aspect of yoga. It has become common in the West to be engaged in yoga only insofar as to be an *asana* practitioner. This is wildly problematic as it can lead to attachments to the body or physical experience.

Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, 31-32.

3. The use of this scale is not meant to be a direct or literal indication of my ability to practice non-attachment. Considering factors affecting my daily life which necessarily impact my practice and the fluctuation of my responses to the weekly questionnaire, the scale is used as a way to look at general fluctuations in my responses over time. The result pointed more to the overall efficacy of my two approaches to the practice (intended for performance and intended for private practice only).

BaljinderKaurSahdra, Phillip R. Shaver, and Kirk Warren Brown, "A Scale to Measure Non-Attachment: A Buddhist Complement to Western Research On Attachment and Adaptive Functioning," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 92, no. 2 (2010): 116-27.

4. *Guru* is the Sanskrit term for "teacher" or "master" of a spiritual path or practice in many Eastern traditions. "Guru: a spiritual master; one who is heavy with knowledge of the Absolute and who removes nescience with the light of the divine."

Tirha, B. B. *A Taste of Transcendence*, (Lake Orion: Mandala Press, 2002) p. 161.

5. The Tripitaka is translated to mean "Three Baskets," which is the collection of three original Buddhist texts.

Lewis Lancaster, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2004), s.v. "Buddhist Books and Texts: Cannon and Canonization."

6. Lama Marut explains the concept of *emptiness* in Buddhism by demonstrating through a breakdown of logic that nothing has an “essence,” nothing is essentially anything, but we see and experience that which we have the karma to perceive based upon our actions, the energy which we put out. In this example, I am suggesting that the documentation of this practice as it has existed thus far is somewhat irrelevant to the learning which has taken place, until it is received by one who has the karmic preparation to glean from it something meaningful or beneficial to their own practice.

Lama Marut, “Inciting Happiness” (MP3 of lecture, Retreat Weekend, Lake Tahoe, CA, July 2009), accessed May 2013, [http://legacy.mahasukha.org/lama\\_marut\\_podcast.html](http://legacy.mahasukha.org/lama_marut_podcast.html).

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