

Activating the Creative, Awakening the Spirit

The Making of a Method

by

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A Bound Document Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Approved April 2013 by the  
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May 2013

## ABSTRACT

This thesis document encapsulates the findings of my research process in which I studied my self, my artistic process, and the interconnectivity among the various aspects of my life. Those findings are two-fold as they relate to the creation of three original works and my personal transformation through the process. This document encapsulates the three works, *swimminginthepsyche*, *applecede* and *The 21st Century Adventures of Wonder Woman*, chronologically from their performance dates. My personal growth and transformation is expressed throughout the paper and presented in the explanation of the emergent philosophical approach for self-study as creative practice that I followed. This creative-centered framework for embodied transformation weaves spiritual philosophy with my artistic process to sustain a holistic life practice, where the self, seen as an integrated whole, is also a direct reflection of the greater, singular and holistic existence.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my committee John Mitchell, Becky Dyer, and Amira De La Garza for their continuous contributions and support. All of your advice and help has been essential in my success. In addition to my committee, thank you to Pegge Vissicaro for everything you have done over the last three years. Your care for my work and me has helped me through many struggles and I am so grateful for your encouragement and contributions.

To my incredible support system of friends: Avalon Johnson, Amanda Ling, Keziah Okonkwo, Britta Joy Peterson, Kristopher K. .Q. Pourzal, and Laurel Wall-Maclane. I cannot thank you enough for your belief in me and my work. Whether it was the countless hours listening to me over the phone, reading my work, or sipping on sangria together, you have all been greatly appreciated!

To my family whom I have come to love and respect exponentially greater over the past three years in part to my research in self-study. We have all shaped each other and from learning myself I have come to understand them with more compassion and appreciation. Their support and pride in my journey and me astounds me and has kept me moving forward. Thank you for being my gang.

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## PREFACE

My curiosity about identity and understanding the true Self shapes my research process. In early 2011, I took a course called Theater For Social Change, where I was asked to write an essay describing my identity as it pertained to target groups such as race, sex, class, and so forth. I find this essay, titled *Other*, to be particularly appropriate in presenting my general perspective on identity while also giving insight into my state of being just prior to beginning my journey of transformation via my thesis research on self-study as creative practice.

### OTHER

Poor, bi-sexual, secular, over-weight, short, multi-racial, able-bodied, border identified, disadvantaged by association female adult. My whole life I have considered myself “other.” Whether it was the bubble I filled in on my standardized tests or college applications, when having to identify as something I typically defined myself as outside of the norm and certainly not privileged. Eventually, I just stopped identifying with these terms altogether. All of these prerequisites to my life are nothing more than my given states of identity, nothing more than labels. Labels help to define things but they also help to support differentiation between people. If the ultimate goal is to give all people equality, barriers between them must be broken. Labels should be used to explain things we identify with rather than identify as. I see the difference as when you can identify with something you are giving it recognition, as opposed to identifying as something, which calls for assuming the role it entails. In *Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Education*, the authors recognize that “oppressive systems work most effectively when both advantaged and targeted group members internalize their roles and accept their positions in the hierarchical relationship between them” (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007). This statement reflects what I see as the root

of all misconceptions relating to identity and the oppressions that manifest from the meanings we place on different characteristics.

I am in a place of wanting to take advantage of the roles I can easily play based on my “given identities,” however I strongly believe in denouncing those things, and I am in the processes of trying to understand what my true identity is. This requires questioning the norms defined by the hegemony of the rich, white, heterosexual male patriarchy, and perhaps having a bit of denial for what some people call reality. But then the question of where reality exists comes to mind—do I accept the terms that are given or do I make my own reality? I challenge the things that appear to be one way based on “facts,” such as my ethnicity, because I do not identify with them, let alone as them. I do not identify with being many of the things that I supposedly am, although I can and sometimes choose to. I understand that I live within a female body, one that contains blended DNA yielding caramel-brown skin. I understand that I live within a short and stout body that is capable of moving and performing without disability. Yet I am not fully convinced that those labels define who I am. I am not my body. Nor am I my mind. I inhabit this body and mind, but they are tools for me to utilize in order to live in this time and place. The question still remains, who am I?

On the one hand, in order to unveil yourself you must first recognize the cloak you wear. You have to see it, feel it, understand it, in order to know how to take it off. On the other hand, it can be difficult to come into awareness of the cloak without eventually believing it is who you truly are. We are not the cloaks that blind us from seeing past our differences. We are not any of that which we choose to identify as or with. I understand the cloak to be our body, the mind, and the ego. The ego is the biggest trickster of them all because the ego is what whispers mischievously to the mind and convinces our mind to

believe that it is real, real flesh and blood. Therefore our mind identifies with the body and together they convince the self that they are what the self is, using our emotions and thoughts to persuade the self that what they (body and mind) are experiencing is real/reality. If you can recognize when the body or mind is trying to persuade you, and you can hush them, I find that there is another, softer, calmer, more patient voice that can be heard. It can be heard when you are quiet enough to listen, and it always speaks truthfully unlike the body and mind who are easily swayed by emotions and frequently exaggerate their interpretations of experience. At this point, I am starting to believe that this voice is who I truly am. Furthermore, I believe that this voice is the same in all of us, and that is how and why we are all the same. Kind of confusing, but this is where I am in understanding identity.

As far as explaining how I perceive power and oppression in regards to the social groups I can identify with, I am torn between explaining the stereotypical explanation versus explaining my true experiences and beliefs with these ideas. Based on all of the philosophical beliefs I tried to explain, I think it is clear I'm not entirely invested in the idea that we should be boxing ourselves into certain categories of description in order to define ourselves. I recognize that my family, from recent to old generations, has experienced racism, classism, discrimination, and hatred for a long time. By association and first hand experience I have also come to understand how the norms set in place by the hegemony of historical white privilege has created challenges for me to succeed that some other people may not have experienced, or have to experience. I also recognize that I have never associated with being a certain race, which means that I have also never associated my disadvantages or advantages with being a certain race. In all honesty, the only type of oppression that I can associate with that has something to do with my social groups is being poor. Yet I tend to avoid thinking in those terms because I believe that it is feeding into the notion that I am poor, which I

perceive as a trivial factor in my life thus far. By even using the words and defining things the way we do, I feel we are reinforcing the very system out of which we want to break.

I mostly see the disadvantages of being impoverished my whole life because I recognize the social structure we live in favors wealth and supports those who are able to afford or invest in certain things. Looking at my life and what I have been able to accomplish with or without wealth, being classified as poor has proven somewhat insignificant because I have still been able to do what I want to do—study and invest in my passion for the arts. Of course I could look at my experience and pick out petty things that could have made my life seemingly easier, but like they say, “the grass is always greener on the other side.” Oppressors and those who benefit from oppression are also negatively affected by this structure of inequality. For example, they are often blind to their privilege and can struggle to comprehend other people, therefore lacking empathy for others. Through empathy we learn compassion. I believe radical changes could come from empathy and compassion as opposed to pity or worse, ignorance, neglect, or outright persecution. How does an oppressor strive for something outside of himself? It is more about humanity and less about the gains he experiences because of his privilege. Everyone loses, in some way, from inequality.

My take on this is not that we need to work vigorously to change the systems in place; we need to give more attention inward to our true self. I am hoping to continue my quest for understanding of true identity and that by “changing” or “unveiling” myself, I will transcend the limitations of the descriptions we currently have for understanding oppression and identity. I think if we are living in a state of true understanding and awareness for self, all of these other things no longer have as much weight, and the way in which we relate to other people will naturally act in accordance to the realization that we are all equal and the same.

However cliché it may sound, we are all one. My viewpoint is something that I am in the process of practicing; it is not something that I have fully realized.

...

I include this paper to demonstrate the cyclical nature of the life-long process of self-discovery. Two years later, I see that many of my beliefs are fundamentally the same. However, I find myself in a more confident and grounded place and able to articulate my beliefs with more clarity. My thesis process, illustrated in the following document, was the vehicle for this transformation.



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

*i feel like over the years, all i've been doing is gradually shedding...  
shedding layers of ignorance...  
shedding layers of need and desire...  
naïveté...  
every time a layer is shed there is such a great sense of freedom...  
but there are times i feel uneasy because i'm being exposed...  
i'm being a little more vulnerable to the world... and if you know me, you know that is not my favorite...  
there is excitement in all of this because you know a change is happening...  
but there is also a doubt or worry that comes from the moment of choice that happens before change...  
the uncertainty of your options can lead you to worry if you're making the "right" choice...  
what if you decide to cloak yourself in the moment of frailty...  
moving backwards, as a friend once said...  
lately the shedding is bringing me to a very timid place...  
instead of gracefully letting go of the old, i almost feel stripped down...  
things are being ripped away...  
as if the layer of skin shedding off of my body is actually all of my skin itself...  
i feel open like a wound...  
susceptible to who knows what...  
crouching in a corner, hoping not to be seen...  
somewhat embarrassed and ashamed of my own ignorance...  
unsure of where to step next...  
hoping to find a way to embrace this unveiling...  
but very fragile...  
  
wary...*

– February 19, 2011

This thesis document encapsulates the findings of my research process in which I studied my self, my artistic process, and the interconnectivity among the various aspects of my life. Those findings are two-fold as they relate to the creation of three original works and my personal growth. This document encapsulates the three works, *swimminginthepsyche*, *applecede* and *The 21st Century Adventures of Wonder Woman*, chronologically from their performance dates. My personal growth and transformation is expressed throughout the paper and presented in the explanation of the emergent philosophical approach for self-study as creative practice that I followed. This creative-centered framework for embodied

transformation weaves spiritual philosophy with my artistic process to sustain a holistic life practice, where the self, seen as an integrated whole, is also a direct reflection of the greater, singular existence.

My experience using self-study as creative practice is rooted in contemplative exercises and active engagement in intuitive, creative expression. It has become a life practice that colors the way I view and understand my whole life experience; as opposed to just the way I participate within the realm of art-making. Practicing and now articulating this method has highlighted the reciprocal nature of self-inquiry and creative expression: the more an artist activates her creativity, the more she becomes self-aware, while the more an artist actively pursues self-awareness, the more she becomes creatively inspired.

My research process began with many unknowns and a determination to see what would be revealed through the process of looking into my Self, and therefore my life. My impetus for using self-study as a model for creative practice came from my desire to establish a working relationship with my Self. This desire was inspired by an experience I call the breaking point. I had an emotional breakdown in the middle of one of my classes, in which I was crying uncontrollably for two hours straight. This event occurred early on in my second semester of grad school during my somatic course called Movement Practices. But this breaking point had been brewing for years and while it shocked and confused me at first, with a bit of reflection I quickly understood how and why this was brought about. Unresolved physical and sexual assault from my teenage years created a strong instability that left me hypersensitive to many things. At the time I had no idea, but I was dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While I was safe in school and in Arizona, I felt unsafe being myself completely, felt unsafe sharing my secrets with my new friends and colleagues, I felt unsafe being exposed. During my studies at ASU, somatic practices are deeply ingrained

in all of the course work, and while it was a part of my undergraduate training, at ASU it has been much more concentrated. With the somatic work I was practicing in my classes, I was aware that unresolved issues from the past can resurface. However, it did not dawn on me that it would happen to me so intensely. Among the various problems I experienced at the time of the breaking point was that I felt very challenged by the incongruous relationship between my artistic and spiritual practices and beliefs. Looking back, the issue seems trite. Nonetheless, it shook me to my core. How could I be working to practice respect towards all people and then turn around and disrespect them in the name of art? Something felt really off in my foundational beliefs and actions.

I had fallen into a deep depression and was completely disassociated from reality. I experienced a deep lack of identity (as alluded to in *Other*) that had reached an all time high just after entering the graduate program. Through reflection, I came to understand that old and new values and systems of thought were disconnected, both in my mind and in my practice. From this disconnect, a separation occurred particularly between the creative and spiritual aspects of my life, which subsequently supported my belief in my own fragmented identity. I felt I was not living up to the values of the spiritual path I believed in; furthermore, I felt like anything I touched in a creative sense was going to be a complete disaster. I was disgusted with myself, and that disgust was a deeply rooted issue based on my past traumas. However, this self-disgust was manifesting in the one part of my life that had always been my safe haven: dance. My overall self-worth was thoroughly shot to pieces and something had to change. From this experience, I declared my primary focus to be to understand who I am more thoroughly, to deepen my relationship with myself, and to commit to living my life as a unified and integrated experience. By living this way, the relationship between my behavior and internal processes with my external experience would

become more transparent, ideally I would comprehend my life with more clarity. These factors represent the foundation of my research as well as the new foundation for my life.

The goal of my thesis research was to establish a holistic, self-reflective, creative practice as a means to know myself better. At the time of proposing this study I felt knowing myself better would allow me to understand my own psychological patterns of behavior, my artistic process, my needs and desires. Further, I anticipated that in knowing myself more deeply, I would be able to make wiser decisions throughout my life, be that in the creative process, relationships, academic, and career situations. Through this research, I believed I would come to understand who I am more deeply by establishing a working relationship with my inner Self; as a means to this end, I would establish my own unique creative practice. In order to become aware of this reflexive practice, I set out to investigate what I was currently doing in life and the art-making process with the model of creating three new works. It was of utmost importance to me to engage in a research project that addressed my current interests while at the same time provided me with something that would serve me beyond graduate school. I hoped to understand my creative process for my own artistic benefits, as well as for my career as a facilitator and teacher.

In addition to making three pieces, over the course of my research process I underwent treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) primarily using Eye-Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). In addition to this healing modality, I was introduced to Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to establish coping skills for undergoing treatment for PTSD. Coming from a background in dance, I was interested in body-centered therapies, which led me to Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE). My experiences with each of these forms of therapy have been a critical part of my journey.

There are many theories and modalities related to self-discovery. However, I have chosen to focus on a small handful because of their strong influence on my work and personal experience. In addition to the aforementioned therapies, the following philosophies have influenced my process: yogic philosophy, chakra theory, Jungian philosophy, and the Four Seasons of Ethnography. I view each modality as a language, and each language has a particular way of explaining the human experience. As a practitioner and teacher of yoga, this practice is extremely influential on my philosophic views, values, and is referenced frequently throughout my work. One of the fundamental principles I have been following is the understanding that “all philosophies are useful, all philosophies are incomplete” and we must not be attached to them, as said by Paul Grilley, yin yoga master. I thoroughly enjoy learning how various modalities explain the phenomena of life and learning to see where there is crossover between the philosophies, or languages if you will. Often times the crossover is where I find the most useful tools and perspectives, and perhaps the path to the Truth.

But what is Truth? What is self or the Self? In order to understand this document, perhaps my personal definitions will provide some insight into my process. While at the start of my research these definitions were not clear, I am starting to feel more confident in expressing the distinctions between truth, Truth, self and Self. Truth with a capital ‘T’ describes the universal, ultimate, singular, and absolute reality whereas truth is the individual perspective or view on reality. The truth that we perceive, we think we understand. It is the asymptote to Truth. Meanwhile, self, myself, one’s self describes our personal life, behavior, emotion, experience. And the Self is again something universal. To me, if I may be so bold, the Self is synonymous or at least highly related to God, the Divine, and the universal. The Self is consciousness. Pure energy, light, love. So this process of self-discovery has been to

really examine and digest my personal history and behaviors, my emotions and thoughts.

While I find it important to give some articulation for how I see these two concepts, I question how necessary the distinctions become in the end if the purpose is in the integration of self/Self/life/environment/universe. The distinctions almost become moot when the focus is on integration and the ultimate goal is awareness of all things.

## Chapter 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Using the model of making three works related to my personal self-discovery, my research process spanned the course of one full year. In chronological order of performance, the pieces are: *swimminginthepsyche*, *applecede*, and *The 2st Century Adventures of Wonder Woman*. Drawing on varying content, each work followed a unique methodology allowing for various perspectives in my journey of self-study and my artistic process. The most important philosophical value going into this project was to live as one whole person in one, inclusive life. Although this is undeniably true for everyone based on the laws of physics, for quite some time my mind created imaginary separations between certain aspects of my life and personality. This research project was not so much an attempt to change my life as it was a radical shift in my perspective, to view my life and self as one integrated whole. I recognized my perception of the aspects of my life being separate from one another and this was a problem. From a holistic perspective, everything became fair game in regard to creative process: past, present, future, school, family, friendships, relationships, therapy, spiritual practice, and dreams. All of these facets of my life became available to my creative process when I began to view these facets as interconnected. This holistic perspective required a particularly expansive, non-linear frame of mind, which is reflected in the emergent perspective for self-study and creative practice.

Many questions circled in my mind at the start of this research process. Who am I beyond my physical descriptions? What is the 'true self' and more importantly, how does one actively engage in a relationship with his/her true self? What emerges from intentionally viewing life as one, inclusive experience and the person as one, whole being? How does this affect art-making? What is my artistic process and how is it reflective of me/my life? These

questions all related to identity and how to be in the world. My findings are therefore more philosophical than practical, in the sense that I am not providing a definitive method for practicing creativity or self-inquiry, but a lens through which to view one's experience. I have come to realize the importance of artists understanding not only their artistic process, but also really understanding their life process—asking: how do I live in the world? What are my values and aspirations as a person? What are my boundaries? What are the principles I live by? How does my art relate and reflect to the beliefs and principles I have set for myself? I recognize more and more that this research project focused on self, not to solely define who I am, but rather as a means for me to understand how I want to relate to myself, participate in life, and potentially improve my experience by uncovering and rectifying the mistruths that I've been living by. Mistruths such as the thought that I am not my body, that I am not worthy of love or respect, that I am bad/disgraceful, and that I hate myself. These mistruths were revealed within the process of my EMDR therapy for PTSD. This research project attempted to answer the Greek aphorism, *know thyself*. However, I conducted this research project with the understanding that it will go on for a lifetime, as each person is always in a state of becoming. I sought to learn ways of engaging in an active relationship with self as a means to be present during my continual state of emerging. The goal in being present is to be aware of the current moment, not hung up on past traumas or future worries. Being present is to be embodied in the current moment. I entered the research without definitive plans or expectations; I entered curious to find out what taking the time to explore myself would reveal. The following questions are what my thesis research is centered on:

- How can self-study be utilized as a method of creative practice?
- How can a holistic and integrated personal and artistic lifestyle be sustained beyond the thesis research and graduate school?



In the following chapters I will account for the process of making each of three original works, by describing the general methodology I worked with, what each work examined in the personal introspective sense as well as artistically, what I discovered, what changed in my awareness, as well as the actualization of the project and the actualization of Self. The works are discussed in chronological order of performance, beginning with my first work, *swimminginthepsyche*, followed by *applecede* and finally *The 21st Century Adventures of Wonder Woman*. I will first lay out my goals for this project and my general thoughts on the arc that my work on this project followed. Next, I discuss the process I went through in creating the piece and then I discuss the process and motivations behind creating the work. Each chapter is concluded with thoughts on what was gained in making the work artistically as well as how the individual piece has contributed to my personal growth and understanding of myself and the greater Self.

Chapter 3

SWIMMINGINTHEPSYCHE

*I asked myself, who?  
What is beneath this body?  
What is at the root of my identity?  
the landscape is desolate and I can't find my way... desolate yet euphoric...  
I feel like I'm getting somewhere  
closer to the 'I know' and the 'I am'  
He was swirling and colliding in thin air it shook him as if to say WAKE UP!  
There's smoke everywhere the elusive nature of the haze captivates,  
asking for attention and yearning for touch  
So you reach for it, it disintegrates  
What is it behind the nature of the smoke trail?  
What is it beneath my flesh?  
What else is there to rid of?  
My mind is swirling and slashing and falling and oscillating  
Are you nauseous?  
Are you noxious?  
It keeps coming near me just out of reach  
Just far enough away so I can't make out the words  
Zoom out and everything shrinks as it grows  
Where are my feet now?  
He lands on the soft quicksand face first  
Should we begin unpacking?  
Take out my belongings  
It looks as if it lasts forever, an infinite abyss of grains of sand  
Am I here or in the subconscious sand dunes in my dreams?  
Let's make sense  
What is this unknowing, unknowing unconscious  
Do the babies hold the answers?  
The intellectualizing might be the only stifling experience  
They're the closest thing to being untainted, unconscious  
Is that where I really am?  
Where are you?  
I'm the fog rolling over the  
I'm the obstacle forcing you to slowly step  
Slowly think      Slowly fall  
Up  
I am  
I am the cause of your inquerie  
Is it safe to proclaim who I am?  
There is no direct pathway  
The shortest distance between two points does not exist*

– November 2012

## CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

A mirage of the ancient aphorism “know thyself,” *swimminginthepsyche* is a digital installation piece inhabited by a cyclical yet fleeting live dance performance. The juxtaposition of the interminable and ephemeral components conveys the ever-present yet ever-changing process of self-discovery. As collaborators, Kristopher K. Q. Pourzal and I submerge our selves into the depths of the question "how does one actively engage in self-discovery?" by embarking on an excavation of the subconscious. Our interdisciplinary performance presents a real-time synthesis of the perpetual ebb and flow of personal understanding, and therefore life— a journey that oscillates between states of disorientation and cognizance. Tantalizing projections of desolate sand dunes transport the viewer to the vast and dangerous oasis of the psyche. This poetic metaphor encapsulates the continuous journey of self-awakening through layers of original choreography, rich visual imagery, dynamic text, and multi-media technology.

This collaboration marked the beginning of my research process and was the first of the three pieces I set out to create. I was still in the early stages of my treatment for PTSD, and was oscillating between states of disorientation and embodiment. During our conversations, my collaborator and I expressed a vocabulary for our current disposition. At this time we experimented with movement concepts, studied texts on identity, experimented with poetry and prose while constantly staying in dialogue about our experiences to establish a wide range of data to source for the work. We had an interest in touch and the lack thereof as it affects one’s sense of aliveness. Investigating our personal histories established both a personal and communal sense of understanding of who we are. Interestingly, discussion was the primary component for this collaboration. Our conversations were like something I have never experienced before so consistently. We would open up conversation and allow it to

unravel us. Without fail, the conversations started in one place, revealed something exciting, then presented a challenge, and eventually came full circle to a sense of greater understanding and direction. Not surprisingly, our overall collaboration also followed this arc.

## PHASE ONE: DISORIENTATION

Within the first few weeks of rehearsals we set upon examining broad concepts and collecting information. Non-judgmentally trying out different activities and exercises, we built a vocabulary between us to describe our experience within the context of rehearsal and how it related to our experience at large. At this point, we agreed that it would be better to try and create a piece that expressed what we experienced in our process of inquiry and discovery as opposed to trying to teach the audience anything we had learned. We felt that an audience might be able to relate to our shared experience of trying to “know thyself” in an emotional and visceral way rather than a cognitive way. Then began our discovery stage in which we articulated four primary terms and phrases that we felt described our experience most accurately.

The four terms we used all relate to a sense of feeling disoriented, confused, ungrounded, disembodied, disconnected, and fragmented. The terms are as follows: 1. Vestibular motion; 2. Swirling and colliding; 3. Moving towards and away simultaneously; and 4. Oscillating. The chart below, Table 1, describes the embodied states of disorientation with physical movement ideas, connections to the “everyday” experience, and spiritual wisdoms understood from this exploration.

Table 1

*Four Terms for swimminginthepsyche*

	<b>Physical Embodiment / Movement During Piece</b>	<b>Connections to Everyday Life</b>	<b>Spiritual Wisdom / Understanding</b>
<b>Vestibular Motion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throwing self off balance</li> <li>• Keeping the head in non-stop motion</li> <li>• Finding moments of stillness and balance in the midst of throwing self off</li> <li>• Activating the vestibulocochlear nerves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of being thrown off balance at every turn</li> <li>• Feeling ungrounded</li> <li>• Feeling un-centered</li> <li>• Feeling unable to see clearly what is going on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lost to be found- Perhaps one can lose himself in order to find himself.</li> <li>• Although a storm of energy is sensed, finding moments of balance and stillness within chaos is a necessary skill for getting back on track</li> <li>• Feeling as though somehow energy is cleared through this disorientation</li> <li>• Sometimes total deconstruction is necessary for profound reconstruction— death and rebirth</li> </ul>
<b>Swirling &amp; Colliding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flailing around and constantly bumping up against things on an atomic level</li> <li>• Image of bodies swirling in space, colliding with the environment</li> <li>• Near misses became of interest – almost hitting each other with full force and speed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas swirling around in one’s mind and colliding with others</li> <li>• Sense of being beaten up by particular situations, environment, and/or nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are the signs or the opportunities to wake up and see what all the movement is grounded in</li> <li>• As in a dream, sometimes we need the physical jolt of being pinched to wake us up</li> </ul>
<b>Oscillating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swaying within a personal kinesphere</li> <li>• Swaying within a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appears to be the most frequent example of our</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If this is the experience we are most often in, what is</li> </ul>

	<p>large kinesphere</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orbiting each other</li> <li>• Awareness of perpetual movement internally, on a cellular level</li> </ul>	<p>experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While trying to reach towards and away from something simultaneously, it turns into a ping pong effect of going back and forth between ideas, beliefs, truths, desires and states of being</li> <li>• Unable to settle</li> <li>• Being indecisive</li> <li>• Wavering between two sides of an issue, flip-flopping</li> </ul>	<p>the space between the end points and can that space be more open in order to slow down the process and perhaps see the patterns and change them before the cycle continues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coming into and falling out of awareness of the unchanging nature of being</li> <li>• Oscillation is the key characteristic of vibration, which is universal in the sense that everything has a unique vibration</li> <li>• Realizing that on a macro level our perception of something may be unchanging (vibration of the earth) but on micro level the only unchanging thing is change (frequency of the vibration of the earth)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Moving Towards &amp; Away Simultaneously</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving towards something while looking and reaching away from it</li> <li>• A sense of pulling and pushing at the same time</li> <li>• Image of us jumping towards the sun while the wind carries us back and keeps us in the same place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tug-of-war of life, being pulled in many directions at once</li> <li>• Stagnation from being pulled in multiple directions but not necessarily knowing which way to go, and/or being overwhelmed or fearful of choosing to focus in one area</li> <li>• Being pulled towards one thing then doubting and pulling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While understanding the belief that Self is not simply a bodily expression, we wanted to transcend the body and also know ourselves in a fully embodied sense, which appeared to be two seemingly oppositional desires</li> <li>• Dualism is contradictory by nature and can therefore present</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging the wringing effort quality (from the Laban Framework)</li> <li>• Expansion &amp; Collapse</li> <li>• Down to go up, which is also a common modern-dance idiom in reference to plié/relevé and jumping. Further, it relates to the lower-upper body pattern in Laban-Barteneiff Fundamentals, which is the 4th body pattern humans develop as infants. This body pattern “can be expressive of basic instincts for self survival, status, personal power, being grounded in the search supporting a reach into the environment. To ‘push through to the goal’, linear-directional goals.” (Hackney, 1998)</li> </ul>	<p>away from it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing both sides of an issue and perhaps being caught in the middle of it</li> <li>• Understanding of duality/polarity</li> <li>• Negotiation between internal and external activity, between allowing things to happen or making things happen, between withdrawing and expressing</li> </ul>	<p>disorienting understanding, invoking a desire for something beyond this problematic dichotomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppositional forces, although potentially disorienting, are what inevitably also keep us balanced</li> <li>• Buying into one half of the common idiom “what goes up must come down,” the counterpart of this statement provides an explanation for the more challenging moments in life: down to go up</li> </ul>
Inertia QED DeWitt © 2013			

Toward the end of our rehearsal process, we took a trip to the Imperial Sand Dunes of California. We wanted to find a location that reflected our experience of feeling infinitesimal inside an infinite universe. I felt dwarfed by the vastness of the dunes, as I did by the extent of the quest to know myself. We recorded video of phrase work we had developed, or at

least we tried. We did not anticipate the challenges of dancing in the sand. While my partner literally knocked the wind out of himself from landing belly first into the sand, I found myself battered by the wind and unable to keep my footing. At the time I was also, unknowingly, dealing with plantar fasciitis, which made it incredibly painful to walk. Physically speaking, plantar fasciitis is typical among dancers. However, I believe this injury was a mere manifestation of my energetic setting at the time. This physical manifestation was a metaphor for my experience, and a calling for me to reassess the way I was walking through life.

The Imperial Sand Dunes held an undeniable beauty and an eerie danger. Although we marveled in awe of it all, we were both quietly suffering from invading this majestic space. Could this experience be a metaphor for the risk of swimming in the psyche? Luckily for us, some ATV drivers had arrived to play in the terrain, so we took it as our cue to pack up our things and exit the premises. In our discussion of the experience, we both recognized just how unexpectedly and appropriately reflective that experience was of our personal sense of existence at the time: disoriented and bruised by the struggle of being on one's own two feet.

Performing a score based on these four primary terms and phrases, to our surprise, actually brought us closer to feeling connected to our inner selves. After our performances, we both experienced a natural high, different than a normal performance. Our sense of time was altered, our bodies were calm yet energized, grounded yet floating, and a strong sense of being alive prevailed. We each felt a strong connection to our body, each other, and the vitality of life.



## PHASE TWO: EXPANSION

The sand dunes offered a perfect symbol for our experience when we began, and in the expansion phase we recognized a new meaning for this symbol's role in the work. The vast horizon reflected our sense of awareness for our selves in space. While taking time off, we both experienced a shift, leaving us feeling more grounded. For Kristopher, the shift went from feeling rather lost to feeling a sense of being "home" within his environment and body. His sense of home had something to do with ownership and comfort inhabiting a given space, particularly within his own body. I had just returned from my 30 Hour Yin Yoga Teacher Training and had a life-changing experience seeing an energy-worker. When we came to discuss our new sense of groundedness, we also recognized this expansiveness helped us feel more connected to others and our environment. We started to dream up what an updated version of our work would look like, one that would now reflect our sense of growing awareness and sure-footedness. This dream incorporated a structural design in the shape of the Fibonacci spiral, with a 0'0 point as the center of the spiral and the furthest point away from the center ascending to a height of 12 feet. For various reasons, mostly not having the skill set or time, we never saw this vision to fruition. However, the act of dreaming it with extensive detail was itself a process of making something artistic along the way. I have sketches and floor plans for all aspects of this project, as well as a proposal to present this work in a local gallery space.

## PHASE THREE: LIBERATION

As stated above, the arc of our conversations always followed a particular order: idea to insight to challenge to greater insight, and so did our artistic process itself. This arc is evident up to this point: We began with an idea to create a work that reflected our journey of self-discovery. We had insight about just how accurate our creation was in reflecting that

journey. Then we set out to up the ante by re-evaluating our journey as it had evolved. Next, we reached a challenge: how to bring about such a lofty project when we neither had the time nor skills to see it through. At this point, instead of pushing forward with realizing our grandiose vision of creating a structure in the shape of a Fibonacci spiral, we checked back in with each other and reflected upon our original questions and desires for the project. We had originally wanted to create a piece that helped us reflect our experience, but we also wanted to make something that helped us come into contact with our inner Self, our true Self. This desire manifested as an experience performing *swimminginthepsyche* that helped us feel alive. Our original performance felt like a moving meditation in which we were in motion the entire time and shifted between different states of consciousness. By the end of both the seven-minute piece and three-month process, the original work left us feeling more connected to our body, our Self, and our existence. After a year of considering these questions, both of us had processed many personal struggles. I had completed my treatment for PTSD and felt like a renewed person. We then asked ourselves: How could we make something that highlighted our current sense of being alive?

Inspired by the Scissor Sisters latest song, *Let's Have a Kiki*, where “a kiki is a party for calming all your nerves” we recognized this inherent desire in all of us to let loose, be free, have fun, and feel good about being ourselves, about being alive. We devised a plan for a new relic of artistry to reflect this landmark in our collaboration. Playfully referring to this aspect of our collaboration as “Cousin Kiki’s Open House: A moving meditation” we danced freely, jamming to our favorite songs. Letting the music fill us and inspire us to move. We asked ourselves: Could we release tension and experience ecstatic joy in various locations in the city? Could this moving meditation not only reflect the action of the participants, but also the nomadic nature of the work to change locations for every

performance? Like the sand dunes taught us, location reflects something about who a person is, so how does one's location affect one's ability to be ecstatic? This open house dance party is an experiment in finding release and connection intra- and interpersonally. Our natural state of being, as I learned studying the fight/flight, freeze, and homeostasis states in a TRE Level I training, is a healthy state of relationship to self, environment, and community. Our moving meditation is reflective of this state perhaps supporting a transcendence of the body into bliss and ecstasy in movement.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Prior to beginning this project I knew I wanted to make a piece aimed in self-discovery and the search for the true self. For the first time I was living hours away from my hometown, feeling different from my peers in the sense of artistic processes as well as upbringings, and I did not feel safe sharing my spiritual questions with my peers and professors. This experience left me feeling very lonely and craving someone else to connect with on a deeper level. Due to my fear of not being worthy or valuable, I hadn't made any new work since my first semester in the program. In retrospect, I now realize wanting to work with someone else was, on a superficial level, a way for me to feel safe making work by sharing the responsibility of creating the work. But perhaps on a deeper level, I was searching for a way to reconnect with the world and find my homeostasis state as I was still experiencing some disassociation.

I met Kristopher when he came for his audition into the MFA program. Spending time with him and seeing his work gave me hope. Following my intuition, I asked him if he would be interested in working with me on this project. I sensed that we might find common ground in creative and spiritual inquiry surrounding questions on identity. Luckily,

we did. What I find most intriguing or revealing about working with another person is its reflection of the communal nature of the homeostasis state.

Finally, *swimminginthepsyche, as a duet*, has another important distinction. *Applecede* and *The 2st Century Adventures of Wonder Woman* were solos that taught me a lot about my personality and unique characteristics, however the duet grounds my understanding of how to live my life. More and more as I look back on *swimminginthepsyche*, I find my understanding of life tied up in the symbolic meaning of the work. For example, there is an idea about losing one's self to find herself that came up in the process. I've recently clarified that you lose your self in order to find Self—shedding attachments to the personal in order to connect to the universal. The phases we went through, the language we used to describe our experience, and the understanding we gained from the work all form golden nuggets of information that I have held onto and often refer back to as metaphors for how to live my life.

## Chapter 4

### APPLECEDE

symbol | 'sɪmbəl | *noun*

*a thing that represents or stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something abstract.*

cede | sēd | *verb* [ *with obj.* ]

*give up (power or territory)*

#### CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The Four Seasons of *applecede* describes the course of this research in reference to the Four Seasons of Ethnography, where each stage of my process correlates to a season of the year. In this ethnographic methodology, the seasons act as a metaphoric reference for the type of actions one takes during each stage of research. While I was enrolled in Dr. Amira De La Garza's course in Advanced Ethnographic Methods, I loosely followed this methodology in the making of *applecede*, an auto-ethnographic study of three of my alter-ego personas, Blackwidow, Nemesis, and Erzulie. These alter-ego personas are distinguished by specific emotional habits and thoughts that manifest into physical archetypal behaviors that are often in extremes and differ from my neutral sense of self. The creative product of this research is a multi-media piece combining intervention art, live sculpture, video, song, and movement.

#### SPRING

Spring season is about preparation (de la Garza, 2000). The spring season is a time of regeneration, new growth, fresh ideas, and budding love, but not every spring is full of sunshine and joy. Love was an apparent theme within the season, but more accurately, my spring was full of foggy days, April showers, and muddy earth. I was saturated with ideas but without focus. Many things were out of sight, and just like the intangible fog, these ideas

were hard to materialize and define. During this season, however, a rich soil was being nourished for the eventual budding of an orchard of apple blossoms.

After a couple misdirected attempts to understand field notes, I finally came to understand that the nature of my research was an auto-ethnographic study as opposed to an ethnographic work, which require slightly different approaches in gathering information. I needed to approach the research with more creative methods for observing my subject, myself, and Dr. Amira de la Garza assisted me directly with this work. My first exercise was what I call an Associative Free Write-- a series of note taking focused on a piece I made prior to starting grad school called *Nocturnal Goddess*, which I had intended to develop more thoroughly.

When choreographing this work, both my alter-ego persona, Blackwidow, and the real black widow spider, inspired me. This alter-ego was my primary focus upon starting to choreograph this work. However, after moving into the Associative Free Write, I realized I would have to undertake the relationship between my three main alter-egos: Blackwidow, Nemesis, and Erzulie. Described to me by Dr. de la Garza, the Associative Free Write exercise is done in three rounds, each lasting ten minutes. Much like writing field notes and coming back over them with fill-ins, I spent ten minutes writing as much as I could on what my solo was about at that time. Then, again, I went back through the notes to add more information as it came to me. In the final round I added information, posed questions, and began to make note of connections that stood out.

Upon completing all three rounds I had a better sense of where I was coming from with my interest in making this piece. However, I was still doubtful about what I was "supposed to be doing" with the research, so I scheduled to meet with Dr. de la Garza for advice and instruction on what to do next. During the meeting, she coached me through a

non-linear approach to synthesis. I went through every line of the Associative Free Write and on small pieces of paper wrote out the notes that stood out. Descriptive language like "cunning" and "dangerous" and descriptions of actions and behaviors such as "bored by options" and "over compensating control" are examples of the notes I created. From four pages in the Associate Free Write came around 100 tiny notes that were then grouped into categories. The challenge is to group the notes into less obvious configurations or "categories" than simply words or experiences with similar meanings. Often I found myself putting notes together that each said or described the same thing. Instead of fighting this, I felt it was necessary and acceptable to go ahead with the blatantly obvious categories as this gave me a stronger sense of what type of information I was working with as a whole. To move forward from this elemental stage, I found that practicing trust and intuition is necessary for the non-linear exercise to progress. It requires playing freely with the groupings until deeper connections emerge. After roughly an hour practicing this method with Dr. De la Garza, I went home to continue working with the notes and spent the next couple of days studying the notes to find what other categories might surface. The most outstanding categories from the Associative Free Write are: Danger to Self, Danger to Others, Secrets, Pride, Motivation, and Tactics.

The groupings or categories that this process revealed helped me understand what was underneath the initial information provided in the Associative Free Write. Each category was named based on its components and often become the axial code; the components helped define the properties of the axial code that emerged from the process. For example, a pile of notes with words like "wanting more in a relationship," "drinking & driving," and "deep down became lonely" are all direct quotes from my Associate Free Write that describe things I keep secret from others. Naming the axial code "Secrets" gave me direct reference

to the vocabulary used when I categorized the notes. At first I only had the tiny notes that were linked together with the commonality of being secret, which are my original categories. However, these became axial codes once they became more clearly defined. Accordingly, the axial code Secrets eventually came to include the following categories of behavior: sexual desires, substance abuse, being abused, and negative cognitions. The axial code is thus defined as any type of secretive behavior demonstrated or perceived, and is often linked with shame.

After using the non-linear exercise to find deeper connections, the next step in the method was to draw a Timeline-- a linear model charting my lived experiences for each axial code. Relying heavily on my memory, the Timeline charts specific examples of events within the six categories from my Associate Free Write. Drawing the Timeline employs a linear form to allow for visually recognizing patterns of events based on the frequency they occurred during my life. This linear form also allows for examining what events might catalyze any given pattern of my own behavior I am studying. The Timeline puts into perspective pivotal events within my personal history to gain understanding of overarching themes and behavioral patterns. Originally, the Timeline did not inspire much insight into my patterning. However, in combination with Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing therapy, I eventually recognized that there are relationships between my personal traits and my responses to certain types of events which I have experienced since early on in my childhood. That is to say, I saw that I have consistently responded or coped with similar types of events in similar ways. For example, the most consistent response or coping skill I found is spite. I use spite as motivation to persevere and 'do better' than what I perceive others think I am capable of doing or being.



While I was investigating my patterns and my alteregos, I happened upon a book called Sextrology, the Astrology of Sex and the Sexes that offered an in depth discussion of each Astrological Zodiac sign according to gender and sexual preference (Starsky & Cox, 2004). From reading this chapter on straight Gemini women, I was inspired by the many stories that referenced the apple. This was the jumping off point into the creative process.

## SUMMER

The overlap of spring to summer came just around the first pivotal point in my research. This overlap aided me in making a smooth transition from “sowing the seeds” and establishing a foundation to “tending the garden” and developing ideas. All of the doubt and confusion that had been fogging my understanding at the start of the spring season cleared long enough for me to admire the wonderful blossoming garden at the start of my summer. I felt confident that I was onto something with the spark of creative inspiration I found with the apple symbol. But not before long would my doubt resurface. My summer, however bright and sunny, frequently met with wafts of uncertainty about my own understanding and ability to succeed academically and creatively.

During summer, most of my energy was spent collecting more resources and deepening my understanding of the major themes of my research. Over the four weeks of the season, I read three books and listened to another four audiobooks to learn more about synchronicity and archetypes. Nearly all of the resources are from the work of Carl Jung or are directly related to his theories. While accounting for synchronicity within a creative process is a challenge, in the Four Seasons Method synchronicity is a viable and valid technique. Jung defines synchronicity as a “simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally connected events,” meaning that the occurrence of seemingly related things, or the appearance of repeating symbols, have no clear reason for happening at the same time.

In the summer season, I came to understand synchronicity more than I experienced synchronistic events.

Prior to reading anything by Carl Jung, I had heard the word archetype before, but I did not understand the meaning of the word. According to Jung (1960) in Synchronicity, archetypes are “formal factors responsible for the organization of unconscious psychic processes: they are ‘patterns of behavior.’ At the same time they have a ‘specific charge’ and develop numinous effects which express themselves as affects” (p. 20). I understand archetypes as universal references for specific human characteristics, where deities and iconic figures in history with obvious and very specific traits become personified archetypal references. For example, Aphrodite is the goddess of beauty, fertility, and sexual love. She is known for these powers as well as her flirtatious and seductive ways. All of these qualities and attributes are available for every single human being to experience and utilize; yet, from my understanding of Jung’s work, some people are more prone to certain archetypal characteristics than others. What determines why some are prone to certain behavior and others are not is unknown to me. There appears to be variation in personalities based on the mixture of archetypal traits one carries, yet the traits themselves are very specifically recognizable. However this is all up for debate. I am curious about whether or not we are prone to archetypal behaviors, if some are just latent and others over active based on imbalances of our emotional and psychosomatic health. Maybe it is just that within human potential lie certain characteristics, which we call archetypal, and we learn to express certain qualities over others based on our environments (nurture).

My view is that archetypes are just another form of language or classification to describe human phenomena. However, because of the ancient examples and consistency of these traits in human history, I questioned the significance of archetypal influence in my own

personality. In late February, I wrote in my journal about synchronicity, archetypes, and the idea of predictability and probability. As I wrote about using astrology to understand or predict a person's nature and future, it hit me that the alter ego that I (thought I) created might very well be predetermined based on my astrology as well. "My mind wanders and thinks about how much of my 'self' (or is it ego) is based on the predetermined nature of a Gemini born on May 31?" I wrote. The connectivity that exists beyond human logic and causal patterns leads me to believe in fated existence. Not a fate where an almighty being decides the experiences of your life, but one in which a chain of events is destined to happen because of the system's design. Archetypes lead me to the same belief: if a person is born into a certain design where archetypal tendencies are inherent in that person's being, then events of that person's life are also based on that given structure, as the events of a person's life merely reflect the nature of a person's being. I have only recently articulated this belief with fervor. During the process of creating *applecede* and specifically during summer, I was still only asking questions about fate. The questions related to fate—is everything fated? Are the events in my life predetermined? Is there room for partial determinacy and choice? were always in my mind. However, I started to bring my attention back to something more tangible and accessible for me to grapple with: apples.

The apple is so rich with symbolism that I was eager to start exploring the various references and meanings it holds to progress with the project. My first step was to take notes on as many stories and meanings I knew of the apple already. These notes were based on collective knowledge of the apple, as well as recent stories I read in the Gemini section of *Sextrology*. From there I started to search the Internet for more myths and cultural references. This search was a general sweep of the Internet, but I collected plenty of information to gain a foundation of reference points. Once I took my original notes, I

marked any connections that came to mind with my own history or knowledge of my alter egos. From these notes emerged themes, which I labeled with a symbolic apple code. “Golden apple,” “forbidden fruit,” and “rotten apple” became the center of my axial mappings. The Symbol Axial Mapping Diagram (see Figure 1) gives all of the myths, personal associations, and imagery associated with each axial code.

To better explain the type of connections I made during the process of creating the Symbol Axial Maps, here are a few stories that stand out. In the myth of the events leading to the Trojan War, Eris throws her golden apple into the wedding party of Peleus and Thetis. Tied to the golden apple is a message provoking a competition between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite to be named the most beautiful, and to take the coveted apple as a prize. I first made a connection to Eris, goddess of Strife and Discord, because of her spiteful decision to cause trouble at the wedding because she was not invited. Her spiteful act caused immediate chaos, excitement, and eventually an epic tragedy with the Trojan War (Starsky & Cox, 2004). Spite is a defining characteristic within my habitual patterns; Blackwidow and Nemesis use spite to cause chaos and excitement, prove their power, and have endured tragic repercussions from their actions.

I also made a connection to Aphrodite in this myth. In this myth, she uses her sexual power to come out the winner. Paris must determine who among the three goddesses is the most beautiful, and Aphrodite wastes no time using her seductive, sexual powers to allure Paris into choosing her. While each goddess offers him something enticing, Aphrodite reveals her body to him, promising him a woman as beautiful as her and the most passionate love he can imagine. What stands out from this part of the story is Aphrodite’s use of sexual power to get what she wants. This behavior is one of Blackwidow’s primary characteristics; she overcompensates for her lack of control with her ability to manipulate







essentially the types of roles I play throughout my life, which can be colored by the alter-ego personas. I believe, like archetypes, these aspects of personality are common among all people. I have identified seven aspects of my personality and named them according to their role: The Witness/Voyeur, The Jester, The Philosopher, The Wounded, The Lover, The Scholar/Nerd, The Artist. In the beginning of March I was able to start recognizing these seven aspects, which are also archetypes. However, I was at a standstill with gaining insight into my alter egos. I felt stuck in the research and the haze of ambiguity hid which direction I should go in next.

During this time of confusion, an unexpected wave of insight came to me. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, I wrote in my journal about what led to the breakthrough:

The last few weeks have progressively gotten more and more stressful. I told Keziah the other night I just felt like throwing a tantrum and breaking shit! Today I've felt resistant and just crabby. I've also felt kind of crazy, like [I'm] talking to the voices in my head telling them to shut up! In Carley's Class this morning, I recognized a connection with my attitude- I felt/feel like Nemesis was/is trying to come out- I'm faced with high stress (academically) and my instinctual reaction to this is to say fuck it! What's interesting though is how I've been internalizing the response as well: high stress academically leads to punishing self-image leads to degrading and devaluing image leads to turning into a spiteful response leads to work harder, push body more, eat less etc. (guilt). This has also been a way to punish my own body, the nagging voice of Nemesis (which I realized today is ironic because I always called her Nemesis because she is viscous and will destroy "you" but I realized today Nemesis is MY nemesis), she is the one who destroys my self-worth and yet acts as a codependent protector at the same time. She talks shit about me and then gets me to be bitter and do (potentially positive) things out of spite, even though they may be harmful to me in the moment (like starving myself for the sake of being skinnier).

After this flash of insight, I felt ready to use an active imagination exercise to allow the voice of each of the alter ego personas to be heard. I call this Alter Ego Voicing. Similar to the original Associative Free Write exercise, I broke the journaling into three sections of roughly ten to fifteen minutes. Starting with Nemesis, as she was the most present in me at the time, I wrote what I know about the specific alter ego. The first round is a neutral voice.

In the second round of the exercise, I allowed the voice of the given alter ego to express how she felt at that time. In the last round I synthesized the ideas that emerged from doing the writing. At this third stage, I wrote questions and kept note of the connections I made. From the Alter Ego Voicing exercise, I was able to create a chart of a general pattern of behavior that the exercise revealed. This chart, Patterns, portrays the loops in negative thought patterns as well as the known cause and affects that trigger the different alter-ego personas. With an extensive amount of information and insight into each alter ego persona, I drew an Alter Ego Axial Map as the final activity of the summer season.

During the summer season, I was battling the constant confusion and doubt of my process, and at the same time was eager to start creating. I have learned that I am most productive when I am being proactive in multiple processes. A former teacher of mine, Thomas Lehmen, referred to this style as running parallel processes. While I research I also create, making tangible products out of what the research provides. Following this method, my first tangible product was a short [video study](#) inspired by the images drawn from the Symbol Axial Map. There were five images that I attempted to use in my first video study: 1) apples falling 2) bobbing for apples 3) apples turning to rice 4) biting an apple 5) apple reflecting in eye. Problems arose when I tried to create some of the images due to my lack of expertise in video and lighting, as well as the limitations of the location and equipment available. Instead of feeling defeated, I decided to find ways of getting the shots I imagined. My original idea was to throw an apple and in postproduction make the apple appear to look like rice as it fell to the ground. However, this requires a tremendous amount of skill in actually filming both shots of apple and rice being thrown and just was not feasible at the time. Because I was drawn to the history of apples and later rice being thrown at weddings, as they are both signs of fertility, I found another way of seeing the transformation of apples



changing to rice. Containing the shot to a central area-- my mouth-- I captured a shot of me taking a bite of an apple and instead of spitting out apple, I spewed out rice. Much of this imagery is created in postproduction. This provocative image is very memorable and draws a lot of attention from viewers as a baffling moment in the video. But my excitement about this moment is not entirely because of how much attention this particular shot receives from viewers. My excitement is also about my instinctual decision and creativity to get the shot, which came from trusting my intuition in filming the shot in the first place.

## FALL

The harvest season went beyond gathering the apples from the orchard. Metaphorically speaking, during the fall season, I collected all of the apples, washed, sliced and seasoned them, made a crust from scratch, baked the apple pie, and served it on a platter with ice cream for many guests to enjoy. However, the apples either were not completely ripe, or I did not let the pie bake long enough, because my creative results were not fully developed. The earlier seasons truly made for a wonderful harvest, but the short amount of time towards the end of our semester only exacerbated an already short period for research. Nevertheless, this season was full of creative productivity and growing ideas.

My stress levels were extremely high during this point in the semester, as I knew I would be absent during finals and the last week of the semester. I had to push into high gear with every assignment and project of the semester to make sure things were done on time. Therefore, the fall season was not grounded in as many clearly defined research exercises. Rather, I spent my time in the creative art-making realm developing ideas and crafting final products. I was more product-centered and less process-oriented. I spent many hours shooting footage for the video for *applecede* and sitting behind the desk editing in Final Cut. Along with the video, rehearsals required a lot of technical preparation to make the bathtub

secure for the show. The late night rehearsals in the lobby of the Physical Education Building East were spent hanging drapery and practicing different elements of the piece to come up with a solid performance. The show ran two nights: April 4 and 5, 2012.

Apples were everywhere during the process of making this piece, but the week of the show I understood it to be a blatant symbol meant for me to see. At first, I thought it was funny that someone was eating an apple during our tech rehearsal, but that was just the first of many apple sightings. The entire week I saw at least one apple a day; they were in the form of real edible apples and symbolic apples drawn on bumper stickers and brochures. After the final performance, I spent some time with my mom and one of my sisters in Sedona. We walked through some shops and I came across apples made from stones; these particular apples looked like golden apples, which I found particularly memorable, as all of the other apples I had seen that week were red. The following Monday, I had a committee meeting to talk about my thesis work and discuss the performance. We met outside of e<sup>2</sup>'s café on the Tempe Campus. I arrived a few minutes early and saw one of my committee members, Becky Dyer, sitting on the lawn, so I joined her. I immediately noticed an apple nearby her and laughed to myself. This apple was much more unique than any of the previous apples I had seen. This apple was cut in half, and only one half of it was left behind, and the meat of the apple was scooped out. All that was lying there was the outer skin of the apple and the core with the seeds. To me, this apple referenced *applecede* directly, as I had chopped every single apple in half showing the beauty of the apple seeds in a star shape. This apple was sliced the normal way, however, it was fascinating to see that someone (or perhaps something- a bird?) diligently ate the inside of the apple, leaving the skin and core in tact. Becky and I talked about the irony of this synchronistic symbol during our meeting while another committee member, Melissa Rex-Flint, encouraged me to keep note of the

other symbolic references that I saw for future reflection. Symbols are everywhere. However, I notice that as soon as I started to follow the apple reference, the more I was aware of the apple symbol all around me. Sometimes I see these things, and no one else is around to appreciate their seemingly coincidental appearance. I also realize that these sightings are often fleeting, or that I only see them at first out of the corner of my eye. Seeing the sign is not the most interesting part though. What is more interesting to me is that these obscure moments spark my attention collectively, that perhaps they are indeed showing up more in my life or maybe it is that my awareness of these symbols is heightened due to my interest in them. I do not believe that them appearing, or me being aware of them *means* anything. Rather, I simply feel an excitement when I bear witness to moments of synchronicity, especially those moments that seem to be for my eyes only.

Synchronicity also played a role in the addition of the song I chose to sing in the live piece. Originally, I wanted to sing something to introduce the piece as the audience was exiting the theater and entering the lobby to view my piece (I showed during intermission). I enjoyed the lyrics of *Come Together* by The Beatles because I thought I could play with the idea of being a siren and seducing the audience over to me, by singing, “come together, right now, over me” in my own way. Also, the lyric “one plus one plus one is three” reminded me of goddesses appearing in myths in threes although they tend to be explaining different aspects of one being. In the live piece, I used three women with similar appearances to play the three goddesses. They each represented aspects of my own being--my three alter egos: Blackwidow, Nemesis, and Erzulie. The next line of the song “got to be good looking cuz (s)he’s so hard to see” made me think of how I had tried to “get” the best looking guys to boost my confidence during the prime years I spent in “Blackwidow mode.” Then, during a conversation with my mom after tech rehearsal, she told me she liked that the Beatles song

referenced Apple Records. I laughed because I had not made that connection, and yet there it was. This surprise connection was yet another instance of synchronicity. Then my mom started singing another song, which I had never heard before. Because the lyrics seemed much more suited to the overall set up of the piece, I decided to sing that song, *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree*, instead. This song frames my piece in a slightly more jovial, lighthearted manner and I intended to “break the ice” between the audience and myself from the very beginning by singing this song. Using this song was also a tactic to manipulate my audience—I know there are images in the piece that are disturbing and can be a turn off, it was important to me to evoke different emotions during the piece rather than one “creepy” tone.

The song reminds me of an iconic American era, the 1940s, because the original singers, The Andrews Sisters, were a popular singing group at that time. There are many references to apples within American history and culture. However, with the use of this song, it becomes less about making another apple and more about creating a unique American feel by invoking feelings of nostalgia. When I hear this song, I think about how women were made to think they were significant to serve the nation's purposes while at war, and how their newfound power was quickly revoked when WWII was over and American culture then propagated the Stepford wife image. Women ceded their power after the war both willingly and unwillingly, allowing very unhealthy expectations of women to take over, i.e. the unfaltering belief that a woman's place is in the home, making babies, does not complain, and is subservient to her husband and children. On a personal level, this history mirrors my own experience, as I have ceded my own power, many times, to the unhealthy expectations and demands of men, and also myself.

The fall season was full of creative development and materializing of ideas. In this short period of time I created over five versions of the video work that would be seen in the live performance of *applecede*. Ironically, it was the very first rough edit that I used because it was somehow the most honest attempt in showcasing the material. I am very inspired by the work of Maya Deren and the surrealist art movement; *applecede* calls upon this style of art. During this time, I worked with the intention of using a strong symbolic reference without trying to provide a message for the viewer. I wanted to see if it was possible to make something full of meaning without a message, and also see if a message would reveal itself. The process of making both the video and the live performance was grounded in the imagery that came to me during the research process as well as insight I gained about myself. When I make video work, I rely heavily on my intuition and make decisions based on the felt timing of what needs to come next and at what pace the video should flow. Again, this demands a lot of trust in what I am making and a deep understanding of what materials I am working with.

In addition to archetypal references that I discovered in the research process, idioms and metaphors were great inspirations for creating the imagery in the video and live performance. Some of the images and themes used in the [applecede video](#) include:

- One bad apple spoils the bunch
- Apple of my eye, Apple bottom, Rotten apple
- Privacy being invaded (use of camera in typically private setting)
- Use of body: exposed, vulnerable, sexual, seductive, sin
- Bear fruit/bare fruit
- Forbidden Fruit & Adam & Eve- covering body- shame
- “Spoiled milk” with image of rotten apples covering breasts
- Bobbing for apples
- Eating apple, rice surprise- play on fertility and morbidity/mortality
- Silent shout- silencing deep emotions, rage and sadness
- Suicide/murder scenes
- Aphrodite, born of the sea

Piecing the live *applecede performance* together required a lot of imagination due to the difficulties of rehearsing the piece in its entirety. Not only does the work require projection for the video, it has many props that are time-consuming to set up and expensive to replace. Each night I cut an abundance of apples, and because it was extremely wasteful I chose not to rehearse this action but to instead save the apples for the show. Of course, this piece is a solo, so getting an outside eye to watch me rehearse was also a challenge. With that said, the only times the piece was actually rehearsed at length was during tech and the two-night run of the Graduate Project Presentations showcase. Normally, this situation would upset me. However, I recognized this issue and allowed the lack of rehearsal to inform the work. Instead of feeling unprepared for the show, I took advantage of the show as a time to try my ideas out and see what worked and what needed more attention. From the show, I gathered a lot of information about my performance quality, and at first I realized that I was much too solemn and removed from the audience. The next run, I tried to be more jovial, but this change proved a distracting pretense that drew me out of the work. The final night, I was hoping for a more balanced blend of performance qualities. However, in retrospect, there was still a lot holding me back in the performance.

## WINTER

Winter Season is a time of retreat, death to old ideas and rest from all of the hard work. In the Four Seasons Method, winter is meant for synthesis and processing. Although the semester ended early May 2012, I imagine that I will continue to feel like I am in the beginning stages of this work for quite some time, especially when considering that a significant ethnography study lasts years rather than months.

As soon as the Graduate Project Presentations showcase was over, I needed to collect all of my data and start writing about the work. The first step was to organize my

codebook. The codebook is a general reference for all of the themes that came from the research; it is essentially a language, or dictionary of information, specific to the research I am conducting. Next, I wrote my Theoretical Memo, which included a general summary of the most significant points of the research up to that point, as well as a proposition for what was to come. Finally, I created an outline of my creative product, *applecede*, to document the process of making the work. In the outline, I went into much more detail about every step of the process and all of the decisions that made the piece. Now that I am in a state of rest from the research, I will be going back through all of my notes and refreshing myself with the foundation of the project. Before I pick back up on the creative process, I will be transcribing many audio journals from the past few months.

Based on feedback from my professor, John Mitchell, I went back to the drawing board to edit my *applecede* video. My intention was to organize the video in a more cohesive way and for that reason I deleted much of the beginning of the original video and replaced it with more simple imagery. The [applecede final video](#) is a mixture of early footage and more recent footage. In this final video the location remains in my bathtub. However, the next stage of the video work will play with changing locations. I believe I will still shoot in the bathtub, but I think I will use my portable tub to change the outer location to continue evoking dream-like references.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSION

*“To suffer one’s confusion is the first step in healing. Then the pain of contradiction is transformed into the mystery of paradox.”* Robert A. Johnson

If there were any consistent elements throughout this process, they would be doubt and confusion. The wavering sense of doubt and confidence is a theme I recognize to reflect my deeply rooted negative sense of self-worth. In many of my journal entries throughout the

semester, I describe this correlation between my doubt and my self-worth with frustration and yet excitement that I am making such connections. At first I recognized that I had been "going back and forth with feeling totally excited and confident in my thesis and then feeling completely lost and like the project has no value." I questioned whether this was a "reflection of my pending and wavering belief in my own self-worth," which I had come to understand was a deeply rooted belief of my inferiority. Not only was I experiencing oscillation between doubt and confidence related to my thesis project, I found that I also felt insecurity related to smaller class projects—I felt insecure about my understanding of assignments and my ability to complete them with high quality work. Passing off these feelings of doubt because I intellectually understand that these feelings do not accurately reflect my abilities would be a mistake. Instead of ignoring this trait of uncertainty in the future, I would like to examine it more closely through the use of shadow work, as described by Jung. Shadow work is an investigation of the areas of the personality that one might ignore, neglect or be unaware. It is the part of the person that influences behavior but tends to have a negative connotation and might be tied to shame, disgrace, embarrassment, anger etc. Additionally, I believe this type of work will help me find more honesty in my performance quality in future showings.

What remains in the research is the age-old debate of fate versus free will. For me, this debate manifests as a question: how much of what I have come to understand about myself is based on my unique life experiences or is perhaps scripted by my time and place in this unique existence? In other words, are these characteristics, habits, experiences, and even patterns that I identify with merely manifestations of an already existing probability? To gain my own perspective and understanding of the archetypes Jung describes as "tendencies," I continue to gather information to examine the question of fate more closely.



## Chapter 5

### THE 21ST CENTURY ADVENTURES OF WONDER WOMAN

*With seemingly ordinary roots, the 21st Century Wonder Woman was born of human parents and was born in a city you may have heard of, however she is no ordinary woman. Entering the world on an intensely hot Sunday afternoon, Wonder Woman showed great resilience from the start. From the very beginning, the tension between life and death has been present in her story, instilling a deep understanding for the greatest paradoxes of our existence. She entered this world in a hurry; flying from her mother's womb, Wonder Woman was entangled in her umbilical cord, tempting death by suffocation. Were it not for the courageous efforts of her parents, enduring labor together without a midwife or doctor, and unraveling her tiny body from the grips of the cord, Wonder Woman would surely not be here today. Her sense of urgency and great feat of resilience as an infant signified her budding super powers.*

*Through adolescence, young Wonder Woman came to know the dark nature of a patriarchal society through various altercations with violent and demanding men and malicious, insecure women. Somehow her tolerance to pain and suffering only grows as she endures more challenges. She has the ability to turn even the worst physical and sexual assaults into victorious triumph, whether that is against her or a community at large. It is through overcoming the devastation of multiple sexual assaults that she unleashed her super human abilities.*

*The 21st Century Wonder Woman stands for "peace, love, and sexual equality in a world torn by the hatred of men." She calls upon her super human resilience (a uniquely feminine ability) to endure and withstand the long battles against evil. She is equipped with truth glasses to see through lies and corruption, and together with her psychic empathy, she is able to envision the future. It goes without saying that a true leader must have the ability to communicate to the masses; Wonder Woman's spellbinding voice captivates all listeners and affects them to hear and accept the truth. Her voice can be heard for miles and she also carries the ability to hypnotize with her siren songs. With all of these powers combined, Wonder Woman wards off feeble minds, archaic politics, and sexist social customs across America and beyond.*

– January 2013

*The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adventures of Wonder Woman* started out with an image of me taking an ice-bath. At first I was thinking it would turn into a piece about the fight, flight, and freeze states of being. I had received this image during my TRE training where I was learning about the three autonomic responses. However, I was really just stuck on the image of taking an ice-bath in the Arizona heat with the ice melting away until finally it had turned to liquid water. After these humble beginnings, I started to make some decisions about what to wear and where to perform this image and the Wonder Woman piece emerged. I happened to buy

a Wonder Woman bathing suit near the time I was brainstorming this concept, and when it struck me to wear the suit a flood of ideas about the concept came to me.

I asked myself: Why is Wonder Woman taking an ice-bath? Where is she taking this ice-bath? What does the ice-bath symbolize? I wanted to find a highly charged location that somehow reflected what Wonder Woman is all about: peace, love, and sexual equality. What she stands for is particularly relevant right now because of how much political controversy currently surrounds women's rights and feminism in general. I chose Planned Parenthood as a performance site because this organization is itself a symbol for women's reproductive rights. A large amount of controversy surrounds Planned Parenthood and I felt that I would be able to give the viewer a hint about where I was coming from with the piece based on the location. This work is still in progress, meaning it is ever-evolving as Wonder Woman continues to make appearances. However, at its core, it is a video series capturing intervention art.

What I did not know at the time of starting this piece was how it tied into my thesis work. Originally, I thought it would be a piece related to the autonomic safety responses (fight/flight and freeze), so when it turned into a piece about adopting a persona, I was somewhat caught off guard. Nevertheless, I followed the work even though I did not yet see the connection with my thesis other than the fact that it was a third piece. Now, approaching a year with this piece and the Wonder Woman persona, I recognize how much it relates to my interest in self-discovery. In both *swimminginthepsyche* and *applecede*, I worked with the idea of stripping layers of self away to get to something deeper, truer. I was in the frame of mind that I needed to expose myself in order to find something meaningful.

In *swimminginthepsyche*, I had the belief that in order to find myself/Self I needed to go within and reveal something beneath the surface of my own skin. Through that piece I had

an epiphany that in the language of going within, I was misled by the notion of Self being found by “going within” as it is often described in spiritual texts relating to meditation. Rather than going within to become buried somewhere deep inside, it is going beyond the physical, emotional, and mental experiences that we identify ourselves with, in order to understand the totality of Self that is infinite and collective. Where I was looking generally at the concept of finding one’s Self in *swimminginthepsyche*, in *applecede* I was searching within my own personal experience to understand myself. These two approaches were similar in the sense that I was researching my own experiences and comparing them to psychological theories and philosophies.

I am finding out that adopting the role of Wonder Woman is another approach for understanding who I am because it gives me a reference point to rub up against, something to see myself in relation to. In *applecede* I referenced archetypes in Greek mythology specifically, however I did not attempt to become Hera or Aphrodite. The difference than is that I am becoming Wonder Woman. Even though I have changed some of who she is in the comic book sense to relate more to my personal history, it was only in researching her and performing her that I came to understand just how much my personal supports the mission of Wonder Woman. She is specific, iconic and everyone knows that if you are wearing blue shorts with stars, a red top, a gold crown, and two silver bracelets – you are Wonder Woman. Her story is mapped out and all of these details were anchors for me to compare with my own story. Like an actress, I performed the role of Wonder Woman, and in so doing, I recognized just how much I embody the archetypal heroine she represents.

With *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adventures of Wonder Woman*, I have come to understand that this persona I have adopted is actually an iconic, archetypal, depiction of the person that I am deep inside—the woman I am becoming. I am beginning to really experience empowerment

because of this piece, and as a woman I am redefining my self-worth. I am not an actress when I am in costume; I recognize that I am the 21<sup>st</sup> century Wonder Woman. This realization has influenced me to reconsider some of the aesthetic choices in the work, particularly the costume, as a consideration for what it means to be a young woman owning her womanhood in this era. I am asking questions such as, what do I feel empowered wearing? In addition to the aesthetic changes in costume, I am investigating my Wonder Woman origin story as another means to draw upon my personal history and reflect on how my history has created a super hero within me, as well as what my 'super powers' are as the 21<sup>st</sup> century Wonder Woman.

The parallels I have drawn from my personal experience to relate to the Wonder Woman persona include details from my birth story, events related to physical and sexual abuse, as well as my talents as a singer and abilities as a highly empathic person. With the Wonder Woman origin story, I let my history become fantasy to some degree, exaggerating real events into fiction, and finding empowerment in the experiences rather than defeat.

The performance of the first episode, [\*Rights on the Rocks\*](#), was a symbolic representation of the endangered rights of women in America. Doing this work in front of Planned Parenthood turned out to send mixed messages to viewers. While many understood the reference, some still questioned if I was for or against the establishment. The next performance I made as Wonder Woman was for a performance and dialogue on women in media called Beyond Miss Representation. With the help of my friend Marion Millin, I rewrote the lyrics to the 1970-protest song American Woman by The Guess Who. I changed the lyrics to address modern concerns about women's rights in America. My performance of the second episode, titled [\*American Woman\*](#), was my performance of this song at the start of the Beyond Miss Representation event. With this performance I projected an

edited version of *Rights on the Rocks* video. I used loop pedals to record a bass part and back-up vocals, and then sang the song. Beyond using the siren voice, producing and performing every aspect of this episode was another way for me to show Wonder Woman's self-sufficiency. Even though there was one technical snafu, I was really proud that I learned how to use a lot of new equipment and broadened my performance experience to vocal work.

Empowerment is a central theme I try to incorporate throughout the various pieces related to this work. *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Adventures of Wonder Woman* is live performance art, a video series, a feminist movement, and more. Sometimes you plant little seeds of creativity and end up realizing you are developing a body of work beyond the scope originally imagined. This project has proven this to me. I started out with one idea about an ice-bath and have many more ideas off-shooting from this central character. With this project, my journey of self-realization has transformed. I began in utter disorientation about my identity and sense of worth, and now I am in a place of empowerment and accomplishment. Wonder Woman personifies my spiritual growth, starting as a highly conflicted young woman, and evolving into a dynamic woman who owns her power.

## Chapter 6

### THE MAKING OF A METHOD

*“I spent twenty years developing methods, roadmaps, so that this very personal material could be developed as art. So that as your life experience deepened your art expression would expand. And as your art expression expanded, this in turn could deepen your life experience.”* – Anna Halprin

#### INTRODUCTION

I began my research with a stripped down outline of actions. I planned to actively engage in self-study, use my process of self-study to generate three new works, all the while maintaining my awareness of the wholeness of myself and of my life as one integrated experience. For me, this challenge was a beautiful one. As opposed to sticking to a particular method throughout, I got to dabble in different methods. But most importantly I was able to see what was already happening in myself and in my life. Without imposing a structure or set of specific actions, I was able to focus on my natural and habitual patterns in life and art-making alike. I was able to let my understanding of self/Self emerge, the clarity of my personal practices emerge, and the nature of life be unimpeded. That is, I did not impose any artificial constraints on myself beyond adopting a particular methodology for creating a specific piece of work. While I thought I needed to do yoga every day, or meditate every day, eat healthy, exercise often, and sleep eight hours every night, I did not do any of those things with any sort of consistency that would allow me to validate those practices as a means for connecting with myself or higher Self.

After I performed the last of the three pieces, I reflected on what it was I actually did. What was consistent throughout? What did I rely upon during the process? What was the relationship between my journey of self-discovery and my creative expression? Was there something universal that could be shared, or was this process completely personal and only relevant to me? In compiling all my notes, something started to unfold. What unfolded is, I

believe, the making of a method, yet to be named. In the following chapter I will express my personal take-away from the process of my research that is grounded in spiritual understandings and practices.

Now that I have spent many months reflecting on my work and on what my method of working is, I am faced with the challenge of distinguishing between what parts of my method anyone can practice and what parts are unique to me. This challenge, while important, is not something I want to rush to figure out. Like my mentors have said and like Anna Halprin's quote states, this type of work takes years to fully establish. I am therefore in no rush. However, I would like to share what I have started to articulate about the way I work.

My overall research has roots that are deep seated in awareness. I have come to express this approach in terms of a spiritual philosophy that sheds light on the dynamic interplay of creativity and spirituality through the process of self-discovery, which requires and cultivates awareness. I employed creative exploration and psychological reflection as the foundation for practicing deliberate self-inquiry. The purpose for practicing this way was to establish a deeper relationship with myself and thereby with life, which I view as a spiritual goal. Through awareness, I was able to activate my creative capacity and awaken my spirit through self-exploration. Embracing this perspective helped me understand my own way of working and way of being, uncovering my own unique philosophy on life and art-making. Through the process of looking at my habitual patterns, personal characteristics, and history, I uncovered not only a gold mine for creative inspiration, but also a means to improve my health and happiness. Investing in the relationship with Self is the primary focus of my practice, and through contemplation and creative expression, I have a sense that I have achieved this goal.

The word 'open' describes the nature of the mindset needed for embarking on such a journey of self-discovery. However, this research required something more unique than simply having an open mindset. 'Open' describes both the expansive quality the research requires and cultivates, which reflects the expansion of the universe, and describes also the call to expand our own awareness of consciousness. 'Open' describes the openness that was available for me to incorporate many other modalities and schools of thought into practice, as it is an inclusive approach that acknowledges value in all things. 'Open' implies an entrance or passageway to new places, perspectives, and experiences. The word can refer to something that is exposed, which is also reflective of the effect the work had on me: exposing self, exposing misconceptions, exposing challenges, exposing power, and exposing truth. Lastly, openness relates to the form of dialogue used, in which I was open to share, discuss, question, reflect, listen, learn, and experiment while engaging in the process. There are many pathways available for one to practice self-study. My practice was founded in my intention to learn more about myself through contemplative and somatic practices, and my use of the process of self-discovery in partnership with creative expression. My strong and clear metaphysical understanding of the world has helped me keep on track with my research.

How a person views the world, their beliefs about living in the world, and their personal methods for practicing self-study and creativity are all important things for each individual to know. Inspired by the many languages and modalities that exist to express our experience, I was compelled to articulate my own, ever so slightly unique standpoint on the world. These notes to self have been my guide in my life and artistic process, as they are one. I articulated it, borrowed it, reflected upon it, challenged it, remade it, and most importantly, I followed it. The following list is what I have referred to as the Six Tenets of my practice.



They are the consistent building blocks of my practice. I write the following as a note to myself:

- Be diligent in the work while mindful of your emotional threshold. Rest is essential for integration.
- Actively express your findings, your questions, your ideas, and your inspirations creatively.
- Notice what you are already doing in your life that is creative and spiritual, support what you are naturally doing before imposing too many things into your routine.
- Investigate the relationship between your processes of self-discovery and art-making. Share your findings with yourself in a form of journal and with other people. Let others in on your journey as you see fit: this is also a method for learning more about yourself by articulating what you understand. They might offer you something you hadn't yet thought of.
- Let curiosity lead you, and try to remain curious even when it is challenging, boring, emotionally upsetting, etc.

From this practice, I have recognized many significant changes in my own sense of self and my behavior. These changes include:

- Being able to hold more information in my awareness at once, while remembering details about various situations.
- Maintaining connection to multiple concepts and practices simultaneously.
- Having a greater sense of acceptance and less judgment.
- Detachment from things that once felt critical to my existence.
- A realization of the spaciousness of my being and my life, a sense of ease and acceptance during times of stress.
- Huge increase in self-worth and confidence.
- Huge increase in creative thought; new ideas come to me frequently and I'm able to run with ideas much more fluidly than prior to starting the research.
- A strong sense of trust and connection with my intuition.
- More grounded and embodied, able to accept that which I do not understand or like more quickly than before.

Even as a budding method, this approach holds a unique strength in its undefined instructions. It is open enough for the individual to find herself within it. It is vague for everyone to find his or her own way. However, as discussed above, I believe this method is a key that will help anyone on the journey as they come up against particular challenges, such as fatigue, lack of inspiration, doubt, and confusion.

The method can be portrayed as a mandorla. The mandorla combines the parts of the journey that occur of their own accord with the things that the seeker must actively do. I created this mandorla from making a mandorla of my own. It expresses what I did in the course of my research and what I encountered during that course. My challenge with this work is finding a distinction between what is unique to my process and what is unique to the underlying method. As I practice this method, it is particularly difficult to not associate my own beliefs and practices with it. Thus, I share this mandorla, Figure 3, as a reference for how I understand the process. My understanding can be summarized as follows: We all exist within the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual planes. Transformation is always experienced through combinations of embodiment, empowerment, and enlightenment. To actually practice this inclusive and holistic way of working with self and creativity, an individual must self-reflect and contemplate what emerges during the process of self-reflection, and must actively engage in their creativity. I have intentionally left half of the mandorla open, to allow for each individual to contribute their own rituals, actions, and requirements. The fact that a portion of the mandorla is left blank, and thus allows for such individual contribution, is a further reflection of the “openness” of my budding method.

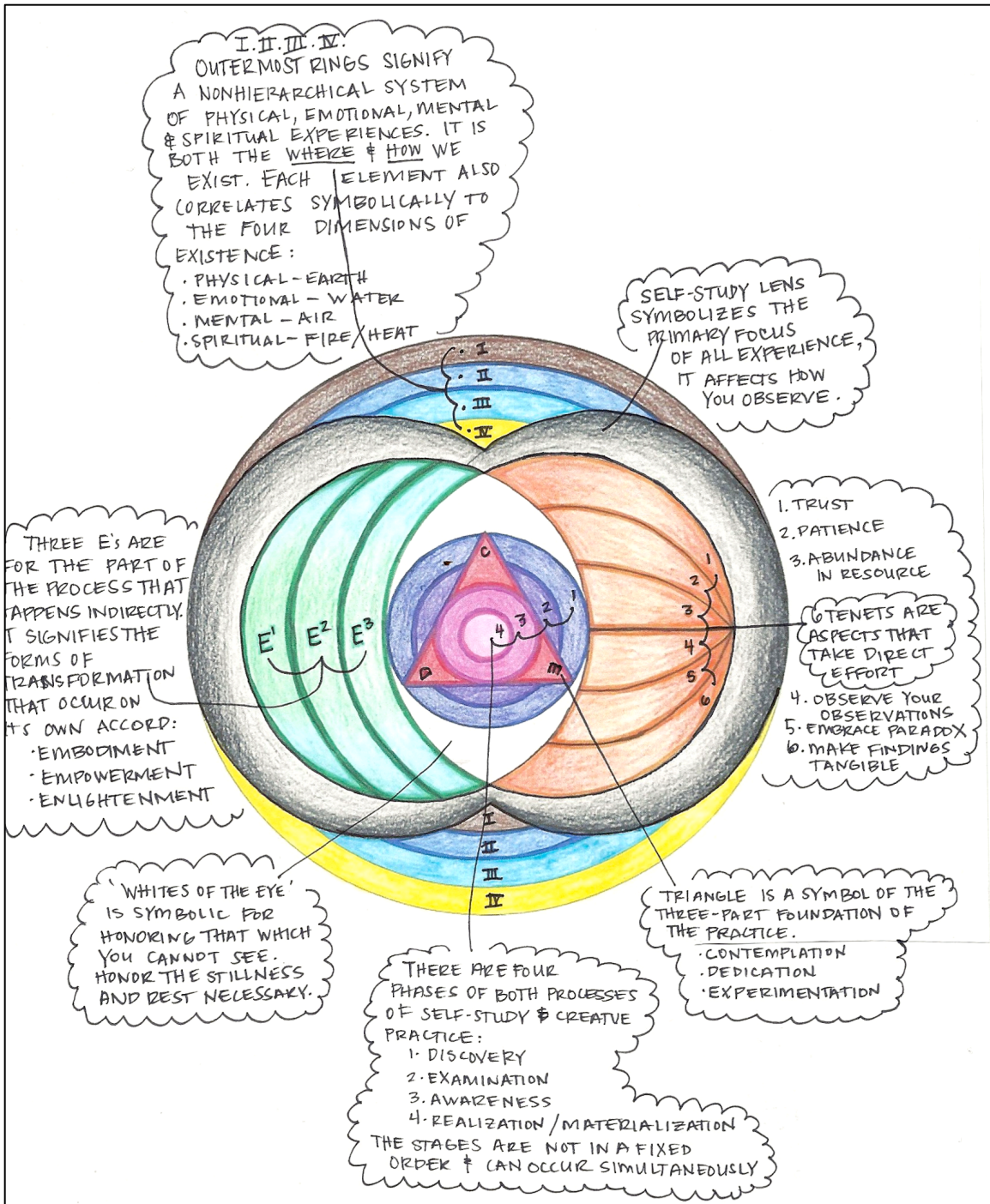


Figure 3 The Mandorla

My 7 Spiritual Guides & Their Ancient Reflections.

*Wisdom is knowing others, enlightenment is knowing oneself. – Lao Tzu, The Tao Te Ching*

This section presents my personal philosophy based on my current understanding of the world and myself, based on my findings over the last two years of research. I share my beliefs, which I call Spiritual Guides. I also share a mandala, which is a visual representation of my beliefs and ideas. Finally, this section includes a description of my outlook on self-study and my personal guidelines for my creative practice.

Only in retrospect did I see a through-line in the three works—swimminginthepsyche, applecede, and The 21st Century Adventures of Wonderwoman—that were used for self-study. The through-line is my philosophical viewpoints, which have strong ties to the ancient wisdoms of various religions and practices. Through the process of describing what I did, how I did it, and what I learned, I have come to acknowledge some consistent beliefs that ground my practice. These beliefs are what I refer to as my spiritual guides. I came to understand these through my consistent journaling before, during and after the making of each of the three pieces.

My beliefs are best presented in the form of reminders. I say these phrases to myself in moments of frustration, when I'm in need of a reminder, or when I feel struggle in my own spiritual connection. These beliefs help me to understand the world. I find it refreshing that these ideas are not new. Indeed, I have come to realize that these ideas are found in many religions and spiritual philosophies, such as yoga, Buddhism, and Christianity. Thus, although these ideas may not resonate with everyone, they are clearly ideas that have resonated with many people throughout history. Yet, I did not study Buddhism, Christianity, or even yoga (at least not as the basis for creative practice) and then establish these ideas as a result of what I learned. Rather, I lived my life with intentional contemplation and an

openness to receive knowledge and understanding, and in so doing, these truths were revealed to me again and again. Perhaps this is why these concepts seem to be universal among many religions and spiritual paths. It might just be that if one is doing a spiritual quest of any kind, he will come to understand the nature of existence in these terms. Because the human experience is a fundamentally congruent one, people therefore learn the same truths over and over again, albeit through an array of slightly different experiences.

In the chart below, I list these truths in the column titled “My Spiritual Guides.” The chart visually links my spiritual guides to quotes from a book titled Jesus, Krishnas, Buddha & Loa Tzu: The Parallel Sayings. These quotes are listed in the parallel column, titled “Ancient Spiritual Wisdom.” This chart acknowledges and also highlights the ancient spiritual wisdom that correlates to my personal understandings or spiritual guides.

Table 2

*Spiritual Guides & Ancient Reflections*

My Spiritual Guides	Ancient Spiritual Wisdom
<p><i>Your life is one experience interwoven within one universal existence, consciousness</i></p> <p>There is always only one thing happening, we are all experiencing the same phenomena. Like the many languages and modalities that exist, my life is merely one expression of the universal experience. If there is ultimately only one thing happening, then there is only one truth; I seek the truth by knowing the singularity of experience. This cannot be solely found through logic or catharsis, this is a spiritual quest that requires diligence, patience, and, perhaps most of all, compassion.</p>	<p><i>“Those who have truly found the Self within recognize that it exists everywhere.” – Jesus, Dialogue of the Savior</i></p> <p><i>“The Way is perfect. The knowledge of one-ness brings serenity.” –Buddha, The Third Patriarch of Zen</i></p>
<p><i>The universe is expanding, awareness must follow suit.</i></p> <p>If I accept that everything exists within a field of consciousness, then it is unchanging, it is only our awareness that can change. The more I am able to allow and recognize the expansion of my own awareness, the more perspective I gain of my existence in the vast and universal consciousness. While I am predominately aware of my personal existence, my awareness can expand beyond that in an inclusive nature without attachment. Thoughts do not exist in my head; they flow through the universal field of consciousness if I allow them to float in and back out of my awareness.</p>	<p><i>“Original man had one original mind. It was unified.” – Jesus, Dialogue of the Savior</i></p> <p><i>“Learn to see what is right in front of you, then you will be able to see that which is invisible. Nothing is ever truly hidden.” – Jesus, The Gospel of Thomas; parallels: Matthew, Luke</i></p> <p><i>“Let go of the intellectual mind, and concentrate your mind on Me. Step by step you will attain quietness. Give up thinking.” – Krishna, The Bhagavad Gita</i></p>
<p><i>Everything is related / It's All Relative</i></p> <p>While aspects of my life might feel distinct, they are inherently connected and provide valuable information and insight about who I am. Every thing has a light and dark side; it is through the practice of being able to see from an open perspective that I</p>	<p><i>“It is impossible to follow the way if you seek dualism” – Buddha, The Sutra of Forty-two Sections</i></p> <p><i>“All things exist in relationship to everything else. Whether manifest or un-manifest, they come and go in relationship to everything else.” –Buddha, The Lankavatara Sutra</i></p>

<p>eventually come to see beyond this dichotomy, as dualistic perception is incomplete. The ability to be non-attached helps me see the relationship of all things. Everything is in perfection.</p>	<p><i>“Following the Way is to be non-attached to worldly things. You will be in harmony with the Way when you no longer see the difference between sorrow and good fortune.” – Krishna, The Bhagavad Gita</i></p> <p><i>“All forms, all beings in the universe exist within and in relationship to each other. In the end, all things will return to their essential nature.” – Jesus, The Gospel of Mary [Magdalene]</i></p>
<p><i>Practicing non-attachment is not the same as being separate.</i></p> <p>The process of expanding awareness requires non-attachment to former ways of thinking, former ways of being and the emotional attachments one makes to people, places, things, and experiences. This practice of non-attachment feels like separating, but like the expanding universe, it is only making relative space between those things we were once attached to. This is not the same as true separation; we do not exist in a different universe. Therefore, I am aware of a sense of contracting in on myself and experiences that feel tightly wound, contracted, collapsing, or shrinking, as these are indications that I am not in line with universal truth. I practice non-attachment so I can become more receptive of the fullness of my experience, and not stunted by the limitations attachment causes.</p>	<p><i>“Attachment and aversion to objects is natural. But do not let either have power over you. These states of mind are enemies of the Way.” – Krishna, The Bhagavad Gita</i></p> <p><i>“Recognizing the unity of all life, one sees his own Self in all other beings. This allows one to be impartial about all things.” – Buddha, The Buddha</i></p>
<p><i>Know thyself, know the world.</i></p> <p>The introspective practice of self-discovery promotes “outrospective” awareness, compassion, and engagement. There is a reciprocal relationship between the inner and outer worlds based on the perception carried between them: awareness unlocks them, awareness unites them.</p>	<p><i>“With one’s heart focused on yoga [union] and recognizing all things as equal, then you will see the Self within – and within all beings.” – Krishna, The Bhagavad Gita</i></p> <p><i>“In order to know everything you must first know yourself. If you do not know yourself, Then you know nothing. Those who know themselves also know the All.” – Jesus, The Gospel of Thomas</i></p> <p><i>“Before you set foot on the path, master yourself.”</i></p>

	<p align="center">–Buddha, <i>The Dhammapada</i></p> <p align="center"><i>“One can know the world without ever leaving the home. The Way can be recognized without a window.” – Lao Tzu, The Tao Te Ching</i></p>
<p align="center"><i>The universal truth speaks in metaphor through symbols and signs.</i></p> <p>I practice following intuition and thinking in metaphors and symbols in order to understand messages of the Divine.</p>	<p align="center"><i>“The way is empty, the Way is full. There is no way to describe what it is. Find it within yourselves.” – Lao Tzu, The Tao Te Ching</i></p> <p align="center"><i>“The Self, which is God, dwells in every being, but only those with wisdom and perception – having the ability to hold the mind steady- will recognize this. When the senses obey the mind, God will be revealed.” – Krishna, The Katha Upanishad</i></p>
<p align="center"><i>“Acceptance of what happens is essential to the discovery of truth.” – The Secret Language of Birthdays</i></p> <p>I must accept what is, for what it is. This is vital in becoming present, in becoming truthful, and in becoming available to change.</p>	<p align="center"><i>“Tao can only be understood in the present moment.” – Lao Tzu, The Tao Te Ching</i></p> <p align="center"><i>“I will reveal all things that are hidden from you so that through perfect knowledge you will become one with Me. Reach out and grasp Me.” – Jesus, The [Second] Apocalypse of James</i></p>
<p align="center">Inertia QED DeWitt © 2013</p>	<p align="center">Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and Lao Tzu: The Parallel Sayings, Richard Hooper © 2007</p>

In addition to my written notes, from which I derived my spiritual guides, I spent weeks over the summer of 2012 trying to crystallize my ideas into a visual image called a mandala. A mandala is a symbol that signifies a system: the system’s relationship to the parts, and the wholeness of the system itself. While the mandala correlates with yogic traditions, I was introduced to it, and the mandorla, via Robert Johnson’s *Owning Your Own Shadow*. Within my mandala (Figure 4), I describe where I exist, how I experience, and the relationship between ignorance (terms in Sanskrit) and wisdom. These concepts are shown in the four pathways of the mandala (stamen of the flower leading to outermost four terms).



This mandala signifies what I refer to in my unified processes of self-discovery and creative expression.

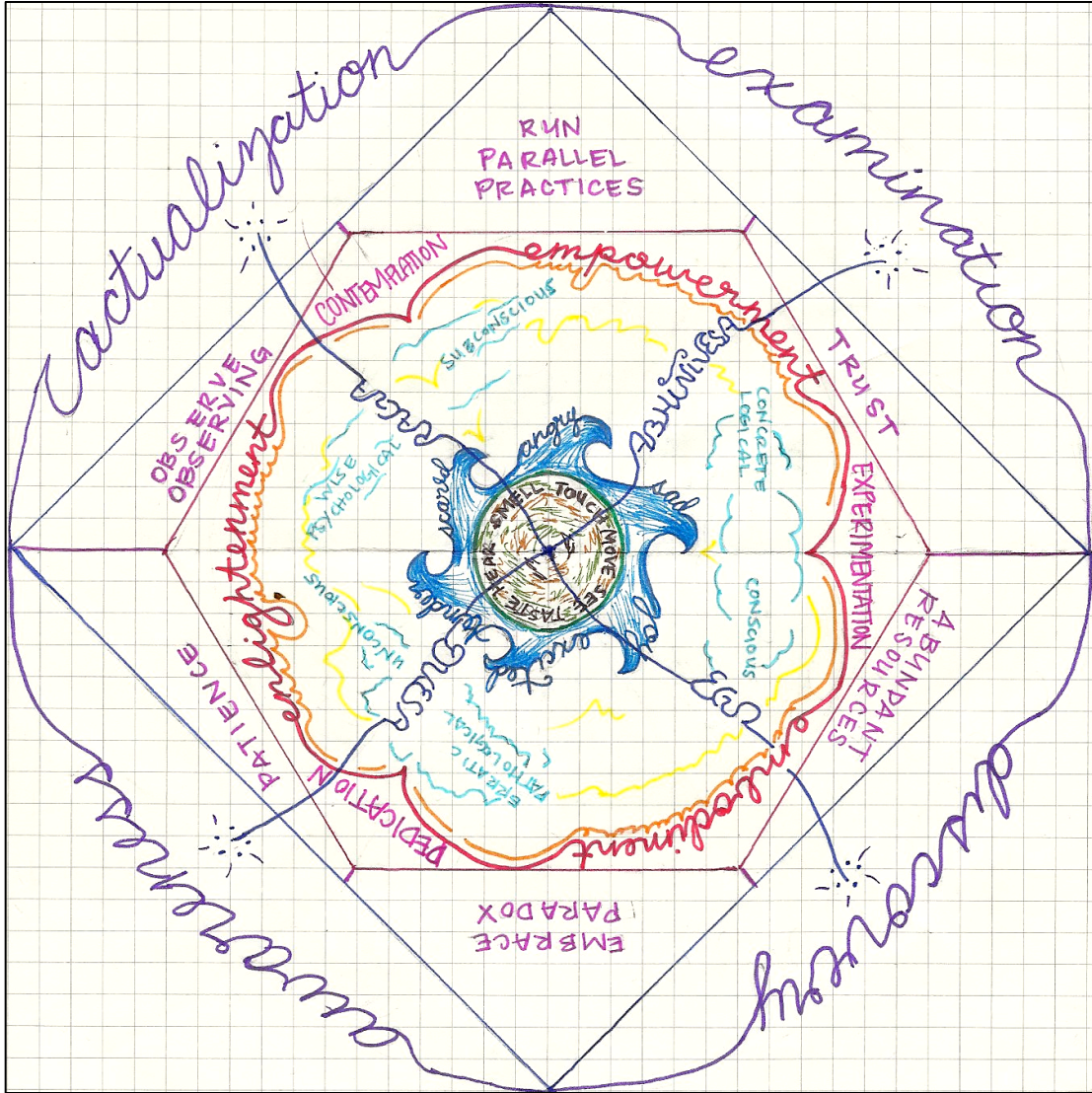


Figure 4 Personal Mandala

Based on my spiritual guides and understanding of my own process, I have developed “7 Principles for Awakening the Spirit,” and “7 Tips for Activating the Creative.” These are ideas that can be used by anyone to engage in a process of self-reflection and spiritual awakening, as I have over the course of the past year. Thus, these are some of the elements of my research that I have extrapolated which can be practiced by anyone.

My 7 Principles for Awakening the Spirit.

1. Recognize *where* you exist is a reflection of *how* you exist and who you *are*. Be mindful of the connection between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual experience. Contemplate deeply on your actions in regard to the four realms of experience, noting patterns and habits in your behavior in order to better understand your true self.
2. Observe yourself observing. This practice is the ultimate one for establishing communication with your inner self and supports the deepest form of self-awareness. Meanwhile, the “muscle” developed by observing one’s observation is key for coming into contact with spiritual wisdom. Learn to listen with your entire body, not just your ears or your logic.
3. Develop cellular awareness of learning to listen and become connected to the most specific parts of your physical body. To do so, establish a physical practice that supports somatic awareness, i.e.: yoga, authentic movement, improvisation, dance, and meditation. Learning to listen to your body aids in physical, emotional, mental health as well as strengthening your intuition. Support your intuitive sense by practicing and playing with it; try following it, asking it questions, and testing it if you dare.

4. Trust yourself, your intuition, your body, and your experience knowing that everything you need is available and in abundance. Don't fret.
5. Practice patience with self, with others, with the process, and with your practice. This practice requires dedication and commitment even when that means you must endure pain. Furthermore, you don't have to understand everything in order to benefit from whatever you are doing or experiencing. Understanding will be gained in due time--endure the waiting.
6. Embrace paradox. Duality is an illusion of the mind. Embrace what seems contradictory and in time the paradox will dissolve, making way for a greater understanding.
7. Actively rest. Take time away from projects, knowing that downtime is when integration and absorption happens, which is a vital part of any form of development.

#### My 7 Tips for Activating The Creative.

1. Keep a journal of some sort. Don't fret about how consistently you write in it. Don't fret over what you are putting in your journal. You can write prose, poetry, drawings, doodles, anything you feel like doing. Date your entries. While art is also documentation of your process, written language serves as a very meaningful tool for reflection and should be embraced in whatever degree is available to you.
2. Reflect frequently but do not get hung up on trying to understand everything.
3. Recognize how, when, and where you are already feeling a spiritual connection and where you are being creative. Support those efforts more consciously. Be mindful of imposing structures of "should be" and "should have" into your life.

4. Begin to define and make room for your own personal values to be expressed. Act upon your beliefs consistently throughout your work and artwork.
5. Take inspiration wherever it comes, follow it whole-heartedly, and do not question; just do.
6. Create consistently. Make tangible your findings about yourself. Get your hands involved not just your mind. Experiment with mediums and ideas you have never tried. Consider different philosophies. Step outside of your box and play outside of your comfort zone.
7. The art you make is yet another form of documenting your spiritual growth. It does not have to be anything more. This perspective may change your relationship with your artwork. You may no longer feel an attachment to its “success” or feel a need for recognition. Instead, your art may provide you with a deeper sense of value due to its connection to your personal transformation and spiritual awakening. Allow the creative process to lead you without attachment to how it can serve you materially.

## Chapter 7

### DISCUSSION

*As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world - that is the myth of the atomic age –  
as in being able to remake ourselves. – Gandhi*

Mahatma Gandhi is known for his spiritual wisdom and teachings of non-violence. Many of his quotes resonate with me. The quote that has stayed with me since I first heard as a teenager, and is also probably his most famous: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” To be the change you so desire in the world requires self-reflection, absolute honesty, and courage. You have to first recognize yourself as a part of the world in order to reflect back to the world what it is you want to see changed. Self-reflection is also key in understanding what it is you are and are not doing that contributed to what you wish to see in the world. Along with self-reflection comes self-knowing. Through knowing her self, she is able to remake herself. In our ability to remake ourselves, we remake the world.

Asking questions about identity and following through into a journey for self-knowledge may appear selfish at first. However, the further along you follow the question “who am I?” the more selfless the journey becomes. Asking “who” eventually leads to asking, “what am I” and “where do I exist.” While the questions may not come so directly in that sequence, the initial question, “who am I?” will bring thoughts related to these additional questions. The question “where do I exist?” (and related questions) allows for expansion of awareness beyond the immediate level of self-reflection that is tied to our given set of descriptions: age, sex, ethnicity, etc. From this internal train of thought we start to consider all of the external aspects of existence that affect our being. Thus, through the process of internal and personal questioning as it leads to the inclusion of all things, we start to become even more aware of the external (“outrospection”).

When we actively participate in our journey of self-discovery, we become more creatively driven, as creativity is our way of expressing our experience. According to Jane Bacon (2010), author of *The voice of her body: Somatic practices as a basis for creative research methodology*, “it is [our] being-in-the-worldness that affords this possibility of generating imagistic material that can be formed into movement, photography, video, poetry or other types of language” (p. 71). The progression of the self, expanding to understanding self, respective to the greater shared experience seems only natural to me. If the whole universe is expanding, are we not also expanding? Indeed, the one thing we can expand is our awareness. There is only one thing happening, one existence, and each individual person is merely a microscopic reflection of that phenomenon. The reflection of the universe in each of us is what makes me believe we are all one. By developing an internal relationship with self and propelling “the process of coming into being there also resides the common ground of humanity and our means of relationship and communication as our bodies link us to all other sentient beings” (Bacon, 2010, p. 71). Self-study, therefore, is an inclusive, expansive practice connecting the individual to universal existence.

Working directly with contemplation, somatic practices, and modalities that seek to raise self-awareness, my approach is more than just a perspective. It is a recipe for broadening awareness of self and beyond the personal, self. I define contemplation as “the third way of knowing that complements the rational and the sensory,” where ‘rational’ refers to logical thinking and ‘sensory’ comes from our sensory perception. The practice of contemplation centers on opening awareness to perceive beyond our current, rational way of knowing.

Somatic practices have been an integral part of my approach in self-study and creative practice. In her 2002 article *Somatic Knowledge. The Body as Content and Methodology in*

*Dance Education*, Jill Green, Ph.D., references Thomas Hanna to define somatics as “the study of the soma, not as objective ‘body,’ but an embodied process of internal awareness and communication” (p. 114). To practice somatics is to look at yourself from the “inside out, where one is aware of feelings, movements and intentions, rather than looking objectively from the outside in” according to Thomas Hanna (Green, 2002, p. 114). I define somatics as anything that refers to a body-mind-spirit understanding of self, and that works to deepen the sense of self through this recognition of the entire being as opposed to merely the mind or merely the body. The relationship between contemplation and somatic practice is vital. Because I experienced a disconnect in my perception of self within my own practice of somatic work leading up to my breaking point— I felt as though I was not my body, or anything for that matter; I questioned my existence by believing I was not ‘this’- hence the lack of self-worth— I find contemplation and deep reflection to be extremely important as a partner of somatic work. It is one thing to practice somatic bodywork and be mindful and present while you are practicing, but it is not just in the moments of practice that require such awareness. Contemplation is about reflection and synthesis of your experiences. Contemplation supports integration of information. Somatic practice supports processing the cellular information held in the body and re-patterning for more healthy and effective use of the body with greater awareness.

Ultimately, practicing with an open mindset will expand a person’s consciousness. I engaged in this practice by incorporating contemplative and somatic practices in my approach for self-study to strengthen communication with self and higher sources of intelligence. At the same time, I invigorated my relationship to Self and therefore invigorated my relationship to my own existence. Naturally, each person must “learn the language” spoken by these deeper sources, as it is often not a person’s first language. These deeper

sources, such as Self, speak in images, symbols, and metaphor, often making verbal communication the last to catch up.

In *The voice of her body: Somatic practices as a basis for creative research methodology*, Jane Bacon calls the place where this symbolic, intuitive and spiritual information is sourced the 'imaginal reality'. I believe in Jungian terms, it would be called the subconscious or the collective unconscious. Whatever we decide to call it, this 'imaginal reality' is resistant to the concrete effects of language' and therefore we are challenged to speak in the language of our imagination. I refer to Jung's work on 'active imagination' for tools to deepen my understanding of this non-verbal language. In the introduction to *Jung on Active Imagination* (1997), Joan Chodorow states "in the deepest sense, active imagination is the essential, inner-directed symbolic attitude that is at the core of psychological development" and using it is "the way to self-knowledge" (p. 17). When one is able to practice these non-traditional forms of learning, it "allows the individual to have experiences of Self/Other in the imaginal realm, which, when brought to consciousness, can have a powerful transformational impact on the individual" (Bacon, 2010, p. 67).

While the work of Green and Bacon both support the transformative nature of contemplative practice, and may even allude to greater changes beyond what we can measure, their work hesitates to acknowledge the spiritual aspect of transformation itself. This hesitation towards spiritual conversation presents itself throughout our society and especially in academia, sometimes manifesting as outright denial and avoidance. In undergoing this research process, others have discouraged me from speaking openly about spirituality. Although I was supported in my research project, the director of my department felt I should speak more directly to creativity as opposed to spirituality. However, in my opinion, spirituality and creativity are intrinsically linked, and thus the discussion of one is



inseparable from discussion of the other. Although I am able to create things that are not spiritually driven, my process is so heavily rooted in self-discovery and intuition that it is a spiritual practice. And, while I anticipated an increase in my creative drive during the course of my research, I was not interested in creativity per se. Rather, I was interested in leading a holistic lifestyle through knowing myself. My quest was, and is still, spiritual. While there are many ways to transform, I believe the acceptance of the spiritual experience into our awareness transforms us in the most lasting and meaningful way.

## Chapter 8

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

*scorching hot  
dryness  
deadness  
came to the desert for the heat  
to die  
to unthaw my frozen psyche  
to warm my soul, and ignite my creative fire  
to feel my body again, to feel home again within my own skin  
little did i know this was truly my calling  
not a piece of paper with my name on it  
I came to arrive to awaken  
my roots were rotting, or was the problem really resting in my crown  
disassociated, identity-less  
wherever it started it moved quickly to the need for grounding  
oh muladara you shook me  
hard  
enough  
to fall  
reestablishing my foundation  
my earth made of disjointed ideas became rich soil calling for new seeds  
the seeds were planted and my Self found its home  
uncomfortable at first, unfamiliar even  
she rested in the depths of the ocean  
singing svadisthana  
while the tears rolled down my face  
and oh do they fall now  
freely  
unlike before  
it came as embodiment, it came through centering  
but enough was enough and it was time to feel the fire within her  
could the heat of the sun be matched by my radiance?  
empowered, i am by manipura  
transforming all along  
opening my heart, to itself  
could she be an angel?  
i would call her  
ana  
HOT  
aaaaaa  
i let my wings carry me, catch me, cradle me  
yet i know my drive has led me astray before  
now its time to surrender to the will of the universe  
lead me know visuddha*

*let me speak the song of the ether  
I will follow  
I will listen  
I will hear  
I will see  
I will know  
i trust you ajna, my intuition never fails me  
now to marry myself with the wisdom from above  
let sabasrara shine in me, through me  
or maybe to start again  
on another clearing  
another cleanin  
another awakening  
do i stay here inside the sun?  
has he provided enough?  
they call it hell here, i call it home  
in the heart of the sun  
maybe now its time to return to mother  
in the bosom of her waves  
time will tell  
it reveals all, when i am patient  
enduring of the perpetual becoming  
becoming one*

*– February 2013*

In reflecting on my process of self-discovery, I recognized a rather surprising correlation with the seven major chakras. In the last nine months I have studied the nature of the chakras more thoroughly. As a result, I realized that my journey matched the flow of the kundalini energy that rises from the base of the spine to the crown. For example, my journey started with a jolt in my foundation and a need to reestablish my roots, to become grounded again. This beginning correlates to a root chakra or muladara chakra connection. However, I can also view the start of my process as correlating to issues related to the crown chakra. These issues include disassociation, lack of identity. I described my journey in the poem above, tying in language from my own experience as well as key factors of the seven chakras. Thinking about this connection and also the fact that the beginning of my journey

can be correlated to various points within the chakras reminds me of the cyclical and continuous nature of the process of becoming. We never begin and we never end. Rather, we move again and again through the cycle, spiraling around the same pathways, learning different things with every pass.

From deepening my understanding of the chakras, I also tied the connection between creativity and self-study with svadisthana. Svadisthana is known as the second or sacral chakra. Primary attributes of svadisthana chakra are that it is the home of the self, and it governs our creative potential. Housed in the sacrum and flowering in the lower abdominal area, the second chakra relates to our reproductive organs. Procreation is perhaps the most primal and sacred sense of creation; it connects to our ability to create life. It is where our physical journey in life began; it is where we took comfort in our natural mother's womb. The home of the self interweaving with creativity is fascinating to me because of my strong interest in self-study through creative expression.

More specifically, the connection to the second chakra and my personal incentive for embarking on this specific thesis project fascinates me because a disrupted or blocked second chakra can present itself as low self-esteem and self-worth, which I absolutely possessed at the start of this work. Self-study and creativity were linked for me because of my interest in pursuing art-making while also investigating myself in efforts to find Self. Because of my interest in making art, it only seemed natural to bridge my questions about identity and the true self by making artwork out of my self-inquiry. Little did I know this process of self-inquiry would also lead to a radical transformation in my sense of self-worth. I am fascinated by my own self-transformation, and intend to keep following the nature of my own process of self-discovery.

I must also include something I found very interesting in regard to the feedback I received from advisors and friends. The three men who discussed my research design and thesis writing with me, who each knew that my project centered on self-study, each made clear that they would rather not hear about as many personal details. By contrast, all of the women expressed an interest in the details about my personal growth. Many of the women asked for more details or expressed that my personal growth should be the foundation for my writing. While I took both standpoints into great consideration for this document, I find that the sentiments of not wanting to know too much about a person and also not wanting to dive into the realm of spirituality to be extremely telling of our society. I see these sentiments as connected to our patriarchal value system and lack of worth we attribute to the personal and the unknown. The personal and the unknown are both feminine values, or feminine ‘realms,’ as opposed to masculine values of group think, the tangible, and the logical. Our patriarchal value system or social structure has made these feminine values the “other” in academia, and the prevailing male consensus is that these feminine values do not have a place, or should have only a minimized place, within this traditionally masculine realm.

On a related note, this separation of personal and spiritual experience is also present within the system of higher education. The neglect for the personal and spiritual in dance academia presents a problem because so many programs are supported by somatic practice. Seeing that a fundamental aspect of somatic practice is to become more self-aware-- which leads to a process of self-discovery, and in my case, a spiritual journey—we should question how programs of higher education can support the students in somatic work without supporting their own processes of self-discovery. Had there been more time allotted to unpack the somatic work practiced within the program, perhaps my breaking point would

not have been so earth shattering. Then again, had I felt safe communicating my experience within the very classes that were shaking me up, this project might not have been so urgent and momentous to me.

Still, this academic and social resistance towards spirituality makes me very curious. I ask: Is this reluctance toward spirituality and personal experience a residual effect left behind from the emotion-ridden post-modern era? Is spirituality stigmatized because of its affiliations with hippies and the new age culture? Is there something about spirituality that is not valid in academia that requires us to avoid it deliberately? I wonder why, throughout my entire education in dance, it took seven years to be introduced to the work of Anna Halprin without a belittling undertone. Could this resistance also be because culturally we do not value humanitarian or spiritually driven work? If it is not outlandish, vulgar, or virtuosic in aesthetic, our society is simply not that interested. And so, after embarking on this journey and meeting this resistance, I must ask: Why is that?

I do not have the answers, but I do have my experience. From my experience working on this project, mostly in writing about the research, I have struggled immensely trying to convey in an “appropriate” (or appropriately academic) way my transformation and my valid experiential research process. While I respect academia, I also want to challenge it. Perhaps that is why I am a dancer. The ultimate challenge to academia is to validate the great wealth of knowledge that cannot be tested by standardized tests and understood by the rational mind. That is, to validate the feminine aspect of knowledge. On a social level, we are also facing a lot of political challenges that address this same neglect of Feminine power.

Without turning my research into political activism, I cannot help but point out these connections as they go beyond my personal experience to something much more relevant to

everyone. It begs the question: can the physical/logical/masculine and spiritual/intuitive/feminine both be validated and supported in academia? In society?

Moving forward, I would like to continue my research and development of a method for self-study as creative practice. This work will consist of creative-centered frameworks for embodied transformation. I plan to share the work with all people who are interested, to establish ways of teaching the form. By teaching this way of working the method will truly come together. Continuing this research will also include investigating some of the emergent questions about spiritual experience in academia and the inclusion of spirituality in academia as a legitimate form of knowledge. I am also very interested in how to weave this greater awareness of my values, beliefs, and interests into my teaching. I have been practicing this method in my modern dance course as well as my yoga courses, and look forward to developing teaching methods that support various forms with an emphasis on awareness, self-discovery and what it means to *be* in the world.

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