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*dharmakaya*: An investigation into the impact of  
mindful meditation on dancers' creative  
processes in a choreographic environment

by

Naomi Lefebvre Sell

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance for PhD  
Creative Practice (Dance)

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<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u></b>	<b>6</b>
<b><u>DECLARATION</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>ABSTRACT</u></b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 <b><u>AIM</u></b>	<b>9</b>
1.2 <b><u>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</u></b>	<b>10</b>
1.3 <b><u>CHOREOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND AND 'TRADITION' WORKING WITHIN</u></b>	<b>11</b>
1.3.1 <b><u>'TRADITION' WORKING WITHIN</u></b>	<b>13</b>
1.4 <b><u>RESEARCH DESIGN AND TIMEFRAME</u></b>	<b>15</b>
1.5 <b><u>CHAPTER OVERVIEW</u></b>	<b>15</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW</u></b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 <b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>19</b>
2.2 <b><u>MEDITATION AND CREATIVITY</u></b>	<b>21</b>
2.3 <b><u>SOMATICS AND FOSTERING CREATIVITY</u></b>	<b>26</b>
2.4 <b><u>EMBODIMENT AND DANCER'S CONSCIOUSNESS</u></b>	<b>31</b>
2.4.1 <b><u>THE DANCE CONSCIOUSNESS MODEL</u></b>	<b>32</b>
2.5 <b><u>SHIFT IN THINKING TOWARDS PROCESS-ORIENTED WORKS</u></b>	<b>36</b>
2.6 <b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b>38</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY</u></b>	<b>40</b>
3.1 <b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>40</b>
3.2 <b><u>PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH</u></b>	<b>41</b>
3.3 <b><u>POSTPOSITIVIST/QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND PHENOMENOLOGY</u></b>	<b>43</b>
3.4 <b><u>CHOREOGRAPHER-AS-RESEARCHER</u></b>	<b>45</b>
3.6 <b><u>RESEARCH DESIGN</u></b>	<b>47</b>
3.7 <b><u>REHEARSAL/CREATIVE PROCESS AND MEDITATION SESSIONS</u></b>	<b>48</b>
3.7.1 <b><u>DANCE MAKING PROCESS AND</u></b>	<b>48</b>
<b><u>IMPROVISATION</u></b>	<b>48</b>
3.7.2 <b><u>MEDITATION</u></b>	<b>50</b>
3.7.2.1 <b><u>Sitting Zen meditation</u></b>	<b>50</b>
3.7.2.2 <b><u>Mindful moving</u></b>	<b>51</b>
3.7.2.3 <b><u>Yoga Nidra</u></b>	<b>52</b>
3.7.2.4 <b><u>Supporting texts</u></b>	<b>52</b>
3.8 <b><u>DATA COLLECTION</u></b>	<b>53</b>
3.8.1 <b><u>INTERVIEWS</u></b>	<b>54</b>
3.8.2 <b><u>OBSERVATIONS</u></b>	<b>55</b>

3.8.3 <u>WRITTEN DOCUMENTS</u>	55
3.9 <u>DATA COLLECTION TIME FRAME</u>	56
3.10 <u>DATA ANALYSIS</u>	56
3.11 <u>TRIANGULATION</u>	57
3.12 <u>WRITING UP OF DATA ANALYSIS</u>	58
3.13 <u>CONCLUSION</u>	58
<b><u>CHAPTER 4 - DOCUMENTING PRACTICE</u></b>	<b>59</b>
4.1 <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	59
4.2 <u>PHASE 1 - TAPE #26-1, 25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2007</u>	62
4.3 <u>PHASE 2 - TAPE #9-2, 24<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2007</u>	64
4.4 <u>PHASE 3 - TAPE #24-3, 14<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2008</u>	66
4.5 <u>DHARMAKAYA</u>	67
4.6 <u>ROUND TABLE Q&amp;A</u>	68
4.7 <u>CONCLUSION</u>	70
<b><u>CHAPTER 5 - PROJECT, PERFORMANCE AND DATA ANALYSIS</u></b>	<b>71</b>
5.1 <u>PROCESS OF ANALYSIS: DURING AND AFTER</u>	71
5.2 <u>STYLE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING</u>	75
5.3 <u>REALIST TALES</u>	76
5.4 <u>CONFESSIONAL/IMPRESSIONIST TALES</u>	78
5.5 <u>TRIANGULATION</u>	79
5.6 <u>REALIST TALES</u>	79
5.6.1 <u>DAISY</u>	79
5.6.2 <u>KATY</u>	82
5.6.3 <u>LUCILLE</u>	83
5.6.4 <u>TARA</u>	86
5.7 <u>ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION</u>	88
5.7.1 <u>DIRECTION OF THE REHEARSAL PROCESS</u>	89
5.7.1.1 <u>A developed language and group dynamic</u>	91
5.7.2 <u>GENERATION OF MOVEMENT MATERIAL</u>	92
5.7.2.1 <u>Non-doing and sharing choreographed movement</u>	94
5.7.3 <u>MY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DANCERS; CONFESSIONAL TALE -</u>	
<u>CHOREOGRAPHER-AS-RESEARCHER</u>	99
5.7.3.1 <u>Ego</u>	102
5.7.4 <u>UNDERSTANDING JUDGEMENT</u>	103
5.7.5 <u>HONESTY</u>	106
5.7.6 <u>EMBODIMENT: BEING PRESENT, LETTING GO AND SUFFERING LESS</u>	108
5.7.6.1 <u>Mindfulness</u>	111
5.7.7 <u>CHALLENGES IN THE SITTING PRACTICE: AWARENESS AND BUDDHA SMILE</u>	115
5.7.8 <u>EFFECTS OUTSIDE THE STUDIO</u>	116

5.7.9 <u>CHOREOGRAPHIC METHOD; CONFSSIONAL TALE</u>	118
5.7.9.1 <u>Confessional tale; why a performance?</u>	121
5.7.9.2 <u>Impressionist tale; the performance</u>	123
5.7.9.2.1 <u><i>dharmakaya</i></u>	123
5.7.10 <u>METHOD OF ANALYSIS FOR PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH</u>	127
5.8 <u>CONCLUSION</u>	127
<b><u>CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b>129</b>
6.1 <u>AIM</u>	129
6.2 <u>METHODOLOGY</u>	130
6.2.1 <u>CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING ANALYSIS</u>	131
6.2.2 <u>TALES AND THEMES</u>	132
6.3 <u>RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE</u>	133
6.3.1 <u>CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE</u>	134
6.3.1.2 <u>Embodiment and mindfulness</u>	135
6.3.1.3 <u>RETHINKING MYSELF IN THE ROLE OF CHOREOGRAPHER-AS-RESEARCHER</u>	140
6.4 <u>TWO YEARS ON AND CONFIRMATION OF FINDINGS</u>	144
6.5 <u>APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY</u>	146
<b><u>APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT LETTERS</u></b>	<b>150</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX B: PHD RESEARCH PROJECT RELEASE FORM</u></b>	<b>152</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX C - TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS</u></b>	<b>153</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX D - PHASE 1 - ANNOTATED REHEARSAL LOG ENTRIES</u></b>	<b>189</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX E - PHASE 2 - ANNOTATED REHEARSAL LOG ENTRIES</u></b>	<b>193</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX F - PHASE 3 - ANNOTATED REHEARSAL LOG ENTRIES</u></b>	<b>197</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX G: DHARMAKAYA PERFORMANCE ADVERTISEMENT</u></b>	<b>202</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX H: DHARMAKAYA THEATRE PROGRAMME</u></b>	<b>204</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX I: DHARMAKAYA</u></b>	<b>207</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX J: BUDDHIST STORY</u></b>	<b>208</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX K: BUDDHIST STORY</u></b>	<b>209</b>

<u>APPENDIX L: BUDDHIST STORY</u>	<u>210</u>
<u>APPENDIX M: FINAL REALIST TALE - DAISY</u>	<u>211</u>
<u>APPENDIX N: FINAL REALIST TALE - KATY</u>	<u>212</u>
<u>APPENDIX O: FINAL REALIST TALE - LUCILLE</u>	<u>213</u>
<u>APPENDIX P: FINAL REALIST TALE - TARA</u>	<u>214</u>
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	<u>216</u>

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To my husband David and daughter Freya for their patience and understanding and to my parents for always believing in me.

Dedicated in loving memory of my mother Anita Faith Lefebvre.

## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This practice-based research project aims to weave together the data generated through a dance making process, with a reflective, critical analysis of the data, to argue that incorporating meditation in the creative process can have a profound impact on a creative practice. *dharmakaya*, the dance work I choreographed for the purpose of this investigation, was developed in collaboration with four dancers, who were at the time, students studying on a BA (Hons) Dance Theatre programme. The process of creating the work involved a deep engagement with the principles and practices of meditation in order to consider critically the impact this had on my own creative practice and on dancers' creative endeavours in the choreographic environment. Integral to this research project is consideration of the implications of this process for practice-based research and practices within the art form.

The written thesis provides the analysis of the creative process of making *dharmakaya*. It seeks to understand if a creative environment can be established which incorporates the principles and practices gained from meditation to support and enhance dancers' creative processes as co-creators of dance work. I discuss how my approach results in changes in how movement material is generated by the dancers, in the direction of the rehearsal process and in my engagement with the dancers. Importantly, the thesis makes clear how a method of analysis can be established which allows the results of the practice-based research to be sympathetically transformed into written form.

As a whole the study contributes to the current field of research through the development of a dance making methodology that incorporates mindful meditation and enables the dancers' verbal and embodied engagement. This methodology incorporates data collection and analysis in order to facilitate a critical reflection on the efficacy of the process. The thesis argues that adapting principles from meditation teachings offers a choreographer a means to engage dancers in a process of 'letting go', to stimulate their creativity and their capacity to generate material in the process of dance making: it offers them a language - an embodied language - with which to articulate and contribute ideas in verbal form.

This practice-based research contributes to the continuing debates about training methods for contemporary dancers and choreographers, the leading/direction of creative dance making processes, and the different ways in which dancers engage with the preparation and performance of choreographed work.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of this research project is to utilise my own choreographic process to explore meditation and mindfulness as an approach to working creatively. My principle interest is an investigation into the practice of meditation and mindfulness within the rehearsal process practices, through the engagement of a 'real-time' development of a complete dance work. I seek to understand the extent to which such practices can usefully impact upon the performers' ability to apply this work on an on-going basis and through to the performance of a completed dance work.

One of the challenges of this research project is maintaining clarity of the aim; the intention of the practice is to think critically on the process towards the making of a dance work and how this is shaped by the inclusion of the meditation practices. The further aim is to understand how I would document this process, drawing out the experiences of the dancers and setting it within a theoretical framework. Through this research process I hope to offer something to what 'goes on' in the creation of a dance work, through the inclusion of a meditation practice and to consider the implications this might have for practice-based research and practices within the art form.

The rehearsal process itself is the practice that emerges out of and shapes this research project's methodology, and produces the data for analysis which I am putting forward here in the written thesis. The making of the dance work, *dharmakaya*, is a necessary result of the rehearsal process, but the dance work itself is not put forward for examination, but is acknowledged as a terminal point of the rehearsal process which 'is' the data I am generating and reflecting on to construct the thesis. *dharmakaya* was performed in a public London theatre (10<sup>th</sup> March, 2008), ten months having been taken to develop the material, structure and final form of the dance

work, using the principles and practices of meditation as the creative stimulus and primary source for the creative processes engaged in the development of the work.

*dharmakaya*, the work itself, is presented in the thesis in DVD form (see Appendix I), offering evidence alongside other forms of evidence, of the practice-based research that has led me to propose that the principles and practices of meditation have the potential to contribute significantly and in a new way to the creative process of the dancer. Importantly it will be claimed that my methodological approach and the processes engaged offer new knowledge of the creative process in the choreographic environment.

Therefore the process of creating *dharmakaya* and its existence as a finished work provides the data for this written thesis and in the writing of this thesis I aim to answer my research questions through the practical research undertaken.

## **1.2 Research questions**

In relation to my research project aim I will seek to understand how the integration of a meditative practice can influence and enhance a dance making process. In particular what shifts result from this approach; in the generation of movement material, in the direction of the rehearsal process and in my engagement with the dancers.

I will also examine what embodiment means in this context; for myself and for the dancers. What new insights can be gained about embodiment and how are these influenced by established theory on embodiment? What impact might notions of embodiment have on the rehearsal process, on the creation of the work and on the dancers' performance?

My final questions seek to understand if a creative environment can be established which incorporates the principles and practices gained from meditation to support and enhance the creation of dance work. And can a method of analysis then be developed to allow the results of the

practice-based research to be sympathetically transformed into written form?

### **1.3 Choreographic background and 'tradition' working within**

My research interests as a choreographer grew from the desire to strengthen the creative and collaborative relationship with the dancers with whom I was creating work. I wanted to research the process of making and performing dance work where the concept of embodied practice was to the fore. For the purposes of this research project I have looked to the way in which the term 'embodiment' is used in the context of dance practices which can broadly be described as 'somatic practices', in which embodiment generally refers to the process of somatically 'reading' our experience of moving, where sensation can be examined, reflected on and made sense of. Specifically, I want to look at whether an external practice such as meditation could influence and enhance the creative process and performance outcome.

In training as a contemporary dancer and choreographer my education was focused on the development of technical performance skills as well as on gaining choreographic expertise. As my professional dance career shifted from performing to choreographing I became aware that I did not know how to establish effectively a rehearsal process where honesty of intention within the movement explorations was at the forefront, at the same time finding and encouraging presence within the dancers' performances.

After completing my BFA in Dance in 1998 and building my professional career I began to engage with yoga and meditation as supplementary training to support my dancing. Within my early encounters with yoga and meditation I began to see the potential connections that could be made to dance training, choreographic processes and performance. Specifically, the

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<sup>1</sup> For further discourse on 'embodiment' refer to; Jane Bacon (2010, 2007), Glenna Batson (2009), Helen Poynor (2009), Thecla Schiphorst (2009), Elizabeth Smears (2009), Sylvie Fortin (2009), Sondra Fraleigh (1998, 1987), Jill Green (1993), Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1979a, 1979b).

discipline required within the practice of yoga and meditation seemed to mirror the necessary presence required by the choreographers and dancers with whom I was working, and I considered that it had the potential to support dance training and the dance making process.

My professional dance performance career included employment with two Canadian companies who had opposing approaches to the body in creation and dance training. First, a Butoh dance company, Kokoro, whose emphasis was on the 'felt' and embodied experience in creation and performance and secondly a Cunningham-based company, Buntingdance, which focused on the aesthetic and athletic execution of the created movement. My position on dance making has been influenced by these differing approaches, both of which aim toward the creation of a choreographic work but the choreographic process; how the dance work is generated, rehearsed and performed was an area I was most interested in engaging with further. My experience of improvisation; the generation of movement material in creative processes, varied greatly between my employment as a dancer within these two companies. In Kokoro we were encouraged to engage with improvisation as a means to generate set dance material, which stemmed from imagery-based instructions and in Buntingdance, we utilised improvisation to find 'variations' of the set material we were taught by the choreographer, the variations were then further refined by aesthetic choices made by the choreographer. Within my own choreographic processes I have utilised a blend of these methodologies; this encouraged me to become interested in engaging further with these ideas to investigate whether there was a more meaningful process which could uncover a method of practice and choreographic outcome which had a closer link to the 'felt' and embodied experience. In prior processes I would devise set tasks, either through improvisation or imagery, this retained a methodology for 'making' the work and methodology for 'treating' or refining it; I am interested in no longer separating these practices. Positioning dance making as a practice that has a greater link to the 'felt' sense

requires encouraging engagement with a 'particular focus upon notions of embodied knowing and the process of speaking 'from' rather than 'about' movement' as articulated by Jane Bacon and Vida Midgelow (2010, p. 4). This is the position I came to realise that I was interested in investigating further through the practice and principles of meditation.

I am also a lecturer in choreography within a conservatoire context, so my position on choreography is influenced by the pedagogic principles at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Within the Faculty of Dance, the choreography delivery supports students to explore their own movement as a choreographic source, to stimulate the exploration of the moving body within a wider choreographic and production framework. The aim is to provide opportunities for students to explore links between choreographic intention and the effective performance of that intention, to develop a capacity to work creatively within an ensemble and with outside direction. This enables students to have the skills to participate in a creative production from its conception through performance. My engagement as a lecturer in choreography at Trinity Laban has encouraged my desire to investigate how best to approach the choreographic processes we are asking the students to engage with.

### **1.3.1 'Tradition' working within**

The 'tradition' I am working within has been influenced by my early contemporary dance training in Canada. The critic, curator and editor, Chantal Ponbriand (2002), defines the dance work coming out of Eastern Canada in late 1970s and early 1980s as 'expanded dance' (Ponbriand borrowed the term 'expanded cinema' and applied it to dance - defining it as a growing field that reaches beyond the traditional artistic fields), performed by the contemporary dancer or 'hired body' as defined by Foster in the late 1990s (as the dancer trained in differing dance styles - ready to work for an independent choreographer) (Cornell, n.d, p. 2). Dance writer, Katherine

Cornell argues that the term 'expanded dance' embraces 'different approaches to the creative process, including laboratories as well as multimedia technology, and encompasses bodily practices within any art form' (n.d, p. 2).

Foster's 'hired body' is culturally and temporally located, - and is drawn primarily from the North American training system which has some resonances here in the UK through the development of the current conservatoire model. Some dance training has consciously moved away from the training of the 'hired body' but its roots remain strong and there is value in this tradition in so far as it offers a historical and cultural reading of dance as it has developed over time. I situate my own work as choreographer/maker/teacher within the realm of Foster's 'hired body' approach and within the 'expanded dance' category as described by Ponbriand and Cornell as a 'product' of the Canadian dance system/tradition. This research project has brought together my own practice, rooted in Canadian and latterly UK training methodologies and the dancers' own cultural contexts, as trainees within the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance bringing with them their own backgrounds and prior experiences.

This relationship between myself and the dancers has been thought-provoking in terms of my own background and the dancers' training contexts. Whilst current dance students have a training that is broader than the earlier 'hired body' regime, there is a 'habitus', in the Bourdieu sense (Bourdieu, 1977), which is brought into/created within the studio, which shapes what happens. Essentially, the 'hired body' 'haunts' and in a very positive sense also informs much of dance training today. However, in institutions where there is an emphasis on dancers achieving technical virtuosity, it is important to recognise that this could result in (inadvertently) creating 'silent' dancers who, through lack of a practice that demands creative interaction might not be supported to develop skills that enable them to create dance and to express and/or talk about ideas that might be

communicated through the dance medium. As choreographer in such a context, my role is to provide the conditions by which creative interaction is possible and indeed an expectation: drawing from my own particular experiences, the principles of mindful meditation and the realities of the dancers' experiences, a unique context is created which at the same time is generalisable as a 'model' for working in a studio-based dance making context.

This research process is an enabled dual process: it offers a novel way of working that promotes an evolving process of embodying dance, allowing for the generation of truly innovative ideas and potentially a new embodied language, which in turn feeds back into the dance making process, and back into the language as an iterative, reciprocal process. This innovation is revealed through the practice and integration of mindful meditation alongside a process of dance making.

#### **1.4 Research design and timeframe**

The desire to delve deeper into my current dance making practice led me to question whether the practice of meditation alongside and integrated with a creative process could provide the basis for establishing an approach to the creation and performance of work that would result in a greater sense of presence in both choreographer and dancers. I began this research study by designing a dance making process which would span ten months, culminating in a theatre performance. Throughout the process, the dancers, and myself in the role of choreographer-as-researcher, would engage with meditation teachings and self practice. I invited a yoga and meditation teacher with whom I had studied over the past ten years, to lead the meditation sessions throughout the ten month process.

#### **1.5 Chapter overview**

In the following chapters I will discuss my practice-based research study, the methodology evidenced in current

literature as well as the outcomes of the dance making process. In Chapter 2, I will discuss existing literature on meditation, somatics and creativity, examining this in the context of the proposed study and highlighting areas for further investigation. Three specific research studies carried out within the fields of meditation, somatics and creative processes are also selected for scrutiny.

Chapter 3 will demonstrate the specific methodological and analytical processes undertaken for this unique research study, allowing for the emergent findings to be highlighted. As a practice-based research study the methodology is guided by the framework of postpositivist research, and employing the tenets of action research to allow the practical findings to influence the results of this study.

In Chapter 4 I will focus on the documentation of the practice as it developed through the project, evidencing selected rehearsal footage with accompanying commentary extracted from the data analysis log. To provide a context for this discussion, the filmed version of the final dance work, *dharmakaya*, is introduced in this chapter, alongside selected footage from the round table Q&A, which followed the performance. This combination of film and commentary provides evidence of the range of activities that constitute the practice, and the volume of data that was collected through the practice activities.

Reflecting on the dance making process, and the methodology employed, I will explore in Chapter 5 how the dance work takes shape through the integration of the meditation practices. I will discuss also how meditation shifted the rehearsal process and the roles of the dancers and my role, as choreographer-as-researcher. In relation to my research questions, I will analyse the results of the study; first, told through the words of the participants themselves, with further analysis of the identified themes in relation to existing research and literature.

Chapter 6, the final section of the written thesis, brings together the various strands of the research project, identifying the outcomes and proposing areas for further research. I also establish the contribution of knowledge offered by the thesis: essentially that it locates a perceived gap (see Chapter 2 Literature Review) in the understanding of the potential of mindful meditation as a new approach to dance making within a choreographic environment and contributes to the current field of research in a number of ways. First, through the development of a dance making methodology that incorporates mindful meditation and enables the dancers' verbal and embodied engagement, this research study offers an example of how creative investigations might be led, with the focus being on 'presence' and 'mindfulness'. This methodology incorporates data collection and analysis in order to facilitate a critical reflection on the efficacy of the process. I argue that this methodology can encourage an experiential understanding of embodiment for the dancers which enables them to engage more deeply in the creative process, and offering them a language - an embodied language - with which to articulate and contribute ideas in verbal form. Secondly, the thesis extends understanding of the role of the choreographer. I argue that adapting principles from meditation teachings offers the choreographer a means to engage dancers in a process of 'letting go', to stimulate their creativity and their capacity to generate material in the process of dance making.

My role as choreographer-as-researcher provided a bridge for the dancers between a more conventional approach to dance making and one which encourages an embodied 'linguaging' from the dancers. There was a dual process: offering a novel way of working that encourages an evolving process of building a new embodied language; and providing a reciprocal means by which the constantly evolving dance material (language) can feed back into the dance making process, and loop back into the language. Through this dual process I negotiated my role as

pedagogue and dance maker whilst also practising my own use of embodied language.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will examine previous research and knowledge with respect to my research aim and questions. Through this analysis I aim to demonstrate how my practical investigation sets out to extend knowledge of the process of dance creation and performance in a creative environment. Some studies, both practice-based and those written from a theoretical perspective, consider the relationship between meditation and creativity or varying forms of somatic practices; none of this research addresses directly how these specific forms of practice inform a dance making process carried through to full production. In bringing together varying perspectives on meditation and dance making process and proposing connections between them to frame this unique study, I will be contributing new knowledge for contemporary dance practice. While a range of critical frameworks have informed the basis of this literature review, I have chosen three specific studies for the way in which they demonstrate, collectively, the growth of debate in this field of study. These three studies offer a broad yet thorough view of meditation and creativity, as well as evidencing other approaches undertaken in recent research.

First is a study conducted at Humboldt State College by Joseph McPherson (1974) a Senior Behavioural Scientist. Aiming to integrate meditation as a means for stimulating creativity, McPherson's study is not dance specific; rather it offers an interesting view of the potential connections to be made between meditation and creativity. Second is a dance education based study conducted by Jill Green (1993) which examines the connections between somatics<sup>2</sup> and creativity in a University course environment and third is a study by Karla Shacklock (2006) which examines the contemporary dancer's

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<sup>2</sup> Somatics is a generic term which discusses movement or body practices that focus on working from the 'inside out'. Although meditation is not typically discussed as a somatic practice, it is however a practice that focuses on the inner self. Somatics and meditation share many core principles, the reason for identifying somatics and creativity for discussion.

consciousness, the creative/rehearsal process and the performer's ability to access varying conscious states.

This literature review shifts between these different types of studies and perspectives because my research project is not located within one particular methodological paradigm. I have created and devised a dance work, whilst examining the dancers' creative process of that work. Shacklock's research into the dancer's consciousness asks important questions regarding contemporary dance training and the dancer's facility to perform. Further, the dance making process in the creation of *dharmakaya* involved a deep engagement with the principles and practices of meditation, and Shacklock's research provided a basis from which to test the impact of this on my own creative practice and the implications of it for practice-based research.

Both Green and McPherson's research studies offer insight into how somatic or meditation practices influence creativity. None of the three studies involved a creative process of dance making which culminated in a theatre performance. I am aware that a number of choreographers and dance practitioners such as Steve Paxton (1997), Miranda Tufnell (2004, 1993) and Deborah Hay (2000) have been influenced by Zen Buddhist principles and have cited these principles for the values they offer that complement contemporary dance practice, but none have laid out in detail how this may impact upon dance making processes. The challenge of this research study is in combining different methodological and analytical approaches; what I have researched in the studio required a practice-based methodology, and resulted in the creative process and performance of *dharmakaya* and is the first outcome of this study. The second outcome emerges from the analysis of the data which has utilised ethnographic principles and has resulted in the writing of this thesis.

## **2.2 Meditation and creativity**

Within the body of writing on meditation and its teachings there is some consistency of view on how meditation supports creativity. Early studies examining the relationship between meditation and creativity, such as McPherson's in 1974, were primarily quantitative and focused on Transcendental Meditation which involves the constant repetition of a mantra. Recent literature and research (Nataraja, 2008; Jaksch, 2007; Alfaro, 2006; Monk, 2004; Read, 1997) offers a more holistic view of the benefits of meditation, linking this with a persons' capacity for creative engagement and output.

McPherson's research study (1974), conducted at Humboldt State College in the context of a training course in Transcendental Meditation (1974, p. 35<sup>3</sup>) examined the effects of Transcendental Meditation on a person's sense of creativity. McPherson developed a modified version of the 'Otis Physical and Behavioural Inventory (Form A)' (1974, p. 35) from which he preselected fourteen items out of thirty from the behavioural section of the questionnaire, on the basis that this would be consistent with the notion of creativity. This was completed by 620 participants, all of whom were practitioners of Transcendental Meditation. Of the returned questionnaires, 216 were randomly selected for detailed analysis.

Awareness, intuitive insights and productivity were examples of three of the behaviours which had a perceived increase with Transcendental Meditation, indicating a movement towards greater creativity. Boredom and restlessness were two examples of behaviours where a perceived decrease was suggested as a movement towards greater creativity. A majority of participants reported behavioural changes, which the researcher considered to be consistent with an increase in

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<sup>3</sup>This research study was part of a literature review conducted by Kanellakos, D., & Lukas, J. 1974, titled *The Psychobiology of Transcendental Meditation, A Literature Review*. California: W.A. Benjamin.

creativity, although the specificity of the creativity was not discussed. The participants generally reported a decrease in restlessness, which the study suggested was consistent with an increase in creativity. This raises the question; can a restless person not be creative?

In McPherson's study, the subjective experience of the researcher was valued over the personal experience of the participants: the participants were not questioned directly concerning whether they felt any increase in creativity. This study essentially evidences a quantitative style of research, likely not to elicit the kind of information about the effects of Transcendental Meditation on the participants: the greater sense of creativity that might be identified through the questionnaire would have limited impact, since it was not discussed further with the participants. The results of this study were not fed back to the practitioners/participants, hence there was no opportunity for them to discuss their personal experience in relation to the research findings; the participants' involvement with the study ended with the conclusion of the meditation course and completion of the questionnaire.

Although the identifying of these 'behaviours' is no doubt accurate, the labelling of them is less straightforward or useful than is suggested by McPherson. For example, the participants may have experienced a greater sense of awareness, but the value of this lies in how the participants achieved this awareness and how they then apply it whilst meditating and within general life outside of their personal practice. Identifying more general or useful states of being could have greater potential for impacting on or enhancing creativity. By contrast, more recent research on meditation and creativity, such as that by practitioners and researchers Mary Jaksch (2007), Janet Read (1997), Gillian Tierney (2007) and Meredith Monk (2004) evidences observations and research outcomes based on practical experiences, philosophical understanding and reflective analyses.

Jaksch (2007) usefully suggests there are three states of mind that can be cultivated through meditation and each one fosters creativity (para. 5). First is 'letting go of the me, mine, myself mind-tape' so that one can completely 'dive into action and forget ourselves in the process'. Secondly, 'being kind to ourselves' is a state that allows one to 'experiment with failure' without self punishment and, thirdly, 'stilling the mind', a mind uncluttered by thought, maintains a spaciousness needed for creativity. Jaksch also states that when we begin a creative process from the standpoint of stillness, 'ideas flow naturally and freely' (2007, para. 5).

In a similar vein, Read (1997) proposes that the practices of meditation, self-awareness, soft-focus and light-heartedness enhance a 'mindful gap' which allows for access to inner creativity (para. 4). Read states that through meditation the brain can access an alpha or a more advanced theta state and in this altered state the 'gap will open and creative mind emerge[s]'. Neuroscientist Shanida Nataraja (2008) also argues that brain wave states encountered in meditation, particularly theta waves<sup>4</sup>, lend themselves to greater access of the creative subconscious mind. As suggested by Read, there is evidence that the benefits of daily meditation are becoming more accepted by medical and scientific communities, with some acknowledgement that enhanced inner creativity is an 'additional by-product' of the practice of meditation. Read proposes also, that the practice of self-awareness or mindful self-awareness is a non-judgemental form of observing one's 'daily actions and thoughts in the present moment in a detached frame of mind' (para. 7) and when this is learned and applied, it can create 'the necessary gap between the ego and self' and a great sense of clarity of mind unfolds. When utilising a soft-focus of the gaze, Read suggests that the 'ego is temporarily set aside and the subconscious mind where

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<sup>4</sup> Nataraja proposes that theta waves provide us with the ability to form mental images, primarily imagination which is particularly prominent in dreaming sleep and deep meditation. This is also the predominant brain wave rhythm in children of two to five years of age, the point in our lives when we are the most creative and imaginative, claims Nataraja. The consequence of the strong theta wave activity is that children can create entire worlds in their minds, when awake or asleep (2008).

inner creativity abounds comes to the surface' (para. 8). For the practice of light-heartedness, Read advises that in maintaining the ability to see humour, we will perceive 'the intuitive and original moments that otherwise go unnoticed when we act from habitual behaviour patterns' and that humour 'embellishes the absurd and unusual, and this is where creativity springs from' (para. 9). Read proposes that when a fluidity of mind and the expressing from the present moment with calm clarity becomes a natural state, the creative mind is then always available, and that the 'experience of inner creativity will become a living presence' in life (para. 10).

According to established literature the practice of meditation also seeks 'a sense of peacefully living in the moment', which can 'stimulate creative, intuitive, and problem-solving capabilities...it can increase self-acceptance, self knowledge, and confidence by focusing inward' (Tierney, 2007, p. 169). As well as opening one up to living in the moment the process of meditation also 'endears one more to the possibilities presented by chance and randomness', factors that are established as 'central to the development of the creative work; the act of making art, in its widest sense, [which] involves adopting a state of mind that is mindful and close to meditation' (online resource, Meditation Expert, n.d.).

The links proposed above between creativity and meditation provide an approach for investigating how a dance making process might be enhanced by using meditative processes. The concept of 'creativity' and how it is developed in the individual, and indeed, what constitutes 'creativity', has been considered in a variety of discipline and research domains, and it is not the subject of this thesis to investigate 'creativity' *per se*, but rather, to consider the work of scholars and practitioners and their understanding of creative activity/engagement and creativity; in other words, to look at what has emerged through their practice and research.

Although not the focus of my research study, it is worth noting here a documented link between meditation and the reduction of performance anxiety, where a reduction in performance anxiety has been associated with maintaining a creative and responsive state in dancers. Choreographer Meredith Monk tells us that she shifted her rehearsal process after being introduced to the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa in the mid 1970s (Alfaro, 2006). Through these teachings, Monk has come to the view that fear is something many dancers have in common, creating conflict and anxiety. Since practising the teachings of Trungpa, Monk advises that she developed patience, respect and compassion towards the people she worked with, especially when dealing with her dancers' stage fright<sup>5</sup>. Further, Monk (2004) links creativity and the ability to be creative directly to meditation, where 'staying present' throughout the process is key. In her experience, the practice of meditation 'has ... expanded her vision' (2004, para. 11).

It is the contention of the author that the link between meditation and creativity could be significant and that many of the concepts that are linked to accessing creativity have the capacity to enhance the dance making process and performance. There is little research into how these practices correlate with and/or might relate to creative/choreographic processes or to the application of these in a studio practice. This research study will seek to offer practical methods for dance artists and makers to apply meditation teachings and principles to choreographic and performance situations to enhance the creative process and final outcome. The aim of this research study is not to test creativity, but rather to identify ways in which the creative capacity of individuals can be accessed and creative activity fostered in the act of creation and performance of dance work. The research design is therefore structured to allow the

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<sup>5</sup> Stage fright is the anxiety or fear generated when a performer performs in front of an audience.

findings to emerge and to be fed back into the practical process on a continuing basis.

### **2.3 Somatics and fostering creativity**

The media artist/designer, Thecla Schiphorst, proposes that 'somatic techniques are intended to be used *by the self on the self* in order to refine knowledge and precision through use of the human body in action' (2009, p. 52). Somatics and contemporary dance share a 'historical epistemology of practice' according to Schiphorst, which is why they appropriately inform each other<sup>6</sup>. Schiphorst reminds us that Thomas Hanna (1980; 1984; 1986; 1988; 1991-1992), a practitioner and philosopher, identified a collection of 'embodied disciplines that share an approach to first-person practice focusing on *sensory awareness*: the ability to act on perceived stimuli'; a collection which he named, somatics (2009, p. 52).

Green's study (1993), *Fostering creativity through movement and body awareness practices: A postpositivist investigation into the relationship between somatics and the creative process*, offers a method and aim in consonance with my research study: conducted from a postpositivist<sup>7</sup> perspective, it adopted a postpositivist/qualitative-based methodology. Conducted as part of an American University course where participants from varying backgrounds with little or no dance experience could take part, the study was structured such that students could be awarded credits towards their degree qualification. The exploration looked in general at the relationship between varying somatic practices and creativity. The group met weekly for two hours over two terms from January to June, totalling twenty sessions. Each two-hour session consisted of a general somatic or movement experience and a

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<sup>6</sup> Schiphorst identifies contemporary somatic practices which include Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais' *Awareness Through Movement* and Rudolf Laban's *Effort-Shape Analysis* (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Postpositivist research is generally qualitative in nature, with the idea that subjectivity is not only unavoidable but can be useful in giving researchers and participants a more meaningful understanding of their findings (Green & Stinson, 1999).

group creative session. The project culminated in a sharing, with participants encouraged rather than required to be part of the performance. The somatic section of the course was based on sampling various somatic techniques - kinetic awareness, progressive relaxation, visualisation/imagery, Feldenkrais, breathing and the energy/tension scale - all led by Green. The creative sessions led on from the somatic sessions, for example the use of breath in movement improvisation followed a 'breath-focused' somatic session.

Green points out that it was not her purpose 'to measure the creative abilities of the participants before and after introduction of somatic practices, but to understand how they experienced somatics and creativity and if they experienced a relationship between the two processes' (1993, p. 89). She was 'interested in how somatics can help dancers create something new, take risks and actualise the self, rather than perform well according to standardized criteria on evaluative tests' (1993, p. 89). Green advises us that 'the study is based on the subjective involvement of the researcher as a participant and insider and admits to an interventionist approach' (1993, p. 90), and the final performance 'was the vehicle used to bring these experiences to life in creative form' (1993, p. 112).

The strength of Green's study is that she bases her research around the idea that 'somatic theory basically views the body as perceived from within the first-person perception' (1993, p. 17). This concept is embedded in Hanna's research which argues that data from a first-person perception is substantially different from data observed from a third-person view. Hanna proposes that somatics is a process of looking at oneself from the 'inside out', being aware of feelings, movements and intentions, rather than observing objectively from the 'outside in' (1988, p. 20). She states that 'life does not occur except in embodied form, and when we see and experience life, it is always by seeing and experiencing a

living body' (1980, p. viii). Green's study is further informed by Hanna's research in that he states:

When a human being is observed from the outside - i.e., from a third-person viewpoint - the phenomenon of a human body is perceived. But, when this same human being is observed from the first-person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive senses, a categorically different phenomenon is perceived; the human soma. (1986, p. 4-5)

Hanna argues that from a first-person viewpoint, data emerges that is potentially more valuable than that which is revealed by viewing a body as an objective entity. From the first-person perspective the 'proprioceptive centres communicate and continually feed back a rich display of somatic information which is immediately self-observed as a process that is both unified and ongoing' (1986, p. 4-5).

Green proposes that 'somatics is the study of the soma, not as an objective body, but an embodied process of internal awareness and communication' (1993, p. 17). And Hanna claims that the word 'soma evolved to mean the "living body in its wholeness", ...the soma arose as a system that always strives to achieve stability and balance - a task that takes place in time and is never complete' (1980, p. 6). Green considers the concept of body/mind processes and Hanna's somatic theoretical perspective, which diverges from a Western dualistic conception of a body-mind split, and embraces a more Eastern holistic conception of body and mind. According to Hanna:

the Asian viewpoint wisely and correctly sees the human being as a single unity with many gradations, whereas the Western viewpoint has seen the human as a phantasmagoria of matter and spirit with no real connection. The Asians have been blessed with a unitary, holistic conception of human nature; the occidentals have been cursed with a Hellenic-Christian conception of human nature. The former sees the human as an integrated unity; the latter as a disinterested duality. (1984, p.7)

Green bases the large part of her research around Hanna's concepts of body/mind theory in relation to somatics, though

she does not discuss these theories' origins, and she is not explicit about their apparent basis in the Eastern holistic conception of body and mind. Rather, this is inferred: 'somatics do not tend to divorce "mental" and "physical" activities' (1993, p. 21). Hanna's claims hold true to the thoughts of the ancient Zen tradition:

The doctrine that man is a duality of mind and body is a lie. It is a lie that has not only maimed us for thousands of years, but it has also cost us our wholeness - not simply because this falsehood has taught us that we were split, but because it specifically told us that we were minds and bodies. There is no such entity as a mind, and there is no such entity as a body. According to the tradition, "mind" is a disembodied aspect of ourselves that is out of touch with the "body" and is untenanted fleshy machine moving by its own laws. There is no one in the "body" there is no one at home in that physiological mechanism. (1991-1992, p. 4)

Hanna proposes that the concept of soma 'is a process', a further reason 'for holding to the word soma rather than the word body' (1980, p.6). For Hanna, 'body' suggests something that is static and solid; a soma is neither 'static nor solid; it is changeable and supple and is constantly adapting to its environment' (1980, p.6). In consonance with Zen philosophy Hanna states that 'in the same way that a soma is not a "body", it is equally not a "mind", "spirit", "soul", or any other such human projection' (1980, p. 7).

Green adopts Hanna's concept of somatic which 'does not focus on the body as a dead or nonliving object, but on the living, functioning body that adapts and changes' (1993, p.22). Somaticists, says Green, 'tend to see the living individual as "a system-in-process" and believe that the individual can be changed by adding new information to the system'. The human organism is conceived of as a process (1993). Another example from Hanna offers the following:

Living organisms defy being described as "bodies". They have a moving order and lawfulness of their own which violates the stable concept of "body". Living organisms are somas: that is, they are an integral and ordered

process of embodied elements which cannot be separated either from their evolved past or their adaptive future...At the centre of the field of somatics is the soma - an integral and individual process which governs its own existence as long as it has existence. (1976, p. 30-31)

As a practitioner and philosopher Hanna drew his ideas from a range of perspectives to establish his case that the human being is an integrated identity - this is the basis for his definition of somatics. Green's study builds out from Hanna's thesis, invoking many somatic disciplines. Essentially, it does not seek to interrogate Hanna's thesis; it assumes its veracity and does not (and neither does it claim to) identify how the varying somatic disciplines affect the participants' sense of creativity and 'actualising' of the self. And because the study does not offer this, it does not advance any further our understanding of how somatic practices work at the level of creative practice. It is the purpose of my research study therefore, to investigate one alternative somatic practice, Zen meditation, taught to dancers by a specialist in the field, and to offer an analysis of its impact on a creative process.

Green states that 'in somatics, process is paramount and any ultimate goal is generally less important than the process itself' (1993, p. 22). Whilst Green's statement articulates process as the primary focus of somatics, this does not preclude the gains there might be for the product of creative process - the dance work and the performance of it. One of the challenges for me, therefore, was, to investigate if participants are able to retain the knowledge gained from the somatic experiences, when shifting the focus to creating a final product and bringing the work to production.

Green and Hanna's work helpfully offers questions and areas for further research, as well as affirming that the foundation of this type of research is most effective when the participants' experiences stem, and are reflected from, a first-person perspective. A study focussing on the impact of

somatic practice on creative process in the dance studio will afford new knowledge and insight on its possible enhancing influence.

#### **2.4 Embodiment and dancer's consciousness**

Embodiment and a dancer's sense of presence have long been discussed by dance theorists, notably Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1979a; 1979b) and Sondra Fraleigh (1987; 1998) but there is little research on *how* a dancer is to enter into this prescribed state and what they can achieve whilst in this state. There is extensive knowledge of what defines embodiment and it remains a central theme in discussions of phenomenology<sup>8</sup> pertaining to a phenomenal body, but further research is required to identify how such knowledge can be useful to dance artists (Audi, 1999). Phenomenology, the lived-body concept, is a notion that, according to Fraleigh (1987, p. XIV) 'at its point of beginning, attempts to view any experience from the inside rather than at a distance'. And to invoke Sheets-Johnstone:

Phenomenology is concerned with the experience itself as *it is lived* and with bringing to light the essential nature of that experience through particular reflective acts that uncover what is actually there in experience and at the same time expose preconceptions and prejudgements which have, unknown to us, become encrusted onto the experience. (1979a, p. 33)

In its prioritising of the experience itself as it is lived, phenomenology encourages a pre-reflective, pre-objective encounter with the self where 'man lives in-the-midst-of-the-world, as he experiences himself and the world, keenly and acutely, before any kind of reflection whatsoever takes place' (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979b, p. 10). The phenomenological perspective offers a further basis, then, for investigating the lived experience/act of creating in the studio. Potentially, this can be considered alongside and in

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<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, bases the philosophy on the idea that 'meaning' is prior to 'language' and Christopher Macann discusses that phenomenology is a philosophy where the whole ambition is 'to reflect on the unreflected' (1993, p. 160).

consonance with concepts of the soma, where the human being is observed from the first-person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive senses. The research study conducted by Karla Shacklock (2006) brings together some of these strands of thought, in setting out to investigate how a dancer can access a greater sense of consciousness and how this state could augment the creative process and performance.

#### **2.4.1 The Dance Consciousness Model**

Karla Shacklock's research study, *Delving into the Dancer's Consciousness - The Dance Consciousness Model* (2006), proposes that with the 'neglect of the dancer's mind, comes a neglect of the dancer's consciousness' (2006, p. 131). Shacklock discusses Western contemporary dance, which she says 'is a dance process in which the choreographer spends the entire choreography and rehearsal time...stressing the importance of an increased body awareness' (2006, p. 131). How a dancer is meant to achieve this state of increased body awareness is not divulged, nor is there any debate about whether this desired state is in fact achieved.

Shacklock advises - that within the 'dance process the dancer is often required to attend to each individual movement in order to polish and perfect it' (2006, p. 131), and yet in some instances, the choreographer will almost negate the dancer's process with a direction to the dancer to 'go on stage and just perform'. Shacklock asks some pertinent questions, such as 'how is the dancer to make the transition from such a reflective process, to a non-reflective performance?', 'how can the dancer simply 'just perform'' after weeks of performing with increased awareness?' (2006, p. 131). For Shacklock, these specific types of refined requirements require 'the dancer to have control not only over the dancing body, but also over the dancing mind, namely the dancing consciousness' (2006). Shacklock states: 'dancers are not explicitly trained to use their dance consciousness; they are expected to use it in specific ways within the dance process and within performance' (2006).

Shacklock proposes a particular kind of consciousness, 'a dance consciousness' (2006, p. 131). Dance theorists Fraleigh and Sheets-Johnstone have also reflected on ideas in this area. In a much earlier study Sheets-Johnstone stated 'as far as is evident, no one has been concerned with the question, what is a dancer conscious of while dancing?' (1979b, p. 39). Fraleigh and Sheets-Johnstone's views on dance consciousness from an existential and phenomenological perspective, indicate two areas of dance consciousness; reflective and pre-reflective. Sheets-Johnstone states that a dance performance 'comes alive in all its richness only as the dancers are reflectively aware neither of themselves, nor of the dance' (1979b, p. 6). As Shacklock points out, neither dance theorist 'provides any indication as to how one may access such a state, other than Sheets-Johnstone's brief claim that one must only stop reflecting - analysing, interpreting, judging - long enough to grasp it' (2006, p. 132). There is a challenge then here, for phenomenologists: if there was a method or formula for accessing pre-consciousness, with the thought that 'I am now in a pre-consciousness state', this would no longer be a phenomenological experience.

Shacklock has attempted to develop a system to access different levels of the dance consciousness through, the 'Dance Consciousness Model', where the dancer can access the 'non-intrattentive dance consciousness' and the 'intrattentive dance consciousness' (2006, p. 133). Shacklock describes the non-intrattentive dance consciousness as a state where the:

dancer is purely living and experiencing the dance, without thought or knowledge of that experience...[the dancer] is explicitly unaware of what the experience is or what the dancing mind or body is doing...the experiential sensation of which will differ slightly for the dancing body and mind. (2006, p. 133)

The intrattentive dance consciousness according to Shacklock is a state where a 'dancer not only experiences the dance, but is also knowingly, intentionally and attentively aware of the dance'; further, the 'dancer is analytically aware of the

experience of the dance - including the dancing body, the dancing mind and other external factors surrounding the dance' (2006, p. 133). Shacklock proposes that 'the dancer is aware of any mental activity concerned with the dance...the experiential sensation of which will differ slightly for the dancing body and mind' (2006, p. 133).

It is unclear as to what is meant by Shacklock's statement 'the experiential sensation of which will differ slightly for the dancing body and mind' in her description of the two differing states of consciousness. Might she be arguing that the mind and body experience differently, counter to those who argue for a oneness of mind/body?; or might she be suggesting that the experience of the mind/body will differ depending on the individual?.

Shacklock claims that her Dance Consciousness Model:

allows choreographers and dancers to actively select their desired conscious state and, through the application of the appropriate strand of the model, to control this state within the acts of choreographing, rehearsing and performing. Prior to this application it is essential that dancers participate in a series of consciousness training workshops in which they learn to access intrattentive and non-intrattentive dance states and to interchange between these states whilst; improvising (free and structured), choreographing material, learning material, teaching material, rehearsing material and performing. (2006, p.133 -134)

Once the dancer/choreographer has been trained through a series of workshops, Shacklock claims they will be able to control the states within the varying acts of choreographing, rehearsing and performing. The use of the word 'control' is perhaps problematic here. Since the process is aimed at encouraging the participant to gain a greater sense of embodiment or consciousness, which in turn they can access in their creative explorations whether in rehearsal or on stage, the focus might be better placed on accessing something beyond what has first been accessed and continuing to explore it further with, rather than controlling it.

Shacklock advises choreographers 'to treat the [choreographic] process as a 'normal process'' and simply use the model as an addition to this process' (2006, p. 139). Shacklock reports that the four dancers who tested the Dance Consciousness Model noted dramatic results 'with the dancers claiming to have gained control over their dance consciousness in a way they had never experienced before' (2006). These 'dramatic results' do not appear to be triangulated by the researcher or by the choreographers who were working with the dancers.

The model implies a solution to accessing a greater 'dance consciousness' regardless of the dancer in practice or the choreographer or type of work being created. The model seems to bear little connection to the way the choreographic process is led; the only 'solution' appears to come from the dancers and the additional 'initial training' they undertake. The responsibility for accessing this greater sense of consciousness lies solely with the dancers, paying no attention to, and offering no interrogation of the way the creation of movement material is made or directed, which might have offered further solutions for finding a greater or more useful state of 'dance consciousness'. Shacklock is interested solely in the effects on the participants' dance practice; the effect the process has on the dancers' lives outside of dance, namely interpersonal interactions, is not discussed. Hence, it is not possible to ascertain whether the effects are transferrable to other creative practice contexts.

The Dance Consciousness Model is 'accessible ... apart from the initial training - which only needs to be implemented once' (2006, p. 139). This model as a one off training system within creative practice is in opposition to a model which engages with the practice of Zen meditation. As an integrated, lifelong practice where the practitioner is encouraged to keep their beginner's mind (Suzuki, 1993), meditation for the enhancement of creative practice comes from a different perspective. An approach which incorporates a life philosophy rather than solely a method of practice may

have greater potential for impact on a process and its participants. Shunryu Suzuki advises 'all self-centred thoughts limit our vast mind...when we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners...then we can really learn something' (1993, p. 228). Growing with a practice, and the new self that comes with any experience, may allow for a richer integration of personal life and creative practice.

## **2.5 Shift in thinking towards process-oriented works**

While the above selected studies offer an insight into how meditation and somatics affect creativity and the performing body, they also highlight the shift needed in somatic and creative thinking to allow for process-oriented works to be valued. McPherson's idea (1974) that creativity must be measured in order to be valued needs to be reconsidered. Green's (1996) exposition on humanists' contribution to an approach that is more process-oriented indicates a view of creativity that has moved on:

Humanists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Erich Fromm tended to view creativity as a process of self-awareness and self-actualization. As part of a human potential movement, this perspective of creativity stresses a full quality of life and inner consciousness, as well as a heightening of sensory experience and the abilities to surrender and self-actualize. This approach moved away from earlier theories of creativity that focused on the creative product and the measurement of creative abilities. The humanists moved toward a more integral and less mechanical world view. It is an approach that is basically process-oriented, that perceives of creativity experientially and somatically, and that affirms the cultivation of a creative life for everyone. (1996, p. 268)

The humanist standpoint is in many senses in consonance with the phenomenological perspective where investigating the experience/act of creating as it is lived is of fundamental importance. It gives greater value to the qualitative self-

reflective response of the individual against the quantitative or that which can be measured.

Writer Christopher Macann discusses the view of Edmund Husserl, who states that 'language is, first and foremost, the medium in which *meanings* are expressed and communicated...this implies that meaning is in some sense *prior* to language and can therefore only be attained, in its phenomenological purity, through a series of exclusions' (as cited in Macann, 1993, p. 5). Phenomenology defined by Macann is a 'philosophy whose whole ambition it is to reflect upon the unreflected, to think the unthought, to name the unnameable' (1993, p. 160).

The fundamental basis for process-oriented research is further supported by Macann who states that a phenomenological based study is a study 'of the body and the world as perceived from the point of view of the body...phenomenology is a descriptive science and so has to be distinguished from any science which would seek to explain' (1993, p. 161). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) introduces the process of reduction which he describes as the precise moment when you first become fully aware of your relation to the world and to other subjects with which you share a world. Clark Moustakas, a leading expert on humanistic and clinical psychology, proposes:

in phenomenological reduction, the task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self...the qualities of the experience become the focus. (1994, p. 90)

Moustakas confirms that reduction 'leads us back to our own experience of the way things are' (1994, p.91). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty had previously claimed that 'reduction is presented as the return to a transcendental<sup>9</sup> consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely

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<sup>9</sup> As defined by Moustakas, the transcendental experience 'uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning' (1994, p. 91).

transparent' (1945, p. xi). Merleau-Ponty also identifies reduction with the procedure of existential rather than transcendental phenomenology, where existentialism is a philosophical theory which emphasises the existence of the individual person as a free agent, responsible for his/her own development. This process of reduction facilitates the identifications and sensations which are supposed to be the building blocks of an experience, where the participant is affected by the immediacy of an experience and then reflects upon the pre-reflective. Through this process the sense of the embodied equals action and disembodied equals reflection, essentially placing the importance and focus back into the place of presence.

Is it the case then, that while phenomenology provides a theoretical framework, a beginning way of making sense of this type of research, its inherent difficulty lies in the fact that when a dancer realises they are in a phenomenological state, they are no longer present in that state? There is limited documentation and research on 'how' a dancer is to access and retain a heightened state of awareness in support of their artistic creative practice. This research study will seek to answer some of these important questions, which will further inform existing knowledge and practice-based research.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

As identified through the discussion of existing literature, there is debate of substance written up on how meditation and somatic approaches can contribute to creativity and effective use of the performing body. Specifically how such approaches might enhance the process of creation of a dance work and its performance has not yet been addressed, however. Whilst aspects of the phenomenological perspective offer a theoretical framework for extrapolation to the studio context, it is the contention of this thesis that it is the studio practice from which the theory is most appropriately generated; where the dancers' experiences can be analysed and fed back into the studio practice. The principles and

practices of meditation offer a valid exploration process that supports the dancer and choreographer in a dialogue with self: to engage with the phenomenal body and the lived experience itself as it is lived and for this to feed back into the creative practice.

Ultimately, this research study seeks then, to provide the means by which the creative 'process' can have a greater and more meaningful connection to its performed 'product'. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, one of the main findings of this research concerns the greater sense of embodiment and mindfulness experienced by the dancers and myself which resulted in a shift in the dancing making process for both.

In the next chapter I will discuss more recent debate in the area of practice-based research, as well as my research project design, the practice and teachings of meditation incorporated in the development of this investigation, my position in the role of choreographer-as-researcher. I will also define my uses of the terms choreography, improvisation and mindful movement in the context of this thesis, as well as the method of data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The focus of this study on the impact of mindful meditation and creativity on a dance making process and performance requires a methodology, which, in Green's words, seeks 'to understand and interpret experience and process, rather than measure or quantify specific abilities' (1993, p. 69). This chapter discusses the methodological choices made which frame this practice-based study including the design of the practical research, the role of the participants and the process for data collection and analysis.

The principles theories I engaged with in this study were phenomenology and postpositivist/qualitative approaches where the first person perspective is honoured; these theories were framed through ethnographic processes of data collection and analysis. Collectively they give rise to a particular methodology unique to this research study, which is shaped by the various elements of and connections between the rehearsals, meditation sessions, and the use of observation, additional readings, interviews and journal writing. This framework of methodologies generates, as well as applies, theories and practices. The theories engaged with and the practices undertaken were interdependent on each other because the theory informed the method and the method revealed something particular to this the study on an on-going basis and through the writing of this thesis.

The chosen methodology within the research practice engaged the mindful meditation practice and creative process of creating *dharmakaya*. The rehearsals were influenced by the meditation practice and its teachings, the data collection and on-going reflection fed back into the rehearsal process whilst also shaped/inflected the methodology - and the drawing in of different theoretical positions helped to frame my own position within the process, my 'choreographer-as-researcher' role, which has been informed by ethnographic frameworks and

postpositivist understanding. Therefore a grounded theory approach emerged through this process of *doing* and I achieved this through reference to concepts of phenomenology and to those who write about dance practice and theory.

This approach enables me to argue that this research has evolved through a process of synthesising methodologies. Necessarily this approach has enabled me to collect, analyse and reflect on my data, and to arrive at my conclusions. All of these methods support the understanding of the impact of a somatic practice-based research project. As argued by Bacon and Midgelow, practice-as-research is 'frequently used to suggest an enquiry-based approach to creative work in which there is a relationship between the critical and the practical' (2010, p. 6). This of course has its challenges, as Bacon and Midgelow also point out that 'writing and speaking *from* rather than *about* the body is endlessly intriguing as well as deeply complex' (2010, p. 13). My challenge is in balancing these methodological approaches as the difficulties arise, Bacon and Midgelow propose that when there is an attempt to 'evoke the kinaesthetic and the visceral in the written word: it is difficult to transform the experiential into something that can appear on a printed page' (2010, p. 13).

### **3.2 Practice-as-research**

Practice-based research in a performance studies context must explore the near connections between theory and practice as forms of research (SDHS: Practice-as-Research Working Group, 2006). As a practice-based research project, a methodology has been adopted that examines the qualitative aspects of the work and experiences rather than potential quantitative outcomes.

Musicians and researchers Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009) identify the term practice-based research, and its affiliates, practice-led research and practice-as-research, to establish two points of view about practice which overlap and are

interlinked. The first is that the 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs'; second, that 'creative practice - the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the process they engage in when they are making art - can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research' (2009, p. 5). The first position emphasises the role of creative practice, while the second highlights 'insights, conceptualisation and theorisation which can arise when artists reflect on and document their own creative practice' (2009). Linda Candy (2006), a researcher in practice-led methods, contends that practice-based research is where the creative work acts as the form of research, and practice-led research is where the practice leads the researcher to new insights. Smith and Dean propose further that 'practice as research can best be interpreted in terms of a broader view of creative practice which includes not only the artwork but also the surrounding theorisation and documentation' (2009, p.5).

Researcher and writer Robyn Stewart (2006) considers how the concepts and processes for practice-led research or practice-based research provide us, as researching practitioners, with ways of working, investigating and theorising about what it is to practice in the studio as a researcher. Practitioner research for Stewart can be defined as 'critical reflective investigation praxis which could include practicing theory, practice into theory, practical theory, theory into practice, theorizing practice, theoretical practice' (2006, p. 2). Further, Stewart emphasises that the 'processes of practice-led research are underpinned by constant emphasis on the ongoing and critical dialogues between studio and theory, process and product that are crucial for the practitioner researcher' (2006, p. 5). Practising artists and researchers Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) propose that the growing area of practice-led research in the arts draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies.

Social and critical histories of art researcher Griselda Pollock, propose that there is 'no practice without an informed theory, even if it is not fully recognised or acknowledged' and 'that theories are only realised in practices' (1996, p. 13). According to Pollock, 'methodology only becomes apparent, that is different from the normalised procedures of the discipline, when a different set of questions is posed and demands new ways of being answered' (1996, p. 13).

This research study is both practice-based and practice-led: it engages with a studio-based dancing making process, in other words, the creative work acts as the form of research; at the same time, through the application of a new perspective within the studio practice - meditation practices and teachings - it is anticipated that the practice itself will lead the choreographer-as-researcher (author of this thesis) to new insights from the creation and performance of the final dance work.

### **3.3 Postpositivist/qualitative research and phenomenology**

Since the nature of this research study is both practice-based and practice-led it requires a methodological paradigm which honours the first-person viewpoint. In response to Hanna's (1980; 1984; 1986; 1988; 1991-1992) link to the first-person viewpoint and somatic practice-based research, a postpositivist perspective has been adopted for this research study.

Postpositivist research proposes that reality is socially constructed and that we construct reality according to how we are positioned in the world; and how we see reality and truth is related to the perspective from which we are looking (Ely, 1991; Green & Stinson, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Positivist researchers on the other hand, claim there is one real truth and that research must be value-free. The postpositivist researcher will contend that subjectivity is not only unavoidable but can be useful in offering researchers

and their participants a more meaningful understanding of their findings (Green & Stinson, 1999). For the positivist researcher, subjectivity cannot be a consideration, since it acknowledges the self in relation to other, which has the potential to skew findings. This research study was conducted within a postpositivist framework where my role as choreographer-as-researcher can be acknowledged as a valid dimension of the research.

Phenomenological theory has also informed my research approach for the way in which it offers a way of 'looking within' and taking account of the experience of the participants. In the search for reaching a stronger and more reliable sense of embodiment in my choreographic work, this practical research study utilises phenomenology as a theoretical framework and Zen meditation as a practice.

Fraleigh roots her thinking in practice or what she refers to as the 'lived-body' concept which she reminds us should 'view any experience from the inside rather than at a distance' (1987 p. XIV). Fraleigh proposes that 'phenomenology is at best an effort to remove bias and preconception from consciousness', endorsing the body presence (1998, p. 138). My own creative process was researched and created from a phenomenological or 'lived-body' perspective, encouraged through the practice and teachings of meditation. The common ground between phenomenology and mindfulness meditation is the emphasis placed on being in the present state. As Jon Kabat-Zinn states 'meditation is really non-doing...it is the only human endeavour I know of that does not involve trying to get somewhere else but, rather, emphasizes being where you already are' (1990, p. 60).

Meditation is a discipline where the emphasis lies in the practice of accessing a present place. Therefore the practice of mindfulness through meditation provides in some cases a way of accessing a phenomenological or 'lived-body' state. For the dancers in this study, this offers the possibility of a new found method of practice. In order potentially to

increase the dancers' capacity to be 'present', training in mindfulness Zen meditation was implemented as a central aspect of the dancers' work for this research project.

### **3.4 Choreographer-as-researcher**

Throughout the practical research study I was in the position of the choreographer as well as the researcher and observer, adopting the overall role of 'choreographer-as-researcher'. Concurrent with this, interviewing, filming and analysis of written documents (dancers' journal entries, rehearsals notes as well as observations from viewing the recorded footage) was an integral part of the research. James Spradley (1980) who has written extensively on ethnography and qualitative research, articulates the character of such research thus: the role of the researcher has the dual purpose of observing the participants and the researcher at the same time; it is the experience of being both an insider and outsider simultaneously. Some avenues of more recent research in the field of practice-as-research evidence continuity with Spradley's position: as discussed earlier, Bolt (2007) proposed that practice-led research draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies, indicating that the practitioner-as-researcher assumes different roles in the process. Such views represent significant changes in what constitutes research, and take us away from traditional quantitative research studies such as the that carried out by McPherson in 1974.

Harry Wolcott (1988) argues that there are three styles within the idea of the participant-observer: the active participant, the privileged observer and the limited observer. The active participant has a role to play in the research setting in addition to the research itself. In this research study my position is most connected to the style of the active participant: in addition to observing the research, my second role was leading the rehearsals and the choreography of the final work, as well as bringing the final work through to production and performance.

Within my role as choreographer-as-researcher I was aware that the very act of observing could potentially alter or influence what was being observed, and that even with the most unobtrusive of intentions, I could influence the very phenomenon I was researching (Ely, 1991). Ethnographer Margot Ely identifies four issues for the qualitative researcher engaging in this type of research: first 'that we participate as closely as possible in line with the needs of our study'; secondly 'that we make ourselves as aware as possible of the ripples caused by our participation'; thirdly 'that we attempt to counter those ripples that might hinder the participant observer relationship and, hence, the study'; and fourthly 'that we describe in the report what worked and what did not' (1991, p. 47).

A further concept that has been relevant in this research is the concept of 'bracketing' proposed by phenomenologist, Amedeo Giorgi (1985). Working in the area of psychological research practices, in particular, qualitative approaches, Giorgi proposes that this is otherwise known as taking on the 'other', necessitating that we become acutely aware of our own personal assumptions, feeling and preconceptions and that we then endeavour to put them aside, to bracket them, to allow ourselves as the researchers to be fully open and receptive to what we are attempting to understand. As the choreographer-as-researcher I applied the approach of bracketing - putting my personal thoughts aside - when analysing the data collected, where what was required of me was to be open to the dancers' findings.

### **3.5 Selection of participants**

For this study four Trinity Laban 2<sup>nd</sup> Year<sup>10</sup> BA (Hons) Dance Theatre students were selected to participate in the practical portion of this research project. It should be noted here that the number of participants can be smaller in

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<sup>10</sup> The dancers were near the end of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year at the completion of the research project. Although I am a full-time lecturer at Trinity Laban I have not been involved in teaching or assessing any of the four participants over the past two years.

postpositivist studies as the findings will not be generalised to a larger population (Green & Stinson, 1999). The participants were given letters (Appendix A) outlining the purpose of the study and a rehearsal schedule. A research project release form (Appendix B) was also distributed to and signed by the participants, granting me permission to use the information gained from the practical sessions for my research and to quote them when relevant. All four participants gave permission to use their real names (Daisy, Katy, Lucille, Tara) throughout the documentation.

### **3.6 Research design**

The timescale of the project was divided into three phases as follows:

Phase 1: from w/c 7<sup>th</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007, ten weeks of twice weekly two hour rehearsals and ten once weekly forty-five minute meditation sessions. A Studio Theatre sharing of movement and research investigations was held on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

Phase 2: from w/c 10<sup>th</sup> September - 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007, ten weeks of twice weekly two hour rehearsals and ten once weekly forty-five minute meditation sessions. No sharing of work/research.

Phase 3: from w/c 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 - 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008, ten weeks of twice weekly two hour rehearsals and ten once weekly forty-five minute meditation sessions, followed by one week of production and a performance in the Bonnie Bird Theatre, Trinity Laban, London, England, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008 19:30.

The three phases of the practical research were designed to fit with the dancers' study commitments and to allow also for term time holidays for the participants to have the time for reflection and development of their personal meditation practice.

### **3.7 Rehearsal/creative process and meditation sessions<sup>11</sup>**

Throughout the practical research I focused on the following two areas of research, which examined the roles of the dancers and my own role as choreographer-as-researcher:

- 1) internal; artists' relationship with themselves, engaging with their own general world including mindfulness meditation in the Zen tradition with yogic techniques for deep relaxation; instructor-led and self-led meditation practice;
- 2) dance making process towards performance; with meditation as a dance making tool for bodily creation in which the intent is both embodied and transmitted. I have, as the postpositivist researcher, allowed the form of the final product to arise from the process (Green & Stinson, 1999).

I was, in conjunction with the dancers, observing and analysing movement explorations which in turn allowed us to interpret systematically the results of the meditative practice, rehearsal process and performance of the dance work from a practitioner point of view. The movement material and final dance work emerged from the experiences and reflections on the meditation sessions and personal practice. Prior knowledge and experience through creating dance works allowed, as Ely states, the 'familiar, when observed from a different stance or a new perspective [to] frequently turn out to be quite unfamiliar' (1991, p.127). Engaging with the meditation principles unveiled a new and unfamiliar dance making and performance perspective and these findings are further discussed in Chapter 5 - Project, Performance and Data Analysis.

#### **3.7.1 Dance making process and improvisation**

For the purpose of this research project and thesis, dance making within a choreographic environment is understood as a

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<sup>11</sup> All choreographic rehearsals were led by the author, and the meditation sessions were led by a Certified (1999) Yoga & Meditation teacher.

generative process where the dancers are co-creators and the creative contributions are from the dancers. The primary role of the choreographer, or in this case the choreographer-as-researcher, is in determining the approach to and parameters for creative exploration, and also the final outcome in consultation with the dancers. In this thesis I have investigated how the process of meditation and mindful moving can trigger a creative process that in turn can lead to the generation of dance material. The final form of the dance work has an alignment with the process, though it is far removed from the structure, findings and outputs of first tasks the dancers engaged with in rehearsals. The iterative process of dialogue, in particular the 'embodied language' employed by the dancers which was fed back into the process of developing and refining, together with the 'openness' gained from the meditation teachings, supported and enriched the development of the dance making process. The primary focus is on the dancers' experiential process within a creative environment rather than the analysis of formal choices within the final choreographed work. There is commentary on this when I discuss some of the movement and spatial choices made (see Chapter 5, 5.7.9 Choreographic method; confessional tale). These choices were often motivated by the dancers' desire to explore a range of challenges, through speed of movement or where the movement took place in space, but in the context of this thesis this discussion focuses on the dancers' experience rather than my design of the movement as choreographer.

I have defined and utilised improvisation within this research process as a mechanism/device for how the dancers should engage with developing the movement material: the dance material was generated through directed improvisation and transformed through a process of distillation and refining of the material over the duration of the rehearsals, supported by the practice of mindful meditation (see below 3.7.2) where reflection, refinement and honesty are to the fore. The investigative process generated from the mindful meditation process, supported by the practice of mindful moving (adopted

from the meditation sessions see 3.7.2.2), and the open, mindful and honest approach offered by the teachings of meditation offered a new way of working, a new contribution to the creative process of dance making.

### **3.7.2 Meditation**

Meditation training uses two separate but complementary disciplines; first, mindfulness meditation, which develops the ability to let go of the surface level mind chatter; and secondly the practice of deep relaxation which permits the free flow of ideas and images from the unconscious mind. The dancers and I had weekly forty-five minute meditation sessions throughout Phases 1, 2 and 3 and we continued with our personal practice outside of the scheduled sessions. The instructor-led meditation practice during Phases 1 and 2 consisted of Zen sitting meditation; mindful moving and Yoga Nidra (deep relaxation), followed by Dharma talks, the teachings of the Buddha.

The practice of meditation is subjective because the experiences take place purely within the participants' minds. Therefore any teachings or instructions can only be offered by the teacher's own subjective experiences of the practice. Meditation experiences cannot be communicated objectively because the discussion is not about a quantitative 'object' but a qualitative experience of subjectivity.

#### **3.7.2.1 Sitting Zen meditation**

The sitting Zen meditation was taught as a way to achieve a greater experience of the self; a reflective practice where the participant becomes an observer of themselves. Zen sitting meditation was taught as a place where the practitioner is just being, staying and returning to the breath, doing nothing, with no thought of right or wrong, whilst also refraining from thoughts of judgement. The tradition of Zen sitting was essentially taught as the practice of mental discipline. We started the meditation practice by sitting for

five minutes and then progressed to sitting for thirty minutes at each session.

### **3.7.2.2 Mindful moving**

The practice of mindful moving is a process where the meditator is remaining mindful in the present state while exploring movement. In a traditional meditation setting the practitioner would practice a basic walking exercise where s/he would walk deliberately, with the attention being on the movement of the feet and legs. Bhikkhu Mangalo (1993) articulates that while executing the walking the practitioner would note to themselves as the right foot begins to rise from the floor, 'lifting', as they begin to move forward, 'moving' and as they place the foot again on the ground, 'placing'. With the same discipline as in the Zen sitting, all distracting thoughts, images or sensations should be noted in the appropriate manner. If the practitioner was to find themselves looking at something specific whilst moving s/he should then immediately register 'looking' and then revert to the mindful movement or walking. Looking at objects or thinking distracting thoughts is thought of as lustful for the eyes and is not at all part of the practice.

For the purposes of this research study, in the practice of mindful moving, the dancers were encouraged to spend time being mindful in the body, staying mindful in what their experience was and not getting led away with their thoughts. During this time the dancers tended to spend time on the floor, would then move into walking, shifting in space to extend eventually the range of improvised dance movement. The dancers always spent this time on their own, yet it was clear that they remained aware of the group; the mindful movement sessions did not include contact movement or overt interaction between the dancers. The meditation teacher would clap his hands to signal that this portion of the meditation session had concluded. When practised in rehearsals, the dancers would agree on the amount of time spent on mindful moving at the beginning of each rehearsal (this would range from 15-45

minutes). The mindful meditation teachings and the practice of mindful moving led to the approach adapted towards improvisation, resulting in a particular approach to dance making which depended upon and at the same time generated its own 'language', expressed through words and the body which was cyclical/iterative. The development of the practice of mindful moving - the focused inward attention - also promoted the development of the 'embodied language' that emerged and fed back into the dance making process.

### **3.7.2.3 Yoga Nidra**

Yoga Nidra or Yogic sleep, which is also commonly referred to as deep relaxation, was practised during Phase 1 and the first half of Phase 2. Yoga Nidra allows the body to release and free the mind and has the potential for recognising different mental states. During the practice we were encouraged to stay connected to our breath in order not to fall asleep, whilst remaining conscious of ourselves relaxing.

The reason Yoga Nidra was practised only during a portion of the research process is that the practice itself is not a mindful discipline as there is the allowance of the free flowing of the mind. During the beginning stages of the research it was useful to practice Yoga Nidra because for beginner meditators the sitting practice was challenging and it was helpful to engage with the deep relaxation at the end of the led meditation sessions.

### **3.7.2.4 Supporting texts**

We were encouraged to continue with our own personal meditation practice and attempted to bring mindfulness into our daily lives, in particular within interpersonal situations. As part of the methodology of the meditation sessions the meditation teacher gave all of us four readings in support of our process as beginner meditators. These readings were also another way of engaging with the philosophy of the meditation practice.

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki was given out at the beginning of the process and examines the beginner's mind; Suzuki says: 'the goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind' (1993, p. 228). The reading also discusses posture, breathing and states that the meditator should keep his/her 'mind on their breathing until [they] are not aware of [their] breathing' (1993, p. 239). *The Practice of Recollection* by Bhikkhu Mangalo was given out half way through Phase 1. This reading focuses on the practice of recollection which Mangalo advises is 'quite simply, remembering to establish the attention with full awareness on the present, on the here and now' (1993, p. 133). This writing reminded us that when each thought arises into our consciousness, it must be viewed as it is, 'without welcoming it or rejecting it, without clinging to it or trying to push it aside' (Mangalo, 1993, p. 134).

*To Forget the Self* by Dogen Zenji, given out during Phase 2, focuses on the 'connection between meditation practice and enlightenment' (1993, p. 205). Zenji's writing is poetic rather than literal because the experience of enlightenment can only be hinted at and not directly expressed. The fourth reading, *The Heart Sutra* translated by The Nalanda Translation Committee, given out during the final Phase, is one of the most important of the Buddhist sutras. The central theme is the Buddhist concept of emptiness, which refers to the perception that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. All four readings were from the book *Entering the Stream; An introduction to the Buddha and his teachings*, edited by Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn (1993) and were discussed during the Dharma talks with the meditation teacher.

### **3.8 Data collection**

Data in the form of observations, rehearsal notes and personal journals as well as individual and group interviews was collected from all choreographic rehearsals and meditation sessions throughout the thirty weeks of the practical research.

### 3.8.1 Interviews

Each dancer was interviewed three times throughout the research process. All interviews were videotaped and transcribed and were carried out drawing on ethnographic principles. In particular, Ely's approach informed the structure, taking her premise that the main 'purpose of an in-depth ethnographic interview is to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed' (1991, p. 58). Jill Green & Susan Stinson's views were equally to the fore in the design of the interviews: they advocate extended and open ended interviews on the grounds that this 'allows the subject to put his or her own frame around the experience and the researcher can pursue each individual's emerging thought as it unfolds' (1999, p. 94).

The first interview was at the early stages of the practical research, where the dancers discussed their initial perceptions of the process and whether there had been any shift in their sense of embodiment<sup>12</sup> or lived experience through the use of meditation as a tool for dance making. They were also asked to think back to previous rehearsal experiences and to share anything relevant that they could identify as being distinctive and challenging for them.

At the middle stage of the process the participants were asked in their interviews if the use of meditation as a tool for dance making thus far had evidenced any shift in their concept of embodiment or lived experience. They were also asked if the process informed their work with other artists in a positive way and if they saw things artistically/choreographically or from a performance sense from a different standpoint. They were also asked if they recognised themselves being in a different place from that of their peers in their year cohort and if the practice of meditation informed their daily life outside of dance. Their

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<sup>12</sup> I based the dancers' understanding of the concept of embodiment from the standpoint of their training at the time which had included a range of practical and scholarly engagement with the established existing theory of embodiment. See Schiphorst (2009) for further discussion on embodiment.

final question during this interview concerned their view of the choreographer's role and whether in their perception this had shifted since starting this process.

At the end of the thirty weeks of the practical research and after the final performance, the participants' final interview took place. The questions addressed whether they thought the overall process had a positive influence on their creative process as a creative collaborator and performer, if the use of meditation as a dance making tool demonstrated a shift in their concept of embodiment, and finally if the practice of meditation alongside a choreographic process enriched or enhanced their daily lives.

For all three sets of transcribed interviews, which include my handwritten analysis commentary, see Appendix C. I will be quoting from these interviews throughout Chapter 5 - Project, Performance and Data Analysis. Informal group interviews were also ongoing throughout the process, occurring during each rehearsal session and at the end of each led meditation session.

### **3.8.2 Observations**

Rehearsal notes, which took the form of short-hand jottings, were taken on the movement being explored in rehearsal as well as on the focus and performance states of the dancers. As each rehearsal and meditation session was videotaped, further notes were taken during and after each viewing of the taped footage. It should be noted that the use of observation alone is limited in this type of context due to the experiential nature of the work. The observations were therefore triangulated with other data since somatic and creative experiences are inherently internal processes and cannot always be detected through outward behaviour (Green, 1993).

### **3.8.3 Written documents**

The dancers and I kept written journals throughout the research project in which we articulated our lived experiences

and reflections. The journals were taken in and read by me at the end of each Phase of the project. These personal reflective journals were important to the research project, confirming as Green suggests that 'they reflected inner lived somatic and creative experiences more immediately, directly, and personally than other forms of data' (1993, p. 84). The written journals were also used to triangulate the observations and the individual and group interviews, which together formed the entirety of the data.

### **3.9 Data collection time frame**

From May 2007 to March 2008 choreographic rehearsals, meditation sessions, observations, individual and group interviews, journal writing and collection and the beginnings of data analysis, as well as the performance of *dharmakaya* took place. The first set of interviews were conducted in May 2007, the second in October 2007 and the final set in March 2008 (post performance). Journals were collected at the end of each Phase (July 2007, November 2007 and March 2008). This time frame allowed for emerging themes and concepts to emerge. The reflective time between the Phases also allowed space for me to review the dancers' written journals as well as reflect on the choreographic process. Additionally, the time frame allowed for our personal meditation practice to grow and develop.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

The process of data analysis is based on Ely's model, useful for this type of practice-based research because it encourages the researcher to have a view of all of the varying types of data collected whilst having the opportunity through the prescriptive formatting to recognise recurring themes and valuable discoveries (Ely, 1991). Once I had completed the task of viewing and making observational notes on the videoed practical sessions, which included rehearsals, meditation sessions and the final performance, a log was created. The log is the repository of all the data that had been gathered

throughout the period using the various methods of data collection. The data includes all of the videoed rehearsal and meditation sessions and the observational notes taken on them. This includes what was said in each session, observation notes on the movement executed or being explored and my reflective thoughts on what occurred or was discovered. The log also contains the transcribed individual and group interviews, the dancers' journals from each Phase and video of the final performance. The log is a chronological record of what I learned and the insights gained on how it was learned, and it contains all the data upon which the analysis was begun and carried out. The log was developed within a specific format: it was typed double-spaced with margin space on the left for insertion of identification codes.

Data analysis was conducted by re-reading the log several times. In the left-hand margin space I identified categories or 'meaning units' to define an appropriate coding context. I then labelled the meaning units, made a list of all labels and then grouped them, which then gave me, as the researcher, the initial list of codes which supported the identification of the themes<sup>13</sup> (Green, 1993, Ely, 1991). The typed lines were numbered so that future reference could be made. In the left-hand margin, I also further distinguished between what I had observed and my reflections on it.

### **3.11 Triangulation**

Triangulation or 'member checking' is a way of establishing credibility and checking my interpretations as the researcher with the participants involved (Ely, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The triangulation of data is particularly important in naturalistic or postpositivist studies. As Yvonna Lincoln & Egon Guba point out, as the 'study unfolds and particular pieces of information come to light, steps should be taken to validate each against at least one other source' (1985, p. 283). The series of interviews conducted; the observations of

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<sup>13</sup> More detail on the process of analysis is located in Chapter 5 - Project, Performance and Data Analysis, 5.1 Process of analysis: during and after, page 71.

the practical sessions and final performance, and analysis of written documents serve as my triangulation. Lincoln & Guba further endorse this process: 'no single item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated' (1985, p. 283).

### **3.12 Writing up of data analysis**

The final analysis of the data took place once the practical sessions and final performance were complete. The themes generated from the codes are the basis of the final analysis. The final writing has the purpose of shaping a complete descriptive account that meshes my fieldwork with the interpretations that have emerged from my analysis.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

For this practice-based research study I have chosen a methodology that values appropriately the viewpoint of both the dancers and me in the role of the choreographer-as-researcher. The purposely designed research study facilitates the rehearsal process, and meditation teachings offer the appropriate space and time necessary for this particular type of practice-based study. The use of the journal writing and individual and group interviews encouraged the dancers' reflective practice, of high value for this research study. The varying forms of data collection permit not only triangulation, but confirmation of the themes and observations made. The creation of the log and the data analysis allow me, in the choreographer-as-researcher role, to understand the findings from this unique practice-based research study.

In the next chapter the creative practice undertaken is evidenced by inclusion of a selection of edited rehearsal footage, as well as footage from the discussion held post-performance, the round table Q&A.

## **Chapter 4 - Documenting practice**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will demonstrate how I developed the main features of my chosen methodology and will illustrate through example the overall approach I set out in the previous chapter. The chosen method for this chapter is to describe the content as a way to evidence change through the project's development, as a contrast to the detailed analysis of how the project unfolded, which follows in Chapter 5.

The rehearsal footage shown on the DVDs is the edited rendition of what occurred in the studio-based research project over the thirty weeks of investigation. The selected footage from the 250 hours of archival footage of the practice represents rehearsals from each phase of the research process, and includes an extract from a discussion held immediately after the performance of *dharmakaya*. Whilst this is a small sample from what constitutes a significant archive of documentation, care has been taken to select footage that exemplifies key features of the methodology, discoveries and shifts in the rehearsal process, and also evidences the reflective discussions which form a key part of the data to be analysed.

In Phase 1, the beginning of the research process, the majority of the rehearsals were dedicated to exploring concepts and movement ideas gained from the meditation sessions. Experimentation was key, as well as openness to what we were being exposed to in the meditation sessions. In this Phase there is already some evidence of how the meditation teachings were influencing the rehearsal process, the creation of material and how we discussed and reflected upon what we were experiencing.

Phase 2 is marked by a greater awareness of the effect of the meditation practice and its teaching on the group's experience in the studio as well as life outside the studio practice. The footage selected evidences how my role as choreographer-

as-researcher continues to shift as a result of the experiences of meditation. The key teachings from meditation, primarily the concept of presence and honesty, begin to have a direct influence on how the creation of the dance work is developed as well as on creative choices and the refinement of those choices.

Phase 3 was about consolidating the choreography<sup>14</sup>: what I have chosen to highlight from the footage is that the process and investigation remained paramount even at the final stages of the process. This Phase evidences the continuation of reflection up until the final performance; how mindful moving<sup>15</sup> became an integral part of the process; how integrated and sophisticated the process had become. It was never sufficient simply to 'run through' the choreographed material. Reflection was the primary mode for deepening the practice, hence the considerable time given to group discussion and individual reflection.

The selected footage is accompanied by text<sup>16</sup>, the purpose of which is to guide the reader further in understanding the basis for the claim that the structure of the research, in both overall design and on an individual rehearsal level, facilitated the choreographic environment and dance making process. This process is informed by the meditation practice which generated the data that is then analysed in the subsequent chapter. The selected rehearsal footage evidences both physically and verbally how the dancers and I articulate our findings and experiences, and charts both the process and the themes identified throughout the practice. Further, this exemplifies how I as the choreographer-as-researcher took the experiences of meditation into the final work. The process of transcribing the rehearsals, through detailed notes of what was said and experienced, and my documented observations when re-watching the footage post-performance was fundamental to

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<sup>14</sup> See 3.7.1 Dance making process and improvisation, pp.48-50 for further reference on how the term 'choreography' is utilised in the context of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> See 3.7.2.2 Mindful moving, pp. 51-52 for further reference.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to Appendix D, E and F for the accompanying pages from the annotated log which corresponds to these moments from the process.

the project. These transcriptions result in layers of reflexive commentary and observation, which again is the source for the analysis in the subsequent chapter.

This thesis is an examination of the practice-based research process, and this chapter addresses the process towards the generation of a completed dance work and the performance of it, highlighting how the practice is central to the enquiry. As the process developed, the practice made me rethink my own choreographic practice and naming my role within the nexus of rehearsal, choreography and research as choreographer-as-researcher, helped me to adopt a sufficiently analytical position in relation to the work. This process involves a close relationship between the dancer(s) and choreographer, which is a common practice; however what is particular here is sourcing meditation as a practice to understand what shifts can be identified, as positively enhancing the creative process of devising a choreographic work.

Throughout the research project, within my role as choreographer-as-researcher, I negotiate moving between talking about what I see as illustration to a more 'felt' expression as a source for making the choreographic work. How I shift between my contributions within the creative process is a move towards understanding my choreographer-as-researcher role. The dialogues between the dancers and me include voicing, moving, sensing and reflecting. My directive and non-directive ability to move between these positions creates the work and shapes what I have named as my role within this research project, choreographer-as-researcher.

#### 4.2 Phase 1 - tape #26-1, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2007

The rehearsal footage begins with the dancers improvising<sup>17</sup> with their 'coming back'<sup>18</sup> solos in order to find structure through spatial patterns and relationships encountered between the dancers. The movement material and structure began to develop early on in the process and much of the created movement remained in the final dance work. What follows is a group reflective discussion on the improvisation, where we express our thoughts on what was just experienced as well as

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<sup>17</sup> See 3.7.1 Dance making process and improvisation, pp.48-50 for further reference on how the term 'improvisation' is utilised in the context of this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Movement sections in the work were named after thoughts which occurred during the meditation sittings.

suggesting ways forward; this process supported the deep level of investigation that led to the final dance work. The pattern of exploring movement through improvisation followed by whole-group reflective discussions developed as a valuable rehearsal methodology throughout the project. This process also encouraged the practice of 'presence', which we were engaging with in the meditation sessions.

A sense of 'group authorship' is evident in the selected footage; this is established through the creative and collaborative engagement with the process as well as through the developing language used to articulate the experiences of the meditation practice brought into the rehearsal setting. The rehearsal situations facilitate the group's ongoing reflective analysis. There is evidence early on that there is a developing sense of openness and respect in the group, with a commitment to appreciating and understanding each other's views and suggestions.

The dancers speak about having and working from a 'feeling', something which is encouraged through the practice of presence gained in meditation. The dancers try to recapture movement phrases or specific structures from memory or impressions from the improvisations; and they begin to have an awareness of when aesthetic viewpoints become predominant: Daisy mentions that at times 'aesthetic... [choices] started to creep in a bit' and as a result she tries to resist discussing whether she 'likes' a movement section or not. The practice of meditation has also shifted the way the dancers approach creative choices; Tara speaks of how she 'felt a bit forced to return to my spot [in space]' after experimenting with a movement concept suggested by one of the dancers. The dancers' reflections evidence the importance they are starting to attach to 'honesty' and an awareness of 'judgement', concepts which are central in the meditation teachings and in the practice of sitting.

My role as choreographer-as-researcher has already started to shift in Phase 1 through the influences of the meditation

practice. I no longer go onto the studio floor to move with the dancers: the focus is on the dancers' mindful experience of improvisations rather than me teaching them material. My dialogue with the dancers also shifts to telling them what I see and asking them questions about their explorations. This represents a significant change from my previous method of creating work where I would have focused primarily on the material created and how it represented or not my intentions for the work.

#### **4.3 Phase 2 - tape #9-2, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

The rehearsal begins with a reflection on how our personal meditation practice was developing, and the dancers discuss how the principles of the sitting are beginning to affect and enhance other areas of their lives. We also acknowledged the many challenges in 'just sitting'. We reflect on the continual development of our methodology and how the practice of 'mindful moving', brought in from the meditations sessions, is supporting the creative process.

My role continues to shift; I now ask the dancers how they want to 'get into' the movement section of the rehearsal and in what order we will revisit the sections. Since coming back from the break between Phase 1 and 2 the dancers continue to recapture set movement phrases, using as their main tool imagery gained from the meditation sessions. This is a direct move away from previous ways of working where previously we would use recorded footage to copy an image of what we had originally created.

The rehearsal footage evidences the development of movement material from Phase 1 and the sustained commitment from the dancers during the rehearsal process. The meditation practice has enhanced both of these progressions: particularly striking is evidence of the teachings of being present and the concept of honesty and truthfulness, both in the experiencing of movement in a particular moment and in the viewer's apprehension of the performed execution of it. The movement section we labelled 'cutting' seen in this footage, is retained in the final dance work; this section gives some sense of the time given to exploring and developing movement material.

Following the movement explorations the dancers and I continue with reflective commentary and there is evidence of how the meditation practice is beginning to have a direct effect on the choices in structuring the work. The dancers talk about how a movement choice 'feels right' and the how the act of 'listening' has enhanced their creative process, for example, requiring an iterative question and answer process in the

development of their movement choices. There is also an acknowledgement of the unexpected challenges that this research process has introduced. Daisy discusses with the group that 'there is something really hard about this project...when you are delving into areas you are less familiar with and not wanting to go with habit'. Katy speaks of how the concepts we are engaging with can at times have a 'transitory' feeling when the focus is about 'recapturing the feeling from before'.

#### **4.4 Phase 3 - tape #24-3, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

The rehearsal begins with a group discussion of our experiences of taking the nearly completed work into the theatre. The dancers talk about how the rehearsal process has given them confidence to take the work into another space and how the teachings of meditation have shifted how they approach their performance of the work. The introduction of lighting and thoughts on an audience witnessing the work also raise some questions for the dancers. Through the group discussion the importance of honesty, truthfulness and refraining from judgement still remain as an important aspect of the dancers' experience of being in the work.

As a group we reflect on the whole of the process and how it has shifted many aspects of making and performing of the work. The dancers also reflect on the experience of taking mindful moving onto the stage for the first time as a warm-up 'tool' as well as the overall benefit of engaging with mindful moving and what they have gained from experiencing the practice. In the selected rehearsal footage the dancers are seen taking time for mindful moving in preparation for engaging with a run-through of the choreographic work.

#### **4.5 dharmakaya**

The full title of the work, *dharmakaya - the ultimate body of reality beyond all forms, attributes and limits, the realisation of emptiness*, reflects our research findings and practices<sup>19</sup>.

The creative process of making *dharmakaya* sought to answer questions about embodiment and mindfulness; through the writing of this thesis I have devised a methodology for articulating the findings and to offer an insight into my encounters in 'the field'.

*dharmakaya* is a published piece of work; through creative collaboration, the dancers and I uncovered ways beyond previous experiences to develop the dancers as performers and

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to Appendix G for the *dharmakaya* performance advertisement, Appendix H for the *dharmakaya* theatre programme and Appendix I for the filmed version of *dharmakaya*.

creators. The research study is not presenting *dharmakaya* for examination but rather the creative process that gives rise to the choreographic work, and which includes, as integral to this process, the engagement of the principles and practices of meditation.

#### **4.6 Round table Q&A**

The selected footage from the round table Q&A<sup>20</sup> which followed the final performance of *dharmakaya* begins with me outlining the research design and process. I then invite the dancers to

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<sup>20</sup> The round table Q&A was with the Acting Head of Research/Dean of Studies, Mirella Bartrip, the Head of Dance Science, Dr. Emma Redding and my main PhD supervisor, Dr. Martin Hargreaves.

reflect on the process of creating and on the performance of *dharmakaya*. The selected footage also demonstrates the dancers' as well as my own immediate reflections on the performance of *dharmakaya*.

Tara speaks of the value of having an awareness of judgement, which came from the meditation teachings; she tells us that she feels she can never completely remove judgement from her thoughts but that she has become aware of when she is judging herself and is therefore more observant and present in herself. Lucille highlights engagement with the concept of mindful moving and how it began as a tool in the meditation sessions and was then integrated directly into the rehearsal process, functioning as a warm-up as well as a way to gain and establish a greater sense of presence. I reflect on how the importance of trust in the dancers allowed for a deeper engagement with process; we were able to be demanding in the creative process of the improvisations as there was a commitment to 'honesty' within the explorations, evident in physical practice as well in the group discussions. I share with the dancers the fact that my role as choreographer has extended 'from the outside in' to observing the dancers and being led by developing material: observing the self in meditation led to a direct change in the way movement was created and selected for the final work<sup>21</sup>. As a group we also discuss the influence of the process on other areas of our creative work and in my case, on other choreographic projects and teaching.

The round table Q&A contributed to the raw data in the form of annotated transcription included in the log, which fed into the analysis of the research findings. For the dancers, the Q&A supported them in refining their final journal writings and the reflective articulation required of them in their final individual interviews.

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<sup>21</sup> See 5.7.9 Choreographic method; confessional tale for further discussion on how choreographic choices were made in relation to the movement material chosen for the final choreographed work.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The documentation of the practice demonstrates the development of the ideas taken from meditation and how the experience of the meditation practice and its teachings influenced directly the approaches we adopted as a group to the creative process. The impact of the practice is evident in how movement was created and structured, leading cumulatively to the creation and performance of *dharmakaya*. The documents substantiate the development of a shared reflective engagement with the process and evidence some of the themes selected - for example honesty, presence and truthfulness - for further elaboration in my analysis of the collected data.

In the next chapter I discuss further the style of ethnographic writing chosen to demonstrate how the research findings construct meaning. As suggested by Green & Stinson, as a postpositivist researcher, I have selected from a reservoir of possible data and have sought to determine what is important or significant in relation to my research context. This allows for an outcome that may have multiple perspectives and meanings (1999). The analysis of the data created in the creative process, the final work and the performance of it will follow in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5 - Project, Performance and Data Analysis**

### **5.1 Process of analysis: during and after**

In this chapter I will discuss the key observations and experiences of the practical research as well as the themes identified in the final analysis of the data, by addressing my research aim and questions which shaped the dancers' creative process and performance of *dharmakaya*.

Throughout the ten month practical research project, the performance of *dharmakaya*, the journal writing and individual and group interviews, I identified on a continuing basis what seemed to be emerging as significant observations and experiences. As a group we allowed (through agreement from group discussions in rehearsals) these observations and experiences to shift our ways of choreographic exploration. I encouraged the dancers to return continually to these observations and experiences, both in their studio practice and in discussions. Through these models of engagement a different type of rehearsal process and choreographic work began to take shape. Essential throughout, and indeed built into the methodology, was that the process of analysis must be an integral part of the practice (all rehearsals), reflections on the practice and in the concurrent and subsequent interrogations of that practice.

With the practical research project complete, including the public final performance of *dharmakaya*, I created a log (553 pages in total) which represents all of the data collected. Once the log was complete I read this several times, making notes in the margin of the emerging themes or categories. This enabled me to identify themes for analysis and discussion and to begin the process of drawing out what elements of the data were significant and contributing to my understanding of what I had witnessed in the studio practice; in other words, to categorise that which presented itself as essential and that which must be discarded for developing a coherent response to my research questions. According to Ely 'every

category, every theme, every finding, whatever its form, arises from the fact that it exists in the data'; a theme may be established 'because it appeared many times...or it appeared once or a very few times but carried important analytical impact...themes arise because the support of them is evident to the analyzer' (1991, p. 156). Ely contends that the process of analysing the final data 'is to find some way or ways to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data; to reduce and reorganize and combine so that the readers share the researcher's findings' (1991, p.140). Ely's thesis has offered a fruitful method for analysing the data of this research project. Through analysis of the data, it became evident that some themes appeared on an on-going basis, whilst others for example appeared only once. The significance of the theme within the choreographic environment was not in any correlation with the frequency of appearance: very often a theme appeared once but shifted significantly the studio-based process.

With an initial set of themes or categories compiled, I began to group them together to create a list of codes which locate the various themes into overarching categories. I embarked on a process of refining the initial set of themes, recognising that in many cases, the themes were similar but expressed in varying ways. As Renata Tesch, a writer on qualitative research suggests, the 'main intellectual tool is comparison...the goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories and to discover patterns' (1990, p. 95). This process of refinement is, I discovered, a lengthy process. Indeed, Ely advises that 'making categories means reading, thinking, trying out tentative categories, changing them when others do a better job, checking them until the very last piece of meaningful information is categorized and, even at that point, being open to revising the categories' (1991, p. 145). Whilst somewhat daunted by the lengthy process, I was unsurprised, in light of the above researchers whose methodologies I had chosen to consult, that it was only by the fifteenth version that I had

a set of themes and categories that I considered was 'authentic' in terms of the work witnessed, and cogent as a tool for analysis. A process diagram of emergent themes (see overleaf) demonstrates how the key observations and experiences feed into the themes and how the themes overall had an impact on the creation of *dharmakaya*. It is important to recognise, however, that in line with Tesch's view, the analysis process is not rigid; rather, it is systematic, and analysis ends only when the data no longer generates new insights (1990).

Through the analysis of the log I was able to identify the main themes generated from the whole of the practical research project. The key observations and experiences generated during the practical research contributed to the identification of the main themes, all of which had an influence on the creation of *dharmakaya*. The thorough analysis of the log and research of methodological approaches that would enable me to make sense of the data have enabled me to analyse the impact of meditation on the process of creating *dharmakaya*.

Diagram - insert

## **5.2 Style of ethnographic writing**

In order to engage with the research data manageably, I have employed strategies used in ethnographic narrative writings to uncover further what was discovered throughout the creative process and performance. This process triangulated my discovery of the themes identified through the analysis of the log. John Van Maanen, an organisation theorist known for his contribution to qualitative research and ethnographic studies, advises that 'ethnographic writing of any kind is a complex matter, dependent on an uncountable number of strategic choices and active constructions...what details to include or omit; how to summarize and present data; what voice to select; what quotations to use' (1988, p. 73). Mindful of the responsibility of the ethnographic researcher-writer, I looked also to Ely again to inform the next stage in the analysis of my data. Accordingly, I decided to put my research findings into a narrative. As Ely suggests, my job was 'to create a text in which the person or persons you have learned about come to life' because I have 'tremendous responsibility to be true to their meanings' (1991, p. 167). The writing of the text 'is with the purpose of shaping a complete descriptive account that meshes our fieldwork with the interpretations that have emerged from our analyses' states Ely (1991, p. 168). The narrative style of ethnographic writing is the telling of a tale. The term 'tales' for Van Maanen highlights the 'representational qualities of all fieldwork writing...it is a term meant to draw attention to the inherent story-like character of fieldwork accounts, as well as to the inevitable choices made by an author when composing an ethnographic work' (1988, p. 8).

This chapter will utilise, the three varying styles of ethnographic writing categorized by Van Maanen: realist tales, confessional tales, and impressionist tales. Realist tales provide a direct, straight forward picture of the subject studied with little concern for how the fieldworker produced such a portrait. The most prevalent and familiar form of

ethnographic writing, realist tales allows the narrator to adopt the device of permitting various informants to speak for themselves. In contrast to realist tales, confessional tales are written from the perspective of the researcher and often include self-reflection. Impressionist tales on the other hand, are personalized accounts of the fieldwork, and may have multiple interpretations or uncertain meanings and carry elements of both realist and confessional writing (Van Maanen, 1988; Ely, 1991). These three styles of tales are adopted in this research study for the way in which they allow for the dancers and me to express our personal experiences of the studio practice, at the same time affording opportunity to include further reflection and observation post-performance. The telling of the tales allows for further analysis of the data.

### **5.3 Realist tales**

Realist tales are not multi-vocal narratives and do not display multiple views. For a realist tale, according to Van Maanen, an 'author typically narrates the realist tale in a dispassionate, third-person voice...the result is an author-proclaimed description' with some 'explanation for certain specific, bounded, observed cultural practices...realist tales push most firmly for the authenticity of the cultural representations conveyed by the text' (1988, p. 45). In a realist tale 'only what members of the studied culture say and do and, presumably, think are visible in the text. The fieldworker, having finished the job of collecting the data, simply vanishes behind a steady descriptive narrative...taking the 'I' (the observer) out of the ethnographic report'. In doing this, Van Maanen states that the 'narrator's authority is apparently enhanced, and audience worries over personal subjectivity becomes moot' (1988, p.46).

I have written realist tales for each of the four dancers (Daisy, Katy, Lucille, Tara) in order to allow for their view of the story to be told, an account of their journeys through the three Phases of the creative process. Whilst I have

adopted Van Maanen's perspective on 'narrative tales', it should be made clear that my research is not attempting to align itself with his concept of 'pre-existing culture' *per se*, although clearly there is a case for arguing 'studio practice' as a (sub)culture (not the subject of discussion in this thesis). Rather, the model is adopted to provide yet further basis for examining the process of dance making and performance that are central in this thesis.

The ethnographic approach that is central to this research process offering the opportunity to bring various writing styles into the documentation, which are variously privileging - personal, poetic, and objective positions through the narrative tales. It is however acknowledged that this method also has its limitations. Whilst this ethnographic approach is useful in giving agency to the dancers some richness of their experiences is lost. The tales lead to writing that does not always reveal the full sense of the dancer's individual personality. Within body-based practices much more is 'unspoken' and revealed as there is 'more' than what they say. I was aware of these 'unspoken' shifts and approaches. An example of this is the atmosphere created within the rehearsal process. There was an 'unspoken' understanding and respect that reflection and honesty were key to the research process and this understanding allowed them to have a greater awareness towards their experiences and be more critical towards other processes they were engaged with.

The writing of the realist tales is to document what the dancers said and to assimilate and understand what they are saying. The dancers articulate themselves in different ways. Throughout the research process Daisy, for example, was comfortable in expressing herself verbally whereas Lucille talked about how she often struggled to 'find the words' in order to communicate her findings, questions and her experiences in an honest way. This is evident in the selected rehearsal footage on DVD in Chapter 4. The importance of the

tales written-up in this study is not in the individual words but the themes that underlie these words.

#### **5.4 Confessional/impressionist tales**

According to Van Maanen the confessional tale attempts to 'demystify fieldwork or participant-observation by showing how the technique is practiced in the field' (1988, p. 73). These tales are written from a more personal standpoint by the author/researcher and typically coincide with realist tales and are elaborations on the formal descriptions (p. 74). The confessional tale is particularly appropriate for this type of study as it attempts to represent the 'fieldworker's participated presence in the studied scene, the fieldworker's rapport and sensitive contact with others in the world described...it is necessarily a blurred account, combining a partial description of the culture alongside an equally partial description of the fieldwork experience itself' (p. 91).

Impressionist tales are about what rarely happens; not about what usually happens. These are memorable moments within the fieldwork experience and are 'reconstructed in dramatic form' and are periods the author regards as especially notable and hence 'reportable' (p. 102).

I have written three confessional tales which discuss my experience in the field in the role of choreographer-as-researcher, the creative process towards the making of the dance work and the purpose for including a live performance. I have also written a final narrative tale based on the impressionist tale principles proposed by Van Maanen, to discuss the performance of the final choreographic work. The themes highlighted in these tales, which were also identified through the analysis of the log, will be further discussed and theorised.

## **5.5 Triangulation**

Checking the data I gathered from a variety of sources and methods was 'one way of contributing to trustworthiness' (Ely, 1991, p. 97). Consistent with Ely, my triangulation process depended upon differing methods of gathering information; in this research, for example, movement observations and interviews. Since the practical process spanned ten months, triangulation also occurred by gathering data by the same method over a period of time.

## **5.6 Realist tales**

### **5.6.1 Daisy**

From early on in the process Daisy became aware of her insecurities within a creative situation. In one rehearsal, Daisy said, in terms of space, that she was very conscious of coming close to the camera. She did not want to penetrate my viewing and, no matter what, she could not get away from the fact that she was being watched. This thought was fleeting for Daisy but she said she was still trying to remain true to the task and herself. She also felt judgement was a very big part or a reason why she was not progressing as quickly as she could have been as a dancer. She said she was able to identify this through the meditative practice of observing the self.

Daisy said she also had more self discipline since beginning the process. In terms of her preparation for rehearsals, she said she felt more focused, thinking about what she was doing and exactly what the nature of the process was and why she was there. She felt the meditation sessions really helped her because she had time to reflect and observe.

Daisy wrote in her journal that in the initial sitting meditation sessions she had constant layered distractions; one distraction would reveal another. She reflected that she wanted to look at Katy who was sitting next to her; her peripheral vision was saturated by her left side. Daisy's right side felt dominant. She took these initial thoughts

into the first rehearsal. She also spoke of how she felt that something was unravelling, like the meditation, the stripping away was what was creating the ideas.

Daisy felt she approached her recent technique presentations<sup>22</sup> differently; usually she is scared, which makes her stiff and less grounded but this time performatively she was freer and grounded and did not worry about her mistakes. She felt that this progression came very much from the process.

Overall, Daisy felt the rehearsal process and the meditation teachings had encouraged her to have a greater sense of openness and had allowed her to develop a maturity in her approach. She felt that as a dance artist she had let go a lot more, and felt more confident and creative. Daisy commented in one rehearsal after making a mistake in a run-through that the moment actually made her more alive. Normally when she made a mistake she wanted to retreat into herself but this time it made her stronger.

Daisy said she felt the findings from the process were going to carry with her. She also felt she was still at the beginning of the journey. She said several realisations had emerged from the process for her; the meditation practice revealed habits of thinking patterns, weaknesses in her actions and the experience of being present. She said she was beginning to change her reactive behaviour, and was noticing more quickly her insecurities and where this affects her. By the end of the project she had noticed more quickly when she was acting out of self doubt, shyness and fear of judgement. As a result she feels she is now a more ambitious dancer, less afraid of making mistakes and feels more genuine. She also feels more intuitive, confident and available/vulnerable (in a positive sense). One big change since the beginning of this project was that she noticed she suffers less from the action of others and is less reactive. She said she is letting go and moving forward. She spoke of how she suffers a lot from

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<sup>22</sup> In their 3<sup>rd</sup> Year of study the dance students at Trinity Laban are required to participate in technique presentations (ballet, Cunningham, Limon etc.).

the actions of others and that it is hard to let go of something so ingrained. She said it ruins her relationships, self-confidence and progression but since starting meditation she has felt much calmer in talking and more patient in waiting.

Although the performance went quickly for Daisy, she said she was still able to feel the spaciousness of the thirty-five minutes. She said she felt 'extremely giving'. She said she had a slight apprehension in the unison, but trusted her body knew the way. She said she walked into the space with conviction and commitment, not looking back or forward, but finding detail and space for the piece to emerge. The work began with Daisy's solo but she said she did not think of it as a solo, but more of a duet, as she felt it was her and the space. She felt she had space in the work, to be able to recognise habits and make the decision to change. She thought the space came from worrying less about things. Daisy said 'the concept of letting go whilst performing' allowed her 'to be more able to abandon thoughts, and not waste energy'. She felt she was letting go more and more quickly. She acknowledged that if she kept hold of difficult thoughts, they build and build and then situations appear that were not there in the first place. She felt that when she becomes more in tune with herself, she becomes more in tune with others. Daisy said 'the fear of judgement' had previously stopped her from listening to her body and the others.

Daisy reflected in her final interview post the performance that creatively she felt more embodied, because overall she felt more honest within her work. From the meditation teachings she said she could access and recognise embodiment much more clearly within the sessions and outside of them. She said that it had been an honest investigation. Time has given her that freedom, but even if she had less time she thought it would still be the same outcome because it was about mindfulness.

### 5.6.2 Katy

Katy mentioned in her first interview that integrity and not being pushed to be completely truthful with explorations, was an issue for her in previous projects she was involved in. She also acknowledged during the early stages of the meditation process that she was too expectant for something to happen and not just content to meditate as she was already thinking about what she would write in her journal. Katy reflected this in her journal:

in meditation today I had a couple of moments when I was in my breath and a feeling that my thoughts had dispersed but this was quite fleeting as I realised it was happening so my brain turned on again. It seems as though there are two levels of my thinking when I meditate, the very distracting brain chatter that seems to be right at the forefront of my mind and more conscious, and then another layer that happens further into the sitting where things seem to appear further back in my brain and it's a while before I realise a thought is even there. It's hard to describe.

The process of sharing choreographed material by using words really resonated for Katy. When she was on stage, she said she would still be painting in colour from images of the 'imprinting<sup>23</sup>' section.

Katy said that normally she is really excited about getting positive feedback but with this work it was more about being in it, rather than having someone else validate it. She felt that she knows what happened and that is what is important, the experience, not the comments. She did not need external comments to confirm what she felt about the performance or how she felt within it.

Katy expressed in her final interview that she thought she would be calmer with the practice of meditation but did not know if it would affect her dancing. What she found to be the most influential experience was coming to the understanding

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<sup>23</sup>A named section of the final work.

that it was not only about what she was doing in the moment but how she contributed to the whole. She also said in terms of working with other choreographers it made her expect more.

### 5.6.3 Lucille

Lucille spoke of a time when she moved during the sitting meditation, she felt that it was a real decision, and felt entirely responsible for it. She felt it was more of a deep listening for her rather than a rebellious action as her focus remained.

Lucille felt that the choreographic work took her on a journey and she trusted it; at the beginning of the piece she is 'someone' and at the end she is different. Lucille said she had to let go through that journey, to just discover it and experience it again and again. Lucille said that because we talked so much about embodiment and being in herself that at the same time she felt the opposite, that she steps out completely of herself. Not in terms that she loses control but in terms of opening; opening her awareness and being vulnerable as well. Lucille feels these are opposites. She reflected thus on one improvisation session:

each time we start with a concept we have to embody it first individually. As I go through the improvisation, and when I become open you have a great reflection/memory of the experience because of the mindfulness and presence one has when executing it...the memories are very detailed once you become open.

With regard to performance, Lucille said she identified what she needed to switch on in order to be present, so that she could feel much more in control. Before she had felt that it was very random if it would happen or not, because she would not be aware of what she needed to do. Lucille tended to go the other way around, thinking that she needed to project out towards the audience. She felt she had moved away from this awareness but thought the project brought this back. She said that the meditation was a good way to become aware of this because when she is sitting, the extreme stillness of it

allows her later to think about it in terms of what is happening (bodily). She felt the extreme stillness was the way to achieve it first and then experience it with movement.

Having gone through this process, Lucille felt she could 'put her finger on it'; she can say when she is engaging and when she is not. At first when she was having stronger moments of awareness she was not able to say what was different, but she developed the ability to use her new knowledge to take her to a present place. Lucille reflected on this in her journal:

Being present, I think is a feeling that I had during the whole process and because I identified it I now can accentuate it during my dance practice. This is what the process brought to me overall. I think what we call mindful moving is what I was taught to do and to engage with when I was taught contemporary dance [as a child]. Although I had never been able to put a word on that and to analyse it as clearly as I do now, this is what the process gave to me, which also allows me to now accentuate that presence and play with it, try to capture it somehow which is challenging, fascinating and enriching.

For Lucille the meditation helped her in terms of concentration, and she would be interested to know if doing meditation alongside the choreographic process is the only way to achieve that concentration and awareness. She feels that there may be other things that have shifted that she is still not aware of, and thinks she will still see the effects later. She said that she will carry these things with her, and articulated this through the image of a very long ribbon behind her with things she can access. Rather than let things go, Lucille said she picked up things along the way.

Lucille reflected on the trust in the whole process, the trust of the movement that her body knows and her trust in the piece. Before she performed *dharmakaya*, Lucille said she did not think about any specific movements, just the beginning of the work. She said that previously in such a context she would have panicked, because she would have wanted to go through the unison section, but would not have been able to

find it because it was not in the context of the work. For her, the trust built up with the confidence that she gained throughout the process. She advised that with this type of process, she needs to trust herself before she can have an impact on the choreography. Moreover that trust needs to build within the group dynamic and cannot be there in the first rehearsal, and she needs to know what is expected.

Lucille mentioned that she cried half way through one of the meditation sittings. She explained that it was not sadness, more tiredness and nerves, letting go of tensions. She said it felt nice to listen to her body in that state, in silence and stillness. She did not share the experience with the group afterwards as she did not find the experience of crying itself very interesting. However, the fact that it had a resounding impact on her mind and body was relevant to her. She also felt that it would take her some time before she could try and analyse and understand why it happened. She could see that her way of thinking since practising meditation had changed. Before, she said she would not have let herself have the time to be in the moment, let go and analyse later, she would have tried to find a cause straight away.

Lucille was given two solos within the work and she said she really appreciated the space that she had with that. She was responsible for each run-through of the work to try things out, and was accountable for finding her way through it. She expressed that when she works with other choreographers she knows much more where her boundaries are, and what she can do within that and where she can push further. For Lucille, it again relates back to opposites; listening and non-listening, and feeling very confident and at the same time feeling very vulnerable, and trusting the piece in its development. She commented that the more she is engaged with her internal state the more she is engaged with the external context. Knowing the piece for her and being prepared for it was about knowing what her journey was for thirty-five minutes and trusting that

knowledge. For her, as the work began, it was a new discovery each time, and her journey revealed itself.

#### **5.6.4 Tara**

Tara reflected that there were certainly feelings or thoughts experienced through the process that were most difficult to articulate. She could feel a shift but was not quite sure what that shift was at the time.

For her there was a real difference between what she had experienced as nervousness or adrenaline and how this affected her mindfulness within the work. Tara felt that the nervousness was detrimental to the work, because it took her out of herself; but that sense of adrenaline she gets in a performance context can make her 'hyper aware' of what she is doing, and can really feed her mindfulness in that way. She feels this demonstrated a change in her. In the performance Tara said she was using what the audience was giving her, to spur her interest further. It made her keen on the idea of pursuing improvisation because she worked on that in the process; those tiny moments of choice. She found this interesting in how she could stay present within herself, and not become egotistical with it, which comes back to how much generosity she needs to acquire. This was quite an important shift for her in terms of developing her skills throughout the process. She felt that having mastered one level of mindfulness she wanted more.

Tara had in fact been practising this way of being for a whole year, and had been developing a tool box; in some ways she was dealing with things in a similar way as before but realisation of her actions/reactions had emerged through this process. Instead of changing her way of dealing with things she had a realisation of how she had dealt with it or not dealt with it. She felt she had begun to catch herself reacting before she reacts.

Tara said that she has found a greater trust in herself and in decisions that she makes, and the realisation of how these

choices affect the unfolding of events. In terms of working with other dancers it had made her able to step back from difficult situations. When there had been a clash of opinion she found the ability to deal with it in a more mature way because of her new found clarity. She acknowledged that there were further challenges that came with her greater realisations: she became more aware, for her it was learning how to cope with this shift.

Tara also reflected on a particular moment in her personal life in her journal:

definitely worth noting that the meditation practice helped me out of a panic attack last night when I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. Tried to talk to myself and tell myself to just sit be mindful of my stress and distress and accept and breathe through it. This really helped me to calm down and find a restful mind.

She felt that she will be able to approach future work with less of a wanting to 'give', and more of a feeling of trust that she is being seen and that her work is good. She thinks she will still want to be generous but will want to step back and trust that her work is 'good enough'.

Tara commented that she feels that this is a choreographic work which does not judge itself, although it expects commitment each time. She feels it is a fluid document of the research. She spoke of her commitment to the process and that it was her deep interest in what we were doing which drove that commitment. The attention given to the focus really helped her ability to remain with what was happening between her in the space and her body. In a sense, this process has for her been about dealing with difficulty, not necessarily overcoming it; acknowledging it can allow for some relief. This comes back to the root of the sittings for her, that thoughts and distractions are not blocked or pushed away forcefully; she acknowledges their existence. She has found a greater trust in herself, able to make choices in relation to others and to know how these choices affect the unfolding of

events. Tara said that stepping back from situations has resonated quite strongly for her.

Tara thought the process brought her further into herself; for her it was also less about giving to an audience but realising that 'what she has' comes through. She felt her attention to embodiment and sense of connection to the group kept her within what was happening within the space. This is something that she would really like to take on into further work because she thinks it creates a greater honesty.

For Tara, in the performance there was group solidarity and the space was ready for something to happen to it, for the choreographic work to be seen: she said it humbled her, she felt she was going to be taken on a journey, for the next thirty-five minutes. She felt that the space took on that other entity; it was something else that she respected.

### **5.7 Analysis and discussion**

The next section considers in more detail how the practical research, the writing of the narrative tales, and the themes that emerged through the practical research to formulate the final data analysis, shaped the creation and performance of *dharmakaya*. My main research question, which I asked at the start of the project, was how might the integration of a meditative practice influence and enhance a dance making process? There were three main shifts which resulted from this investigation: a shift in my direction of the rehearsal process, in the generation of movement material, and in my engagement with the dancers. These shifts were identified through an unfolding understanding; I began to be able to identify these shifts through a critical engagement with the themes as they emerged through the analytic process.

I also began the research process questioning; what does embodiment mean in this context, both for myself and for the dancers? What new insights can be gained about embodiment and how are these insights influenced by established theory on

embodiment? What impact might notions of embodiment have on the rehearsal process, the creation of the work and the dancers' performance? Engagement with the teachings of meditation gave me a greater understanding of embodiment and its fundamental role in dance practice for both the creative process and performance in three main ways: in the understanding of the effects of *judgement*, the importance of *honesty* and the practice of *being present* through the understanding and integration of *mindfulness*.

I will also discuss the challenges we met during the sitting meditation practice and the effects of the teachings on our lives outside of the studio process. Although not originally part of my initial set of research questions, these observations offered valuable insights into the development of the work over the duration of the project.

Finally, I will address the questions I posed about choreographic method; to seek to understand if a choreographic method can be established which incorporates the principles and practices gained from meditation to support and enhance the creation of the created work. And can a method of analysis then be established where the results of the practice-based research are sympathetically transformed into written form?

#### **5.7.1 Direction of the rehearsal process**

As a choreographer I began this creative process with a greater openness than when I had created previous works: I started with a willingness to accept change in my working methods and a hope that the process would enrich my creative resources in support of my work as a choreographer.

Since integrating a meditation practice into my dance making process was new to both the dancers and me, I recommended that we always began each rehearsal with a group discussion and reflection on how our personal meditation practice was going, whether we had had any new creative thoughts that emerged from the sittings as well as recapping where we left off from the

last rehearsal. We decided that the dancers would always start the physical portion of the rehearsals with ten to fifteen minutes of mindful moving<sup>24</sup>, to allow themselves to tap into their place of mindfulness and become present for the creative/movement tasks. The practice of mindful moving, first experienced in the meditation sessions, was brought directly into the rehearsal process early on and it was something that remained a useful and integrated practice until the final evening performance. We would not have found the usefulness of mindful moving had it not been for the meditation practice.

We would often continue improvising around an idea which we had been working on previously in a rehearsal. During some rehearsals we would not discuss immediately the outcome of specific improvisations. This was in order to let the dancers 'settle' and to allow the improvisations to have an impact on the dancers' way of moving. We found at times we were too quick to make judgements or decisions. Daisy reflected on this in her journal, 'it feels like we are rushing to have something today...the structure we have imposed takes away from the honesty'. Similarly, Tara mentioned in one rehearsal that she felt there was a moment when the improvisation should have ended but then it did not. After discussion, we decided then, that if the dancers felt the exploration had resolved itself before I instructed them to conclude then they should finish.

My trust in the dancers and their trust in each other continued to grow throughout the process and this shifted more responsibility and ownership on to them. This changed distinctly my way of working as a choreographer: as the dancers' experiences and reflections were brought to the fore, I allowed the development of the movement ideas to be led by the dancers, rather than imposing my 'external' observer view to dominate. I was able to acknowledge that the dancers' commitment to the process, driven by the commitment required

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<sup>24</sup> See 3.7.2.2 Mindful moving, pp. 51-52 for further reference.

by the meditation practice, allowed them to find honesty within the tasks and movement explorations, which I recognised was likely to be key for the final form the dance work would take.

The structure and direction of the rehearsal process was a direct change from my previous ways of working as a choreographer. I had had to create a situation where the dancers could reflect and speak about their findings from the sitting meditations sessions and the Dharma teachings in order that these could have impact on the creative process. This new found way of directing the rehearsal process was influenced directly by the meditation teachings and practices, and in turn, the dancers were able to access and utilise the meditation experiences to feed into the creation of *dharmakaya*.

#### **5.7.1.1 A developed language and group dynamic**

The creative process enabled the dancers to develop a language to talk about themselves and articulate their experiences. They transferred some of the language and teachings from the meditation sessions into the rehearsal process and continued this into their reflective writings and individual interviews. At times there were moments or experiences that were difficult to articulate in words but were felt by the group and these had an effect on the process. Michael Polanyi, a researcher and theoretician who has made significant contributions in the areas of physical chemistry, economics, and philosophy, states: as humans 'we can know more than we can tell' (1966, p. 4). Polanyi says, we may know a person's face and recognise them amongst a thousand others but usually cannot explain why or be able to put it into words. There were often moments in the improvisations that each of the dancers acknowledged as being notable and had left an impression; however they were not able to put words to what actually happened.

The group dynamic was important throughout the whole of the project and this evolved from the process. Lucille spoke of having trust within the group, and Tara also spoke of how the work as a whole required much group listening. As the process revealed early on, the vulnerability of those participating meant that a respectful and supportive atmosphere within the group was quickly established. This also impacted on the way the rehearsals were led and directed; and the meditation teachings had a direct influence on this.

### **5.7.2 Generation of movement material**

The shift in the generation of movement material was one of the most significant changes to my previous ways of making dance work. And it was also the biggest risk, as I was now questioning what creative thoughts arise from the meditation sessions. Silvano Arieti, psychiatrist, suggests, 'human creativity uses what is already existing and available and changes it in unpredictable ways' (1976, p. 4). Using this concept as analogous to our practice in this project, as a group we were using the experiences that emerged from the meditation sittings to feed into and lead the creative process. We took these experiences and transformed them into choreographic explorations. These creative thoughts or ideas were often very subtle but the patience we gained from the meditation practice encouraged us to let the concepts develop and expand over time. Dance artist and meditation practitioner, Irina Nadel Rockwell states:

Sitting before doing a work of art makes a space, creates a gap. The hesitation or holding still is like clearing your canvas. You can then make a move from there. How you move depends on your own confidence and your willingness to expose yourself. In this way, making art opens all your abilities and potentialities. You don't need a vocabulary and tricks; you just express who you are and what you want to say straightforwardly. It has nothing to do with what we conventionally understand as artistic talent. Instead, there is a new definition of talent: awareness. (1989, p. 191)

The dancers and I had experienced this 'space' or 'gap', initially during the sitting practice and continued to develop this 'awareness' throughout the whole project. Setting up the starting point and structure of the rehearsal process supported this as the dancers were beginning to recognise and have an awareness of what they needed for themselves in order to prepare for the exploration process - the 'clearing' of their 'canvas'. This awareness encouraged the identification of creative ideas which could be taken into the choreographic process.

Daisy had many creative thoughts during the rehearsal process and was eager to experiment and suggest options for the creation of the work. In our first rehearsal we discussed our creative ideas from the meditation session and Daisy spoke of how she felt 'right dominant' (she favoured or privileged the right side of her body), and felt drawn to Katy, her body wanted to move. Lucille mentioned that when she would lose her focus, she felt Tara swaying, and would go back to the sitting meditation posture and felt really 'empty' afterwards. These are examples of some of the concepts we took into improvisations in rehearsal. Katy reflected in her journal about the first few improvisations: 'I felt very open and free, with space to acknowledge, the chance to explore without putting too many judgements on top - a bit like not judging where your mind wanders to during the meditation'. Daisy spoke of how she had one honest experience with Katy, as though her body moved without previous thought, her mind had to catch up for a change. Katy said she allowed herself space to observe, to be truthful. She also spoke of how her mind can work faster than her body and that she followed the body, and it was nice to have the time to check in with her body this way. The dancers' experiences of patience and the 'space' or 'gap' felt from the meditation sittings had a direct impact on the way they generated movement material.

The creative thoughts and process of discovery emerged from the experiences of the meditation sittings and its teachings.

Being open to allow for a practical methodology to emerge provided a structure and environment where the dancers had the confidence and willingness to engage.

#### **5.7.2.1 Non-doing and sharing choreographed movement**

*Non-doing* was a concept we engaged with from our meditation sessions, which meant encouraging ourselves into a state of just 'being' and sitting. This is a process of continually returning to the sitting and breathing in that moment. We learned that 'doing' stopped us from just being in the state of being or non-doing. Rockwell proposes that the meditation practice is about how 'the raw state of mind cultivated by sitting practice is open, inquisitive, and clear, thus enabling a person to produce art that relates more directly and genuinely to one's experience' (1989, p. 187). The dancers' experiences were largely consistent with Rockwell's thesis: while engaging with the meditation practices the dancers were able to create movement which was related directly to their experiences from the sittings.

We were taught that non-doing was acting without thoughts of gain or loss, right or wrong but being free to experience what comes up. Katy spoke of how she felt as if she was beginning to own the meditation experience more, not doing, not trying to do anything special. This concept had a positive effect on the process as it encouraged the dancers to remain present with the tasks they were engaging with and to allow for moments of creativity or choreographic choices to emerge. It also encouraged the dancers and me to be patient with the process and to not rush to make decisions. Here there is resonance again with Rockwell, in the recognition of the 'space' or 'gap' created from the sitting practice. This experience was a change from my previous ways of working: normally, I would be quick to make a judgement in the process of creating the work and would then feel the need to 'fix' it or find an immediate solution. Engaging with the concept of non-doing encouraged a great amount of 'doing', and this came

in the form of creative ideas stimulated through the practice of patience. This concept is in accord with Rockwell's claim that the state of mind 'cultivated by sitting practice' has the ability to strengthen and deepen the creative process of art making.

Erich Fromm, a humanistic philosopher, claims that in the:

being mode, remembering is *actively* recalling words, ideas, sights, paintings, music; that is, connecting the single datum to be remembered and the many other data that it is connected with. The connections in the case of being are neither mechanical nor purely logical, but alive. One concept is connected with another by a productive act of thinking (or feeling) that is mobilised when one searches for the right word. (1976, p. 39)

Consistent with Fromm's claims, the concept of 'being' allowed the dancers to find a new, effective way of sharing and 'recalling' choreographed movement material which would maintain the essences of their experience. As the creative process developed we realised we needed to find a new way for the dancers to share movement material; a way that would maintain and be true to the essence of the original concepts, as the movement was created from a place of 'feeling'.

Daisy suggested they talk about the feeling of the movement rather than the shape, to explain what it was they were feeling to get the essence of the material. The dancers' concern was with getting the essence of each other's movement which came from their lived experience of it. The aim we agreed on was to see if they could embody it rather than copying the movement. As a result of the different processes in learning movement material the dancers would then ask different types of questions to clarify. In relation to a section exploring the idea of 'sinking' and 'mud', Tara asked Katy 'where is the mud in relation to you?'. In this way, Tara was looking for a visual connection to the movement when

learning her imprinting phrase<sup>25</sup>, rather than asking a bodily orientated question, such as 'do you arch your back?'.

Learning each other's material this way was productive: the dancers were focused on the intent of the choreographed movement material. Daisy spoke of how it would be interesting to learn a phrase this way; let it settle and then come back and refine it, to come back to that first experience. The dancers learned the material without looking or watching directly, rather learning by hearing and sensing. The dancers worked from a set of imagery-based instructions, rather than copying the physical actions of the dancer demonstrating the movement material. Tara said the emphasis was more about how it was making her feel, rather than on if she was moving the same as everyone. Katy spoke of how the concern was about being true to the information and that she had more respect for the other person's material. Daisy said the experience was new but there was something familiar with it, something that she felt she had lost, her understanding of sensing and tuning in, made her think about ballet<sup>26</sup>. In ballet class she said she keeps being told to 'feel' and to 'express it' but it is a feeling she is not familiar with. Lucille spoke of how the words were more of a trigger than the movement, it was less about getting things right but more about capturing the feeling each time. The concept of 'feeling' was important to the creative process as it also formed a way for the dancers to remain honest within the movement explorations whilst maintaining the intention of the work as the focus. The dancers reflected that they were able to bring something of themselves to someone else's movement. When executing the movement, the focus was on recapturing the words. Learning the material this way the dancers felt they had captured the essence of the other dancers' movement and the focus on honesty and intention remained. Tara reflected on this process in her journal:

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<sup>25</sup> A named section of the final work.

<sup>26</sup> The ballet classes she was taking whilst studying for her degree at Trinity Laban.

It was helpful not only in picking up the movement more efficiently as a result of our common knowledge about the experiences in the movement, but also helped to clarify our own material and remind us of its origin. Positions and details did not matter when performing the material as a group, because the intention was clear, so these things were almost irrelevant or unimportant.

Daisy wrote that she:

Found new ways to embody movement. By describing the feeling of each movement to my colleagues, they were able to capture the essence of what I was feeling. When improvising with their phrases, I was able to be more intuitive with my decisions, and more 'in the moment'.

Katy also further reflected on the experience in her journal:

Rehearsal today felt as though we had taken a huge step forwards in the process of how you teach each other's choreography without losing the true essence of where it originated. Not learning steps but instead having a feel for the movement through the thought process behind it was like going back to experiencing movement for the first time. It was internal and it took away all judgements about right or wrong, instead a truthful clarity that wasn't forced or about external shapes. When we performed as a group, having been through this process meant that not only did I return to the original intention of my own phrases, but I was also aware of the others despite not looking at them or dancing with them.

Lucille reflected that she had lost the 'essence' of the material she had originally created when she was simply repeating the movement without the focus on 'intention'. She commented that the process of teaching the others her material had allowed her to return to the 'essence' of the originally created movement. Returning and focusing on the essence of the movement material, encouraged by the practice of non-doing and the 'being-mode', the dancers found an intriguing and honest way to share choreographed material. The intention was at the forefront of the process and allowed the creative and performance experience to be taken to another level.

Choreographer, dancer and writer, Susan Leigh Foster advises that traditionally in dance training, 'drilling is necessary because the aim is nothing less than ''*creating the body*'' and

that 'with repetition, the images used to describe the body and its actions *become* the body' (emphasis in original, 1997, p.239). Foster further advises that 'metaphors that are inapplicable or incomprehensible when first presented take on a concrete reality over time, through their persistent association with a given movement'. Although the devising period for this research project did not adopt the characteristics of a traditional technique 'drill', we used repetition as a means to embody metaphors. For the dancers the images were not merely a language to talk about their bodies but a way of experiencing embodiment and a method of creating material. So by contrast with Foster, in this choreographic process the images and intention were to the fore: creation and embodiment were simultaneous, there was no 'drill'.

This discovery would appear to have some continuity with the principles of meditation practice discussed by both Trevor Leggett (1978), a teacher of yoga and philosophy, and James Austin (1999), a clinical Professor of Neurology. They propose the 'ri' principle in meditation practice as the inspiration or spirit, and the 'ji' principle as the formal technique. Austin states that 'ri' means to be 'so in contact with the true, universal nature of the situation that one expresses its beauty and power both naturally and efficiently...ri is inspired by our innate creative wellsprings within...it cannot be taught or imitated' (1999, p. 669). However the 'ji' principle can be taught and observed, having been handed down from some other person's inspirations of 'ri'. Applying these principles to the experience and creative output of the dancers, it is possible to propose that the dancers' original inspirations of 'ri' were handed down to each other through this new found way of sharing dance movement material, through the particular teachings offered by meditation.

### 5.7.3 My engagement with the dancers; confessional tale - choreographer-as-researcher

As my original rehearsal notes and comments were also included in the log I was able to confirm a number of key observations and experiences that arose from my position of choreographer-as-researcher. My role as the choreographer evolved through the rehearsal process. I would begin each rehearsal by asking the dancers if they had any creative thoughts or ideas that had emerged from the meditation sessions. These thoughts would be discussed by the dancers and one concept would be chosen by the group to be taken into an improvisation. My role shifted to being the observer, telling the dancers what I was seeing, as well as asking them questions about their experiences. From early on in the process, I did not come onto the studio floor to demonstrate movement or improvise with the dancers; this was a distinct change from my previous ways of working as a choreographer. Though my role shifted to being an observer, I continued to lead the process by directing the timing of explorations and by initiating reflective discussions. At the same time, I consciously tried to refrain from making judgement, remaining sensitive to the dancers' experiences and thoughts.

As the group dynamic and trust developed so did my approach to the rehearsal process: I would ask for more intentional detail, in order to encourage the dancers to define further what they were creating, rather than asking them to alter movement. I had to be patient and trust that the work would develop in its own time, allowing moments to reveal themselves and being open to the experiences the dancers were offering. Writers on creativity, Stanley Rosner and Lawrence Abt suggest, 'ideas may emerge unexpectedly but it is implied that they have been available all the time...the process is one of discovery' (1972, p. 382). This accords with the experience of creating *dharmakaya*: it was necessary for us to give time for the process of discovery and trust that solutions to choreographic challenges would be resolved. I designed the

structure of the practical research process, which spanned ten months, specifically to avoid the pressure of making a work with urgency. The lack of time pressure allowed us to work sensitively out of the meditation teachings and practices to find material that would eventually be consolidated to become the dance work, *dharmakaya*. My approach as choreographer had changed fundamentally through this process: directing rehearsals had become a different kind of activity; I was no longer imposing my ideas, but rather posing questions arising from which the dancers were able to develop and refine material.

Further, the practice of not labelling the meditation experience found its way into the rehearsal process. This practice encouraged me as the choreographer not to label the dancers' experiences, or outcome of the tasks from an external perspective. I also began asking the dancers how they would find a way into the movement or the improvisation tasks during the rehearsals. Since the movement concepts were originating from a personal meditative experience I did not feel I could dictate a methodology, this had to emerge from the dancers. The principle learned from the meditation process of non-judgement, of not judging from an external perspective and making decisions based on these judgements, guided the process: none of the movement created was chosen for how it appeared visually. The dancers never viewed any of the videoed footage to re-find any of the specific movement material or to see how they might enhance their individual performances as dancers. The movement was created from their experiences of the meditation sittings and was refined by tapping back into the place from where it was first experienced: by returning to the self, the experience and coming back to the breath, as practiced in meditation. I asked the dancers in their second interview how this shift in my role affected them. Daisy advised that it had allowed her much more freedom to be herself, and she felt she had given herself fully to the process. Katy felt valued in what she had to offer. Lucille said my new role made her feel responsible for the movement

and the work, and that she and the other dancers are the creative process, and that it encouraged her to engage fully each time.

A significant challenge for me in my dual purpose role of choreographer-as-researcher was how to manage sharing or giving over ownership whilst at the same time retaining authorship in some sense. In my choreographer role I was interested in shifting my way of working and investigating how I could have a more integrated engagement with the dancers with whom I was creating the work. This meant 'giving' an author role to the dancers, and suspending judgement regarding the extent of my authorship.

Owning the process was an issue to be addressed: when as a group we engaged with the concept of letting go, in particular letting go of ego, the challenge was balancing the practice of 'opening out' and 'letting go' whilst creating a choreographic form and having to reflect on and analyse that form. A further issue stemmed from the fact that my research was based in two opposing 'worlds': meditation as an Eastern philosophical practice, which emphasises looking and reflecting on the self; and a tradition within Western contemporary dance which stresses 'making' and 'doing'. The challenge was to let go of the sense of ego whilst analysing the benefit of losing the ego, and this continued throughout the writing of this thesis. There were times, in allowing the dancers to 'own' their experiences, I lost my anchoring in the analyses of the work. However, the frame and design of the research project was conscious and deliberate, very much mine, hence the process itself was not without form; whilst the process was open in the sense that I had let go of previous boundaries. The approaches were designed to enhance the creative process and the performance experience, the outcome in terms of the form the work would take was unknown.

### 5.7.3.1 Ego

In one of our final meditation sessions our teacher spoke of how it is not possible to transcend the individual self, the ego based self, until we stop building the ego. When we stop doing that, very quickly the ego begins to crumble and deconstruct itself. When that happens it can be a very frightening process, it is like a death and no one willingly destroys themselves. For Rockwell the ego:

builds itself up to protect itself, creating biases in experience. Art created from this state of mind remains narrow and confused. Egolessness, or openness to one's existence free from territorial biases, means that one is unencumbered and works freely and dynamically with energy, space and one's existence free environment. One sees and experiences reality directly and spontaneously, is more present in one's being and more genuine in one's actions. (1989, p. 189)

The dancers' experience of engaging with the concept of 'egolessness' was of being 'more present' and 'genuine' within their actions in the process of creating *dharmakaya*. The teachings and engagement of 'egolessness' created further understanding of the meditation principles and had a positive impact on the creative process. In particular, Tara explained her feeling of embodiment in terms of letting go of the ego.

As we were nearing the time for performance of the completed work, I asked the dancers what would be most beneficial to them during the final rehearsals: previously when making work, typically I would 'refine' or 'clean' the work at this stage, but this seemed inappropriate in the context within which we had been working for the duration of the project. The dancers suggested that we go through the whole work and remind ourselves of where the movement concepts had originated, going back to the roots of the creative process research rather than refining the performance outcome and leaving the source behind. This process involved re-visiting memories of past rehearsals and recognising where we had been and what had been the agents for generation of material. Tara reflected that

revisiting the intention and starting stimulus of each of the sections allowed her to recapture something in the movement, a freshness that sparked her interest afresh in what was already there; it kept her present and connected to the idea of integrity. Daisy reflected on this point in her journal as the work was near completion:

A trust is building and the work is revealing itself. Determination and acceptance is becoming stronger and there is less judgement and self consciousness. Although we are important for the piece, I feel now that the piece is taking over, I am able to communicate without ego.

#### **5.7.4 Understanding judgement**

The process of creating *dharmakaya*, which means the 'body of reality', was in direct contrast to the concept Foster (1997) describes as the 'hired body', a concept central in traditional dance training, where the dancer, so to speak, is hired out to the choreographer as the means to articulate and communicate the choreographer's ideas. I consciously set out to choreograph through a process of non-doing. What emerged, or rather surfaced in my consciousness, was a way of working less prescriptively<sup>27</sup>.

I was interested in dancers embodying an idea/ideas: I was not seeking to make the dancers 'more' or 'less' embodied, but rather to see if the attention to embodiment provides insight or a different kind of experience of creativity in choreographic activity. Foster advises that in traditional dance training 'students learn to duplicate the correctly demonstrative body and to avoid the mistakes of the incorrect body, they present (and are presented with) endless new variations on right and wrong' (1997, p.238). This embedded concept of 'right and wrong' was one of the key observations and realisations for the dancers early on in the project: they recognised that in their dance training hitherto, their judgements had been made according to this concept of right

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<sup>27</sup> See 1.3.1 'Tradition' working within, pp. 13-15, for further reference.

and wrong. Identification of this resulted in a shift in our method of working.

Learning to judge less was a significant development in the process and had an impact on the dancers' ways of working and performing: it supported their engagement with embodiment. In one rehearsal Tara spoke of how they were all worried about judging each other and that she had a real sense of self doubt. She wanted to go to the floor but doubted herself, that maybe it was the wrong place in the improvisation. Tara also discussed in her first interview how the notion of right and wrong comes into play a lot for her in creative processes and how it would create freedom if she had less judgement. Tara reflected on her early meditation experiences in her journal:

an inundation of distractions - a shock to realise how full my mind is of things which cannot be dealt with at that point in time. My body was resistant to the procedure at first...itches, pains...but I managed to focus my mind on accepting those distractions and resisting the urge to do anything about them. Nevertheless, the mind often was concerned about 'doing the task' correctly. Am I sitting right? How should I be thinking about my distractions?

Katy also expressed that she hoped she would become less judgemental from this process, as she was always comparing herself to others, rather than reflecting on whether what she was doing was valid. Katy was often worried about what she was doing in rehearsal, but she realised within this process that what was important was her embodiment of the ideas in action, rather than making a judgement about whether she performed one section [of the work] better than another. Katy reflected on this in her journal:

The start of rehearsal was very open and I was improvising with quite a carefree manner about 'coming back to centre<sup>28</sup>'. Once we had to set material though, I felt as though my brain went into shut down. I couldn't move away from the most basic notion that thoughts draw

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<sup>28</sup> A named movement section.

you away and bring you back and all I was doing was reaching away from my body and bringing arms into my chest. Then I just started panicking, so I was at a loss. It brought up a lot of things. Firstly, should we be judging ourselves when we create movement if it is coming from a truthful response to the exploration? What it looks like should not necessarily be part of the equation, as it usually would be. I need to try and retain as much as possible that anything I do and put together is 'right' in the same way that there is no right or wrong way to do the sitting. Currently, I'm being too judgemental of myself in relation to what the others are creating, when this really doesn't matter and will only stifle my natural responses. It is not about doing it right; it is about accepting what is there.

Consistent with the methodology adopted for my research project, I videoed each rehearsal and meditation session. The camera was a vital tool throughout the research process as it allowed me, in the choreographer-as-researcher role, to be overt with my observations. Unsurprisingly, the sense of being watched, either by me or the camera was difficult at times for the dancers. Tara spoke about not wanting me to think that she was being arrogant by coming close to the camera. Katy spoke of how she was testing herself in the improvisations with how close she could come to the camera and still stay mindful. Katy also reflected that in one rehearsal she tried to use more of the front space where, usually, she would avoid it because of the camera. She also realised that much of her experimentation took place with her back to the camera. In an attempt to address this difficulty we had one improvisation session where I did not watch and instead viewed the session on video. Daisy said she felt freer not having me watch but she felt that she could try and capture that feeling when I was present.

The dancers eventually overcame the distraction from the placement of the camera and me watching but it remained a discussion point for the group for many rehearsals. Initially I was surprised that judgement was a concern for the group, especially so early on in the process because I had initially judged the four dancers to be confident movers. However, the

meditation teachings<sup>29</sup> which are strongly based in being in a present state with no judgement of right or wrong, had an immediate effect on the creative process. The concept of judgement and being watched was identified early on in the process, and the dancers used this to their advantage in three specific ways. First, when exploring movement, they tried consistently to maintain a state of presence, to not think about being judged or to label the experience. Secondly, in the structure of the work, the dancers frequently suggested using the far downstage space of the studio (closest to me and the camera) for certain sections of the work, on the grounds that since initially they had avoided this area of the studio, this would continue to challenge their sense of presence. Thirdly, the dancers would lift their focus when executing movement, again when furthest downstage.

The experience of judgement initially constituted a challenge for the dancers and the creative process; in turn this concept had a positive impact on the creation of the work and remained as a continual checking in point and place of growth. Jaksch's (2007) writings argue that one of the states of mind cultivated through meditation is being kind to ourselves, which permits experimentation with failure. This state of mind is seen as a way of fostering creativity. In similar vein, the identification of judgement and its implications, allows the participant eventually to turn towards non-judgement, a state of being where creative activity emerges.

#### **5.7.5 Honesty**

The identification of honesty followed from the concept of judgement. Honesty in the movement explorations was important to the dancers throughout the creative process. John Tusa proposes that an artist often possesses:

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<sup>29</sup> The meditation teacher often told a Buddhist story near the end of the session. The teachings in this type of work often come from life; this is why Zen teachings are often part of stories between teachers and students. The traditional stories told were taken primarily from *The Dhammapada* and *The Blue Cliff Record*; both texts are widely used Buddhist works.

a deep instinct for when something is 'right' - a word much used - when a piece of work has become 'right' or when it is 'true'...a moment of recognition when their work reaches a point of rest, a moment of completion...when the word 'true' is used in this context, it signals a reconciliation with their internal sense of truth, with their understanding of personal integrity. (2004, p. 9)

The practice of the sitting meditation was about noticing the mental state, which is a reflective practice; the focus was not to shut out thoughts but was the process of returning to the sitting, the posture and breath. Since the meditation teachings encouraged us to be truthful to what we were experiencing in the sittings this concept led directly back into the creative process.

Once movement was set or while doing an exploratory improvisation<sup>30</sup>, the dancers were able to identify when they were not being truthful or honest within the movement explorations, a state which felt wrong to the dancers. The dancers also spoke about how in an improvisation they were given a responsibility to make something happen; and maybe at times they were trying to make something happen rather than allowing something to emerge organically from the exploration. Tara questioned in one rehearsal, 'how can this 'magic'' and truth of improvisation be kept when creating something and refining it...the elements of judgement/right and wrong start to enter - contradictory to values of meditative practice'? Daisy reflected in her journal:

we built a structure from the improvisation and when we came back to it, it wasn't feeling the same, so we realised, like in meditation you have to be honest about your feelings, so we decided to improvise again, some people kept their movement, others revised it, this gave it a whole new energy because we delved deeper and it felt more honest.

Katy likewise reflected in her journal:

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<sup>30</sup> See 3.7.1 Dance making process and improvisation, pp. 48-50 for further reference.

It seems to be like a ritual, these [rehearsal] sessions. A precious space in which we explore, discuss, refine, similar to the way we do the sittings. There is definitely truthfulness to this process, an exploration that I haven't experienced in such depth before. We questioned how true we were being if we were trying to purposely make things happen between us, rather than letting them occur naturally. Can you ever escape personal judgement when setting material? Is it possible to entirely let go? The more you return to movement, does it become more truthful as you explore it, or does it lose something?

As the priority towards truth and sensing developed, so did the material. This concept developed into a checking-in point for the process, as a sense of knowing. And this checking-in point developed a sense of ritual as Katy mentioned, a way of always coming back to the posture, the breath and honesty of the movement explorations which continually supported their experiential understanding of embodiment.

#### **5.7.6 Embodiment: being present, letting go and suffering less**

As the observations and experiences of judgement and honesty were identified and had an affect on the dancers' creative practice, the concepts of being present, letting go<sup>31</sup> and suffering less<sup>32</sup> began to add another layer to the experience. Again these concepts emerged from the meditation teachings and practices and became part of the studio practice.

The dancers began to notice differences in their movement explorations. Daisy spoke about how she was beginning to move

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<sup>31</sup> Specifically in the practice of letting go of the mental functioning of thinking and paying attention to our thoughts and finding the roots of those thoughts, focus on being rather than doing was encouraged. We were encouraged to become an observer of ourselves as the practice of meditation is a greater experience of the self.

<sup>32</sup> We were encouraged to consider when we were suffering because of our thoughts, and was it possible to lay those tools aside. If it is not possible, then recognise that. Sometimes we found that in meditation when we were sitting with our thoughts, it was very difficult to put them to the side. We were encouraged to ask ourselves who is suffering. The practice of Zen sitting is to look at the moment. Are you causing your own suffering in this moment? If holding on to a certain belief is causing you suffering then is it possible to let it go? Do not create more suffering because you cannot let go, accept it for what it is. Refer to Appendix J for the Buddhist story told by the meditation teacher to encourage the concept of 'suffering less'.

in a different way and Tara said the process had pushed her to be more inventive, less concerned with shape, and she felt this had emerged from the attitude to what we were doing. Tara also spoke of how it was good to feel trusted and that it allowed her to trust herself. Rosner and Abt suggest that 'open-mindedness, flexibility, willingness to trust hunches, and curiosity are factors that emerge repeatedly as facilitating and favouring creativity' (1972, p. 382). I also observed that the dancers were able to tap into the presence and self-discipline required by the meditation practice whilst exploring movement concepts in rehearsals, and this was having a positive impact in 'facilitating' creative engagement. Tara spoke about how embodiment for her was about letting go, especially in a class situation and not 'over-thinking' what she does. For Katy, the meditation practice encouraged her to let go and to worry and judge less; to perform the work honestly she had to be present. What was different about this performance for Katy was being present the minute she walked out into the space while also having an awareness of the audience. Katy said she never had that feeling before; because she always had the feeling that she had to go out and 'prove herself'.

Maria Shevtsova, who writes on theatre direction, describes the concept of embodiment as the energy of the work coming from a 'phenomenal focus on each task at hand, from a commitment to search and research, and from a principle of embodiment by which the body inhabits every motion and emotion passing through it, and where body, mind and spirit are one' (2003, p. 6). Shevtsova further states that when dancers embody a work it can:

stay in the repertoire for years on end and grow with the performers rather than atrophy into a thing...the fact that the performers bring their own selves into the entire creative process means that they co-author the production...they continually bring fresh input, thereby ensuring its living quality of play. (2003, p. 6)

As the dancers experienced a greater sense of embodiment, they effectively became 'co-authors' of the work: they continually questioned the intention and integrity of the choices being made and had a distinct 'willingness to trust hunches'. The dancers demonstrated a 'phenomenal focus' and commitment to the research which stemmed from the observations and experiences of judgement and honesty gained from the meditation teachings. In Green's study<sup>33</sup>, her participants also experienced the idea of 'freeing the body'; another form of the concept of letting go. Green's participants related this mainly to 'unblocking physical and mental tensions' or to 'relaxing more'; overall they became further aware of 'inner somatic experiences', though the study did not specify what these were (1993, p. 123-127). Daw Thynn Thynn, a medical doctor and Dharma teacher, advises that 'letting go of beliefs, doctrines, gurus, ideals and judgements is extremely difficult, because one holds them very dear to oneself'; 'they become one's possessions, like material wealth and power, and then one is not free and does not proceed further' (1995, para. 3). Thynn Thynn confirms that to achieve freedom within the self requires only two things, 'a silent mind and an open heart' (1995, para. 6). Through the experiences of the meditation practice and letting go, the dancers began to find an openness which in turn encouraged a greater sense of embodiment and was one of the most valuable themes discovered from the research process.

The meditation teacher also spoke of Satori, a realization that is small or great, a flash of insight, something that stops you and brings you to stillness. When experiencing moments of clarity, when suddenly we understand something that we have been struggling with, something changes. This often comes from a moment of stillness, and something arises from the self which is this Satori or realisation. The difficulty is allowing these moments of insight to take hold, allowing them to change us. We were encouraged to remember that

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 2 - Literature Review for outline of Green's study on pp. 26-31.

whatever comes up in meditation or elsewhere, if we do not sit with it, and allow ourselves to stop and look at it, then it does not have the power to change us. This is the benefit of the power of any kind of stillness practice. The more we can be still with some kind of realisation, the more it has the ability to do something in our lives.

The shifts in embodiment and sense of greater presence for the dancers came from these moments of stillness. These realisations were first felt, as Lucille said, in the meditation experiences and were then transferred to movement. Rockwell observes something similar in how the:

sitting practice is about coming to stillness...there is a simplifying of our situation, a coming to the moment, to the present, to the now...a sense of being rather than doing, is developed. Ultimately, when one has become comfortable with a sense of being, it is about appreciating stillness in activity and connecting directly with the raw energy of the phenomenal world. (1989, p. 189)

The practice of stillness also had an impact on the structure of the choreographed work. The dancers and I decided to include moments of stillness to allow for sections of the work to shift either in energy or dynamic. We also utilised stillness to allow for moments of 'group listening' or to have time to allow the impact of a previous section of the work to settle.

#### **5.7.6.1 Mindfulness**

The concept of mindfulness was practiced during the improvisations in rehearsals and sessions of mindful moving<sup>34</sup> in the meditation sessions. As a result of this practice the dancers gained a stronger sense of presence, were able to be truthful to movement explorations and had the ability to recapture the essence of experiences through movement and then to set choreography. Mindfulness was linked to the concept of 'being present' because if the dancers were not 'present' then they could not be 'mindful'; therefore mindfulness was also a

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<sup>34</sup> See 3.7.2.2 Mindful moving, pp. 51-52 for further reference.

grounding for the dancers' physical understanding of embodiment and was another key theme discovered in the research project. The Buddhist meditation master, Chogyam Trungpa describes mindfulness as training the mind to see the 'precision of situations at every moment' (1973, p.186). This concept has some continuity with Shevtsova's claim that embodiment requires 'phenomenal focus'. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990/2008) theory on the mental state identified as 'flow', where the participant is completely absorbed and fully immersed in an activity, during which time the ego-self is ignored, is also aligned with the practice of mindfulness. This state of flow, presence and focused attention has been identified by Csikszentmihalyi as the place where a person's skill is utilised to the highest level.

Practising mindfulness enabled the dancers to encounter<sup>35</sup> in positive vein distractions within the meditation sittings, rehearsals and life outside the studio practice whilst always coming back to the breath, self and having a greater awareness of the situation. This supported significantly their practice of embodiment.

We discussed within the group the difference between being mindful and mindless, as this was at times becoming blurred for the dancers. Trungpa's writings helped clarify this: 'there has to be a certain discipline so that we are neither totally lost in daydream nor missing the freshness and openness that come from not holding our attention too tightly...this balance is a state of wakefulness, mindfulness' (1976, p. 33). The dancers found that having completed an action, if it had not left an impression, then it was a good sign that they were not attentive or mindful while doing so. This was particularly important when exploring movement through improvisation, as the dancers gained the ability to recall moments that felt appropriate and were able to discuss

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<sup>35</sup> The meditation teacher told a Buddhist analogy to aid us in our encounters with distractions, 'you have a dog and a lion, if you throw a stick at the dog it will go after the stick, if you throw a stick at a lion, it will go after you'. If you have a distraction you will tend to go to it, you will always be the distraction, an itch, someone coughing, a thought. The practice is about taking the responsibility back.

this with the group. The dancers often noted that when they became reflective whilst moving they were no longer present, and the feelings they had been experiencing were lost. Daisy spoke of how she realised that this concept goes back to distractions and the sitting meditation practice, and that her movement ended when her mind decided to change dynamic, or to go in a different direction; her mind took over the decision. This was a constant battle for her. She said she found that when she changed direction or dynamic, the 'energy' stopped and the mindfulness stopped. Daisy said she would like to reach a state of being where she is so acutely aware in her body that her body always takes over. She said she did practice with 'putting her mind into parts of her body' and that this was the closest she has felt to true embodiment.

We were encouraged continually to question whether we were present. If we were present throughout, then this is the practice of mindfulness. There is no question of mindfulness in looking forward or looking back. Neither can one say 'I was really mindful there' - that statement is itself is not mindful. Rockwell discusses how in mindfulness 'one is completely and fully there...there is a sharpening of the mind and development of one-pointedness because experience is reduced to a moment-to-moment awareness without the distractions of past or future' (1989, p. 189).

With the practice of mindfulness, it was important for us to understand that it is a technique that you cannot do rightly or wrongly, it is a question of being, of how we are in the moment<sup>36</sup>. This state of being was challenging to understand and apply: dance training<sup>37</sup> tends to focus on a right or wrong way of executing movement, so for the dancers it took some time for them to understand the practice of mindfulness, not only in how they practised it bodily but also in how they reflected on it. The dancers experienced a sense of freedom from being in the present/mindful place because that is all

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<sup>36</sup> Refer to Appendix K for an analogy given to us to support this concept.

<sup>37</sup> The 'hired body' approach/tradition as argued by Foster (1997).

that they knew. This understanding gave the dancers the freedom to be present in the movement and to experience it. Katy reflected that the concepts we were exploring often had a fleeting feeling, one day she could feel it and the next not at all.

We were also taught to watch when pure mindfulness becomes a performance. It was important to recognise when thoughts arise such as 'what do I do next', 'how do I want to move'? These are impulses which counter being present and in the moment. Daisy shared that sometimes she felt that she could use her voice in mindful moving but needed to be aware of the impulse to do it and the impulse to shut it down.

Stewart argues for the mindful artist:

as one who continues to work in the studio, informed by theory and reflection...hopefully as the super practitioner of the future who contributes value added, informed, powerful and interdisciplinary models for praxis to their fields...they will emerge from the studio to create and model best practice by consciously constructing and making visible praxis in their fields to new levels, as mindful practitioners who are different, better and more articulate than those who have gone before. (2006, p. 8)

As suggested by Stewart, the practice of mindfulness is rich in possibilities for impact on the practitioner and for practice-based research. The dancers experienced this as a 'value added' process; it was one of the most influential discoveries of the research, having an impact not only on the creation of the work but also on the performance of it.

### 5.7.7 Challenges in the sitting practice: awareness and Buddha smile

The sitting meditation sessions<sup>38</sup> were challenging<sup>39</sup> at times, both physically and mentally. We found that it is one thing to learn about meditation and another thing to apply it. Daisy said after one session that she had to move because of pain in her hip; she did not feel guilty about this but wished that she had prepared for the sitting more mindfully. Tara was late for a session and reflected that she was judgemental of herself throughout the rest of the sitting but was grateful for the difficult session as it reminded her that to sit is no easy thing. It takes preparation, an open frame of mind and discipline. We all found that it was difficult to sit with pain during a sitting but it was a richer educational experience because it pushed our mental and physical boundaries. The sittings did not get easier for us but our comfort levels and essentially our determination continued to shift.

In the beginning stages of our meditation practice just holding the posture was enough to 'hold our minds'. We learned as distractions began to emerge that the benefit to a mindfulness practice, is not simply stopping the thoughts, but watching the thoughts and learning what comes up. This process could help us change our thinking pattern and we quickly learned that it was impossible to change something until there was awareness of it. We learned that a discouraging thought is just a thought, it is neither good nor bad, but in terms of the meditation we were encouraged to ask, where did it come from and how far away did it lead us? These teachings supported the understanding of the key observations and experiences of the process. Once the dancers had an understanding and awareness of the observations of *judgement*,

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<sup>38</sup> We removed the practice of Yoga Nidra (often referred to as corpse pose or deep relaxation) half way through Phase 2 as this is not a mindful practice. The practice is to come out of your body to such a degree during this pose, lying like a dead thing. It is helpful to let the body die and collapse fully and let go, particularly after an intense sitting, which initially was very helpful at the beginning of our practices.

<sup>39</sup> Refer to Appendix L for the Buddhist story told to support the more challenging sittings we were encountering.

*honesty, letting go, suffering less and being present* they were able to apply these functionally in the process.

We were encouraged to try the meditation sittings with a little Buddha smile, by lifting up the corners of the mouth. We were taught that the secret of the Buddha smiling is the moment of realisation that he spent years searching for something that he already had. Tara reflected that the use of the Buddha smile positively affected her sittings. She had the experience of her thoughts not necessarily being stopped, but that the nature of them was lifted and a greater sense of ease came with this. It caused her to dwell less on her suffering which often escalated her physical pain. Instead of just coming back to the breath, she also came back to the smile. Katy commented that the use of the Buddha smile encouraged her to be more hopeful and reminded her that the sitting was not a test, just an experience, and her new found understanding of judgement supported this. In rehearsal, I observed that the use of the Buddha smile became a useful tool: it encouraged the dancers, whilst moving, to return to the beneficial principles learned through the sitting practice.

#### **5.7.8 Effects outside the studio**

The meditation process, in particular the practice of mindfulness, also had an effect on life outside of the rehearsal process. We all expressed that we found this particularly evident in interpersonal relationships, working with other choreographers or peers and in dance technique classes. We were taught during the meditation teachings that when interacting with people it is often easy to find fault in others rather than take responsibility for our own feelings. The idea is often 'you are making me feel this way', rather than 'why am I reacting in this way'. In trying to assign blame for a particular feeling we can lose sight of the inner causes of those feelings and, in doing so, lose our self awareness.

We were encouraged to practice mindfulness throughout the day and be mindful of what we were doing. We were not stopping our thoughts, equally we were not being carried away by them either, allowing ourselves to stay engaged. The more we brought awareness to our everyday lives the more it had an ability to change us and change what we do. The dancers reflected that they were increasingly more equipped to deal with interpersonal issues, although they still found this challenging when this was not met with change or a further openness from others involved. They had to accept that for a time things might actually become more difficult. Katy reflected on this experience in her journal:

I'm wondering if this process is having more influence than I realise - doing the commissioned work<sup>40</sup> was something I was really excited about but I'm really feeling very much like a body to be used. Perhaps it's something to do with purpose and intention. In this research, I'm really investing something of myself, the process involves the whole of me, and I know the intention behind the movement I produce. I guess my biggest realisation is that I never ever feel in any dance class (technique/improv/choreography) the way I do when I'm in these rehearsals. Nor have I ever moved in the same way. It is really empowering to recognise this and to realise it is happening without trying to make it happen - everything else I do is always about trying, working, always trying to improve on something so something is better. I know obviously I'm in a very secure, supportive environment in which I can push beyond and admit to discomforts or struggles but I think my aim now should be to try and transfer some of this letting go and self-confidence into classes.

Daisy also spoke of how she was now able to recognise to a greater extent distractions from the meditation teachings:

I noticed someone was standing outside the door and it brought me out of the rehearsal but then I just came straight back to it, I was aware of it, acknowledged it and just came back to the imprinting...the power of the imprinting became very powerful...usually when I get distracted from the exterior it affects the rest of what I am doing.

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<sup>40</sup> A component of study in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year of the BA (Hons) Dance Theatre degree programme at Trinity Laban.

In the meditation sessions we talked about change and life changing experiences, how life changes but we want to keep it the same sometimes; that anytime we knowingly deal with change, there comes a point where we would like to go back to our old self, return to our older state. The truth can be difficult for anyone who is on a path of change, it is not the world that changes, it is the individual. Sometimes that change is very pleasant, but sometimes because we are now conscious of things that before we were able to keep unconscious, it is more challenging. For somebody to stay the same in a changing world requires a lot of mental effort. For some, changing can mean a death; our old self has to die. When the process of change becomes difficult, the real task is to be able to let go.

Each of us had moments within the process where we felt that we were changing and had encounters where we noticed our personal world had shifted, and we identified that these shifts would probably stay with us even once the practical investigation had ended.

#### **5.7.9 Choreographic method; confessional tale**

In Phase 3 the final dance work began to take shape. There was a clear form to the work, having found a structure through improvisation<sup>41</sup>. The dancers would improvise, then we would discuss if they remembered anything that 'felt good'. Structure came about from the improvisation itself; it came from what 'felt good' and about catching a moment from the improvisation. The question then arose, what would feel bad, how you would reflect on that feeling and where does 'this feeling of good' fit in? The idea of 'feeling good' or 'right' corresponded with the group intuition. The composer and writer, Errollyn Wallen suggests that 'intuition is a knowingness...knowing when something is right or wrong, knowing when a piece of work is finished or needs revising' (2006,

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<sup>41</sup> See 3.7.1 Dance making process and improvisation, pp. 48-50 for further reference to improvisation.

p.46). Wallen defines intuition as the 'power of the mind by which it immediately perceives the truth of things without reasoning or analysis: a truth so perceived' (2006, p.46). McPherson's<sup>42</sup> study, which examined the effects on creativity of the practice of Transcendental Meditation, also demonstrated that awareness and intuitive insights were examples of the behaviours which had a perceived increase and could be seen as a movement towards greater creativity. For Daisy, it was about the space and in terms of feeling good, a connection between the body and space. It was clear from the practice when the dancers were tuned in and listening to each other and when they were not. Daisy reflected on this in an interview:

since practicing meditation I am feeling more compassionate, and this feeling has always been here I am just more awakened to it...and it felt like that with the space as well... you are just more open to the situation...I didn't feel like I was ever making decisions about structure it was more reflection on how it felt between us...and that happened when I was there [in space] or over there.

When something changed or shifted within a movement experience we had an awareness of when it was no longer mindful. As Rockwell suggests, 'awareness, in turn, brings about genuine action' (1989, p. 192). This practice came into the studio: having awareness or having a knowing of what felt right and this informed the formal structure and movement choices made.

The structure and energy of the choreographic work 'decelerated', which meant for us that the dance work and performance began with movement of great speed and dynamic; eventually greater use of stillness was incorporated, with slower sustained movement. This choice of structure reflected the beginner's mind in meditation. At the beginning of a sitting the mind is often over working and busy. With time and breath more space enters and there is a return to 'emptiness'. The structure of the work was also informed by

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2 - Literature Review for further discussion of McPherson's study on pp. 21-26.

the challenges the dancers placed on themselves in terms of mindfulness. The dancers wanted to know if they could be mindful whilst moving to the furthest points downstage close to the audience. I decided that Daisy's 'coming back' solo would start the work: it was direct and was a 'stamp' on the wandering distracted mind.

The attention to the processes of mindfulness affected and influenced the choreographic choices made in relation to the movement material chosen for the final choreographed work. The dancers gained clarity about how to develop and vary the dynamics (speed and quality) of the created movement and within the dance work itself through their 'sensing' and awareness of what 'felt right'. Whilst the exercises and the creative process/development of material had often resulted in movement material that was slow in speed and in some cases qualitatively homogenous in character, actually, what the process revealed was that dancers were clear in their dialogue about what dynamics choices might be made in the distillation of the piece; hence what emerged was a piece that had a range of dynamics - fast and light in quality, fast and with greater force, movements with staccato<sup>43</sup> quality that quickly changed direction, movements that flowed seamlessly from one to the next and so on. This was also contributed to by the dancers' desire to 'challenge' themselves; could they still remain mindful and 'present' within a range of dynamics. Initially, just 'sitting' in meditation was challenging enough for the dancers to remain 'present', this challenge then shifted to 'mindful moving', to then improvisation processes within the choreographic environment - to then extending the dynamic and spatial range of the movement material created, all whilst remaining mindful and 'present'.

The sitting meditation experiences linked directly to the development of movement material, the structuring of the work, as well as influencing the commitment and honesty required of

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<sup>43</sup> The term is a form of musical articulation, meaning 'plucked', 'sharp' or 'clipped'. In dance the term staccato is often used to define a dynamic quality.

the dancers. The dancers' commitment and honesty impacted on the creative process: in the way the dancers conducted themselves in rehearsal, in their reflections, and in the way they 'gave' themselves 'fully' to the process. The creation of *dharmakaya* was motivated by a conviction that was very different from conventional choreographic processes such as the tradition of the 'hired body' approach. It became evident to both me - and the dancers (who had worked and continued to work with a variety of choreographers), that this process encouraged a continuing process of developing and refining the material; integral to the process was the idea of distillation and ultimately transformation.

#### **5.7.9.1 Confessional tale; why a performance?**

The final work was performed in a public theatre: as a choreographic artist I work primarily within the proscenium stage space. Putting the work in the proscenium space allowed the dancers to see if the practice of mindfulness and presence could be maintained whilst performing. If the work had not been performed we<sup>44</sup> would have missed many important encounters. As suggested by Rockwell 'the fruition of the creative process, by definition, includes product...the process is not complete until there is a manifestation of it' (1989, p. 194). Howard also argues that 'performance is not circumstantially related to the end-product; it is identical with it, both process and end-product '(2008, p. 18). So the manifestation was 'meeting the public' in performance.

The lighting designer<sup>45</sup> chose grey flooring for the stage space and laid a black floor on an angle on both sides to give the space a feeling of more depth, the space also then appeared slightly narrower at the top. The space was further opened up as the lighting booms<sup>46</sup> were shifted up against the walls and legs<sup>47</sup> were removed. The space was open and clean and the dancers remained onstage, visible and present

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<sup>44</sup> For the dancers as performers and for myself as choreographer-as-researcher.

<sup>45</sup> Fay Patterson

<sup>46</sup> Vertical pipes that are placed on stage, usually on the sides.

<sup>47</sup> Drapery hung on the sides of the stage space.

throughout the thirty-five minute work. It was a traditional theatrical space but one that was 'stripped' of more conventional dressings.

The sound composition<sup>48</sup> was brought in near the completion of the work. Lucille found that the addition of the score affected her profoundly at first; it was not only influencing the dynamic of her movements and her energy throughout the work, it was also preventing her, somehow, from listening to the group. It was challenging for her to come back to the initial experience of the piece without being influenced too much by the score, she had to find a balance. Tara found the experience to be the opposite; the score did not disturb her listening to the movement or moments, in fact she felt that her senses were heightened because of it. The sound score created fullness in the space and intensified the tangibility of the space. Tara said that the timing and her sense of time of the piece and its rhythm lay with her attention to the others and her embodiment of the images and concepts.

As a choreographer I have always used sound compositions within my works and for this research process I wanted to retain this theatrical convention; however the collaborative dialogue with the composer was affected by my experience of meditation. The creation of the composition was supported mainly by the composer viewing run-throughs of *dharmakaya* in rehearsals and he then 'responded' to the work via the creation of his score. The dialogue between the composer and me was primarily through him viewing *dharmakaya* with limited additional verbal discussions. The communication process between us was supported by my growing understanding of trust and patience embedded within the meditation teachings. I felt that the choreographic work and the execution of it, 'spoke' for itself and that the need to add extra 'verbal' explanation was not necessary in this particular creative process. The collaboration process with the composer was therefore

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<sup>48</sup> Composed by Nick Parkin

supported by the 'space' and 'patience' given to it, which Rockwell reminds us, encourages the creation of 'genuine' art.

#### **5.7.9.2 Impressionist tale; the performance**

Drawing on elements of the realist and confessional tale writing styles, this next section is my own version of an impressionist tale where I am taking one moment from within a ten month process, and using the tale writing experience to extract further meaning from the whole process. According to Lynn Bryan and Deborah Tippins, an impressionist tale is a 'form of autobiography that portrays one highly personal perspective on a significant moment in time' (2005, p.227). The personal perspective of the performance of *dharmakaya* will be discussed in this impressionist tale by focusing on the dancers' reflections and my view of the work from the position of observer, of both the live and recorded performance. My view of the final work is supported by having gone through the same meditation teachings as the dancers. Using the method of the impressionist tale allows me to continue to evaluate the creation of the final work and the performance of it.

##### **5.7.9.2.1 dharmakaya**

The dancers were able to assimilate the knowledge and discipline gained from the meditation sessions into the rehearsals and the final work. Through the practices learned, they were able to articulate their impressions of performing the work. The dancers gained an ability to be embodied and mindful whilst executing the choreographed movement and most importantly maintained the ability to discuss it later. The dancers identified through their reflections, how they were aware of what came before in the work whilst remaining present, the impact of the movement and the execution of it and its effect on themselves and how the listening to the space and each other, created a wholeness to the work. The dancers also spoke of how the focus was about their intention in the work and their intention was 'being present' which in turn resulted in a particular focus. All of these

realisations were for me, a sign of the 'success' for the creative research and for the making and performance of *dharmakaya*.

After the 'dress run' and before the final performance the dancers reflected on how they viewed the work and the space. This discussion was important: the dancers were able to articulate how they experienced the work and to listen to each other's formed impressions:

Katy - there are times when the space clears and you see what is left behind and there are other times when repeated patterns come back and you are resetting what the traces had left behind...

Daisy - it is about constantly finding. It is not about the movement but what the movement creates...and what we leave behind and find again and find for ourselves.

Lucille - when I stand, I listen to the space, listen to your steps, it makes me scan the space, the space is vast...

Lucille- that moment of listening, you take everything with you...when you run you take the whole side of the room with you...

Daisy - it is like you grab it and pull it, like a curtain trailing behind you, you are the space...

Tara - there are moments when the space is intimidating...when I do the 'cutting'<sup>49</sup> for example...you see the space and think how am I going to reach the end of that...it is an extraordinary feeling. The space is the fifth person in the work..

Post-performance the dancers reflected on their experiences of performing and commented on what the experience was for them.

Lucille reflected:

I felt more communicative, it is more about trusting that it is communicative...by having the integrity of what we are doing...which comes back to the meditation, where you let go of the self as you know it...being open to experience...it was challenging having people watch...we did not want to lose that energy and communication...the

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<sup>49</sup> A named section of the work.

challenge was to stay true to what we felt and trust the original.

Tara also reflected in her journal:

Did we come *out* of our lived experience of the movement because of a desire or habit to 'perform' or project? My response would be no, I had enough internal stimuli for the movement (e.g. the colouring, the imprinting, the energy being created between someone else/the group), that I could focus almost purely on these things without overly 'coming out of myself' (although of course there were fleeting moments of concern for aesthetic and audience opinion). The movement's starting points and lived motivations were ingrained and inherent within it, so for me it became practically impossible to lose these on the day.

The dancers' reflections demonstrate that honesty and truthfulness within the work remained an important aspect of the process and contributed to what was experienced by us all as a 'successful' performance. As the choreographer, knowing that honesty and truthfulness were key experiences for the dancers I knew that a trusting engagement within the group had been affected. I was conscious that the feedback and creative contributions I would receive would stem from a place of 'egolessness'; in Rockwell's terms: the dancers were 'more genuine' in their actions (1989).

Daisy spoke about how, in the meditation sittings, she looked at one spot on the floor and she blurred that spot and opened her focus to the peripheral. For her that was the experience of having people watching; she was still aware that they were there, whilst remaining present in herself. Daisy's thoughts have some continuity with Rockwell's thesis on meditation:

there is a sense of a general vision rather than focused attention, yet the precision of the mindfulness is not lost...someone costumed at a carnival, holding out in front of himself a teaspoon of water that he must not spill as he walks through the crowd. One is both mindful of the spoon and yet completely aware of the surrounding environment. (1989, p. 189)

What was evident in performance to me as a viewer, was that the dancers had achieved a high level of awareness and precision of mindfulness from the practices gained from meditation; this was evident to the dancers also. Daisy further reflected on performing in her journal:

I felt a sense of equality between myself, the other dancers and audience. We were being watched but everyone participating in some way. It's nice to think that the observer can take what they feel without being directed a certain way, maybe it makes them question what they see...to investigate further for themselves, like what we have been doing. I did not feel responsible to please or communicate something to the audience but to be honest and selfless with the experience.

Daisy's reflections link back to the concept of non-doing, where the act of 'non-doing', in fact equals a lot of 'doing'. In her understanding and application of honesty and letting go within her performance she was able to 'give' herself 'selflessly'.

An overall sense of heightened awareness gained from the meditation teachings and the application of them has been experienced by the dancers in performance and by me in the role of the choreographer-as-researcher. Rollo May suggests that often a gain in heightened awareness is correlated with 'abandon and absorption', and it involves a 'heightening of awareness in the whole personality' (1976, p. 46). This notion is consistent with the dancers' and my experience of 'letting go', where we essentially 'abandon' previous ways of working and thinking, in order to gain and absorb new insights, or importantly 'realisations' of actions. May also suggests that creativity is 'the process of bringing something new into being' (1976, p. 39). In the making of *dharmakaya*, the practices of meditation brought 'something new' to the creative process and act of performance. In the role of choreographer-as-researcher I was, as Tusa suggests for all artists, 'looking for that understanding of rightness, that revelation of truth, which represents [my] own essential guide to when a work is complete' (2004, p. 10). *dharmakaya* reached

completeness and revealed many important findings which I will be able to draw on in making future dance works.

#### **5.7.10 Method of analysis for practice-based research**

A novel methodology has been established and utilised in this practice-based research project: it has been a challenge, as I needed to find an appropriate means to articulate what I found through the making and performance of *dharmakaya* and in the writing of this thesis. The process of analysis continued to evolve, as my role of both choreographer and researcher was influenced by my understanding and application of the meditation teachings.

I began the choreographic process with a particular and established way of making work<sup>50</sup>, at the same time, I had a desire to extend the boundaries of my artistic practice, to experiment with a new way of working. I had the challenge of bringing two 'worlds' together; meditation, as a reflective practice, and choreography, a creative practice. Inherent within meditation, the practice of, 'letting go' is fundamental; at the same time, it was necessary to analyse the impact of 'letting go' on the making and performance of *dharmakaya*.

In drawing from recognized qualitative research methods, in embracing the meditation practices as they were taught to me, and in deliberately utilising these for the making and performance of *dharmakaya*, I have established a way of creating, analysing and documenting a dance making process which contributes to furthering existing knowledge within the 'tradition' of dance making.

#### **5.8 Conclusion**

This research project was contextualised through its location in an institution which includes in its training what Foster calls a 'hired body' approach (1997). Alongside the project,

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<sup>50</sup> See 1.3 Choreographic background and 'tradition' working within, pp. 11-15 for further reference.

the four dancers continued to participate in daily class across a range of dance techniques. The research process of *dharmakaya*, captured through the methodological approach, foregrounded the development of a shared understanding of embodiment and the evolution of a language which aided discussions and fed back into the experience of the dancing itself.

The analysis of the data collected, which includes all of the participants' encounters and reflections as well as the performance of *dharmakaya*, and the writing of the narrative tales, constitute a substantial body of knowledge responding to the aims of research project. The teachings and practices of meditation encouraged the dancers and me to be mindful and embodied; where presence and honesty within movement development, creation and performance was central. As Lucille so eloquently expressed, the dancers and I have gained new knowledge and skills or a 'very long ribbon' with many concepts to engage with further.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion**

I now will discuss the key observations and discoveries that have emerged from this practice-based research study in relation to my research aim, questions and methodology, whilst also discussing possible areas for further research and the contribution of knowledge offered by the thesis.

### **6.1 Aim**

In the writing of this thesis I have aimed to answer my research questions in relation to the practical research undertaken. First, I have sought to understand how the integration of a meditative practice could influence and enhance a dance making practice. Secondly, I questioned what embodiment meant in this context and what new insights could be gained about embodiment. My final question sought to understand if a creative environment could be established which incorporated the principles and practices gained from meditation to support and enhance the creation of a dance work and if a method of analysis could be established where the results of the practice-based research were sympathetically transformed into written form. The practical research, the writing of the narrative tales, and the themes that emerged through the practical research fed into the final data analysis and shaped the creation and performance of *dharmakaya* as well as the writing of this thesis.

The aim of this research project was to utilise the dance making process to explore meditation and mindfulness as an approach to working creatively. The process of creating the work involved a deep engagement with the principles and practices of meditation in order to consider critically the impact this had on my own creative practice and on dancers' creative endeavours in the choreographic environment. Integral to this research project is consideration of the implications of this process for practice-based research and practices within the art form.

The aim was also to weave together the data generated through the creation of a choreographic work, with a reflective, critical analysis of the data, to argue that incorporating meditation in the creative process could have a profound impact on choreographic practice. The final choreographic work was to be performed in a theatre before an audience with also the possibility of touring<sup>51</sup>.

The interwoven practice of meditation, the choreographic environment and the discursive reflective process of data collection encouraged a multifaceted approach to fulfil my aim to build a theoretical and practical research project which can contribute to the field.

## **6.2 Methodology**

Ely's model of understanding data (Chapter 3) was applied as a basis for this research study. As there is no standardised system or methodology set out for this type of research nor would this research have benefited from a prescriptive method, a methodology that was open and fluid has allowed for the themes and findings to emerge; the analysis of the data has confirmed these discoveries. The themes have provided an access to understanding the results of the process, when meditation practice meets creative practice within a choreographic environment. This practice-based research study has offered insights for both dance making practice and performance: it has implications, then, for the development of artistic practice and pedagogy, at the same time impacting on existing discourse concerning creativity and somatic practices.

I have designed and utilised a research method that allowed and encouraged feedback from the project participants and through this ongoing dialogue, key observations and experiences were identified. The dancers and I responded on a

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<sup>51</sup> *dharmakaya* toured to Giessen, Germany as part of the TanzArt Festival in May 2008.

continual basis to key observations and experiences, allowing them to have an impact on the research through the rehearsal process, and in the creation of the final choreographic work. This process, and in particular the encounters experienced in meditation, encouraged a shift in our creative practice. This was an evolving process and methodology. In contrast, for Green, the continual sampling of different somatic practices as the practical course progressed offered a linear route; the identified experiences and changes did not shift the study whilst it was ongoing, rather, these were documented only afterwards. My research methods also differ from McPherson's early research, where the participants' involvement culminated with the end of the Transcendental Meditation course and completion of the questionnaire.

### **6.2.1 Challenges in conducting analysis**

The dual role of choreographer and researcher throughout the project presented many challenges as well as valuable insights. Since I was participating in the meditation sessions as well as leading the dance making process, videoing each practical session became an invaluable data source. Through the process of reviewing the 125 recorded DVDs, I was able to immerse myself in both the role of the choreographer and researcher. Revisiting each practical session via DVD was an enormous task. I wrote field notes whilst viewing, so inevitably each video would take longer to view than the recorded time as I would pause to reflect or to type, in order to not miss any non-verbal observations. Since I began this process of analysis once the practical project was complete, I was making field notes in the knowledge of what had informed the creation of the final choreographic work. I had to stay open to the data I was revisiting whilst navigating through this with accumulating knowledge. This was at times daunting: I had to question constantly if what I was viewing was informed by what I knew was the next stage in the process of discovery, and ultimately, the witnessing of the live performance of *dharmakaya*. Throughout this process I had to

balance the challenge of writing at the time of the practical research, with making notes during data analysis at the completion of the practical research, with the writing of this thesis, which is writing about the present, which has already past. Green found that this 'initial problem' of the dual role allowed for greater depth and dialogue with the raw data and is one of the 'benefits of working with a flexible framework and emergent design' (1993, p. 243).

### **6.2.2 Tales and themes**

The writing up of the data analysis and its subsequent appendices took the form of a number of tales followed by further discussion which included the integration of existing theories and literature. The writing process of the initial tales encouraged me to become intimate with the raw data and to continue to further refine it and be responsive to the emerging themes. As this reduction took place I was able to identify the prominent themes as the initial data became more manageable<sup>52</sup>.

Once the creation of the log, which included all of the raw data, was complete I was able to identify recurring themes which arose from the meditation sessions, rehearsals, journals, interviews and performance of *dharmakaya*. This methodological process allowed me to analyse the impact of the meditation on the creative process. This was a continual process as the key observations and experiences identified during the process encouraged shifts within the rehearsal process, which I noted whilst in the process as well as when watching the rehearsal footage on DVDs.

The multiple types of tales encouraged a detailed analysis and presentation of the key observations, experiences and emerging themes. This allowed for a greater understanding of what resulted in the process diagram of emergent themes (see Chapter 5). The writing up of the tales and creation of the diagram of themes formed a valuable part of the data analysis:

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<sup>52</sup> Beginning from the 553 page log.

this process encouraged further refinement of the emergent findings. As the researcher I continued to question what was being identified through these themes. I could not have arrived at final conclusions without this method of continual refinement and distillation. The writing of the narrative tales became a valuable part of my methodology: the process of the 'telling of the tales' allowed not only for data analysis to be undertaken but more importantly, meaning was revealed from the raw data. The 'meaning' identified, was organised into themes and the identification of the themes emerged through reflecting on discussions, interviews and writings, and became an analytic, reiterative process. This methodology, bringing together practice-based research and written analysis in this way, offers a contribution to the field as new knowledge.

### **6.3 Research findings and contribution to knowledge**

In Chapter 5, I discussed the three main shifts identified in relation to my main research question at the outset of the project: how might the integration of a meditative practice influence and enhance my own choreographic process. The identified shifts were in my direction of the rehearsal process, in the generation of movement material, and in my engagement with the dancers. I also questioned what embodiment meant in this context, both for myself and for the dancers, what new insights could be gained and how theories of embodiment could inform further these insights. I considered the impact of dancers' embodiment on the rehearsal process, on the creation of the work and on the dancers' performance. I have identified that through the engagement with the teachings of meditation the dancers and myself came to new understanding and application of embodiment in the creative process. This was achieved in three main ways: in understanding of the effects of *judgement*; the importance of *honesty*; and the practice of *being present* through the understanding and integration of *mindfulness*.

Although participants' lives beyond the studio was not a concern of my research, and neither did it feature within my research questions, the four participants found that the insights gained in the meditation teachings could be applied with positive outcome to broader issues in their everyday lives.

I also set out to inquire if a choreographic method could be established which incorporated the principles and practices gained from meditation to support and enhance the creation of a dance work. The key observations identified through the meditation practice helped form a method of making and performing that extended beyond the experiences the dancers and I had had in previous training and in performance<sup>53</sup>. The process represented a fundamental change for the dancers and choreographer in the way movement was developed and created (the initial processes of the dance making practice), in how we reflected on this through a particular embodied language and how I directed the creation of *dharmakaya*.

Finally, my enquiry involved seeking to establish a method of analysis which allowed the results of the practice-based research to be transformed sympathetically into written form. The development of a research methodology, in turn shaped an analytic process that informed the design of the written thesis. The method of analysis undertaken for this practice-based research study was influenced by the teachings and practices of meditation, as well as by established documented methods such as those adopted by Ely (1991). This offers a paradigm for future practice in the field.

### **6.3.1 Contribution to knowledge**

In relation to what I initially proposed and have discussed in Chapter 5, this thesis locates a perceived gap (see Chapter 2 Literature Review) in the understanding of the potential of mindful meditation as a new approach to dance making within a choreographic environment and contributes to the current field

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<sup>53</sup> See 1.3.1 'Tradition' working within, pp. 13-15 for further reference.

of research in a number of ways; specifically the fields of dance making within a choreographic environment, pedagogy and performance.

First, through the development of a dance making methodology that incorporates mindful meditation and enables the dancers' verbal and embodied engagement, this research study offers an example of how creative investigations might be led, with the focus being on 'presence' and 'mindfulness'. This methodology incorporates data collection and analysis in order to facilitate a critical reflection on the efficacy of the process. I argue that this methodology can encourage an experiential understanding of embodiment for the dancers which enables them to engage more deeply in the creative process, and offering them a language - an embodied language - with which to articulate and contribute ideas in verbal form. Secondly, the thesis extends understanding of the role of the choreographer. I argue that adapting principles from meditation teachings offers the choreographer a means to engage dancers in a process of 'letting go', to stimulate their creativity and their capacity to generate material in the process of dance making.

My role as choreographer-as-researcher provided a bridge for the dancers between a more conventional approach to dance making and one which encourages an embodied 'languaging' from the dancers. There was a dual process: offering a novel way of working that encourages an evolving process of building a new embodied language; and providing a reciprocal means by which the constantly evolving dance material (language) can feed back into the dance making process, and loop back into the language. Through this dual process I negotiated my role as pedagogue and dance maker whilst also practising my own use of embodied language.

#### **6.3.1.2 Embodiment and mindfulness**

The engagement with the principles of mindfulness through the practice of mindful moving in the meditation sessions, created

a foundational understanding and practical application of the values of embodiment. The concept of mindfulness had a significant role in establishing a dance making and performance process that stemmed from the dancers and my understanding of *being present* and the discipline required of that, through the practice of sitting.

Through the practices and teachings of Zen meditation the dancers came to a physical and conceptual understanding of the practice of mindful moving, the core values of which are in establishing a present state and letting go of judgement and thoughts of right or wrong. The dancers first experienced and established these principles through the stillness of the sitting meditations and then were able to transfer this newly found knowledge to movement practices. The practice of mindful moving<sup>54</sup>, which was first introduced and experienced within the meditation sessions and carried through to the rehearsal process, had a profound impact on this research process: it encouraged a sense of presence; to spend time being mindful in the body, staying mindful in what was being experienced and not getting led away by thoughts. By coming to an understanding of this movement practice - being present and letting go of judgement whilst improvising and exploring movement - the dancers were able to gain a foundational understanding of their own sense of embodiment. The practice and understanding of mindful moving was essentially a practical tool which grew into something much more valuable.

Once established, the mindful moving practice became the access point for gaining a deeper understanding of embodiment and mindfulness. The main principles of embodiment and mindfulness are that of being in a present state and mindful of one's actions; through the practice of mindful moving the dancers were able to identify how to access and maintain this state of embodiment/mindfulness. The dancers gained a 'knowing' of when they were or were not being mindful. When they were not being mindful they would often comment that this

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<sup>54</sup> See 3.7.2.2 Mindful moving, pp. 51-52 for further reference.

was when they were judging themselves on what they were executing physically or when they were experiencing self-doubt within their actions.

The most valuable discovery within this process occurred when the dancers gained the ability to be fully present whilst moving; at the same time, maintaining the awareness of what they were executing physically. This capacity enabled us to discuss, analyse and recapture movement post-improvisations; the key notable or 'magical'<sup>55</sup> moments of movement, spatial design or group relationship were not lost. The dancers were able to recapture the essence of the original experience and future executions of the same (or recaptured) movement sections maintained an honesty and intention and did not 'atrophy into a thing' (Shevtsova, 2006, p. 6). The discovery and understanding of mindfulness meant that the dancers' intention and commitment to the truthfulness of an experience was maintained.

The dancers quickly established that practising mindful moving was the most productive way to begin each rehearsal, to prepare them for the creative process. The practice of mindful moving also supported the improvisation sessions when exploring concepts taken from the meditation sittings. The dancers felt the difference between simply doing mindful moving and an improvisation session that adopted an external theme<sup>56</sup>. Establishing the mindful moving practice meant that in the improvisation sessions the dancers could maintain the mindful practice while introducing further thematic layers of a theme (for example, 'cutting'): the principles of mindful moving offered the foundation from which the 'theme' could be further explored in the state of presence.

The mindful moving practice not only gave the dancers a physical way of coming to a present place, it also offered an

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<sup>55</sup> For the dancers, these were moments that left an impression on them or were particularly memorable.

<sup>56</sup> An example of this is the movement idea of 'cutting', 'cutting' in the space, through the space. This is one example of the ideas or themes the dancers suggested throughout the rehearsal process

authentic basis for the movement explorations while creating a foundation for further discovery and reflection. The discovery of the practice of mindful moving was driven by the dancers' full commitment to the process and in achieving a state of presence. The understanding and application of mindfulness, established through the practice of mindful moving, allowed the dancers to gain the skill of *being present* and embodied. This established state of presence was supported by the dancers understanding and integration of the concepts of *non-judgement* and *honesty* engaged with in the meditation sessions.

The practice of presence and mindfulness extended to life outside the studio practice: for the dancers it became a practice that was integrated into their lives rather than a concept that was 'switched on' in the studio. The dancers gained an ability to articulate verbally their experiences; developed a common spoken and written language amongst the group, which allowed them to discuss their experiences. This language held the core values learned from the meditation teachings (i.e. not judging an experience, letting go of ego) and this had a meaningful impact on the creative process. The dancers exercised the teachings of not judging or labelling an experience; they did not discuss the visual impact of movement explorations; rather, their focus remained within the *honesty* of the experience, with being in the present state whilst moving or in relation to the concept they were investigating (i.e. imprinting<sup>57</sup>). After movement explorations in rehearsals the dancers would always discuss their experiences in relation to whether they were truthful or honest to the idea or moments of exploration. This information was triangulated by my observations and the dancers' reflective journals which reinforced the idea of a shared language. Though there is a real sense in which the dancers' comments were judgemental, the judgements arose from practising their 'awareness' of a situation or experience.

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<sup>57</sup> A named section of the work.

Through this research study I have identified that by placing presence at the forefront of the rehearsal process through the practice and understanding of mindfulness, many other areas or concerns fall into place, in particular the traditional 'polishing' or 'cleaning' of a choreographic work, or 'drilling' as discussed by Foster (1997). I link this experience to the principles discussed by Leggett (1978) and Austin (1999) in that this new found way of working is further connected with the 'ri' principle of a meditation practice; a principle which underlies the choreographic environment where the tacit understanding is at the core. Whereas, the foundation of the 'ji' principle lies in the technique of a process, a process which can be associated with the methods adopted by many choreographers, myself included, before I embarked on this research project.

This research process has identified that by starting with the practice of mindfulness and presence, for both the choreographer and the dancers the activity of polishing and cleaning once the choreographic work is complete is redundant. This state of presence and intention ruled out what in dance is often referred to as, 'marking', of going through the motions of movement without a focused intentionality; the need to clarify any aspects, for example, spacing or movement was integrated into the creative process. Asking dancers to 'mark' movement phrases or sections, a common practice within a rehearsal process, whilst often purposeful in focusing on such issues as timing or spacing, does not encourage these 'additional' clarifications to be integrated into the practice of awareness. Indeed, for the pre-professional dancer it can often cause confusion, because the 'marking' actions do not replicate what will eventually be performed. As discussed in Chapter 2, the directive to 'go on stage and just perform' proposed as potentially confusing by Shacklock (2006), does not occur, where a state of presence is at the core of the rehearsal process.

In Chapter 2, it was proposed that phenomenology and mindful meditation have some common ground: emphasis is placed on being in the present state. How a person is able reliably to access this state of presence is not the concern of phenomenology, of course. The practice of mindful meditation alongside a dance making process, as identified through this practice-based research study has established a methodology where this practice of presence can be accessed and utilised to generate and support the creation and performance of a dance work.

This new perspective is akin to the Zen or Eastern philosophy of creating art. A Japanese calligrapher versed in Zen principles creates from a state of being. The calligrapher brings him/herself to a place of presence and mindfulness from which the strokes of paint or ink are created. Scholars have referred to this state as 'mushin', where the mind is cleared, which results in intentional and meaningful art (Leggett, 1978; Rockwell, 1989).

The practice and teachings of meditation had a multi-layered effect for the dancers and for myself in the role of choreographer-as-researcher: the process impacted on the way the rehearsals were conducted; in how the dancers prepared for the creative process; in the way in which the dancers explored movement concepts, and how they discussed their experiences through an embodied language; and importantly, the dancers' performance of *dharmakaya* was a realisation not only of mindfulness but of what it means to be in a state of presence.

### **6.3.1.3 Rethinking myself in the role of choreographer-as-researcher**

As the dance making process developed I began to focus more intently on the dancers' engagement and their insights, and correspondingly away from considering directly my personal role. The meditation teachings were shifting my way of viewing and directing, with me giving greater weight to the accounts of the dancers' experiences, as discussed in Chapter

5. The development of the dancers' ability to articulate their experiences through an embodied language, was a direct result of the research process I had designed and the methodological approach employed; hence my role as choreographer had changed from a previous focus on structure, form and content to one which identified closely with the dancers' engagement at the level of ideas and experiential knowledge.

Though I maintained a perspective of artist/researcher throughout the creative process, I began to be less focused on myself and my ego; I was able to relinquish concern about the nature of the artistic product that would emerge. I embarked on the research project with a view to feeding my creative practice and improving my skills as a choreographer and director. Certainly I have gained new skills in this domain, but not in the way that I had imagined. Tusa advises that 'creative innovation is vital to the process of understanding ourselves, of seeing the world differently as it presents itself anew, of presenting novel propositions about the way we see, hear, look and conceptualise' (2004, p. 7). This encapsulates for me the essence of what this project has given me. It has provoked me to view my 'choreographic' world from a different perspective, one that I feel is more genuinely productive and likely to result in a more innovative output.

Stepping away from the 'role' of the choreographer that previously I had inhabited, I now know how to engage with the dancers and propose scenarios which encourage presence and creativity. Arieti suggests that, 'the creative process is a way of fulfilling the longing or search for a new object or state of experience or existence that is not easily found or attained' (1976, p. 6). My views accord with those of Arieti: I have found through this process that many choreographic concepts or strategies I was hanging on to were limiting my capacity to engage in a genuinely creative process. The dancers and I agreed that some of my previous ways of working - for example, using an external point of reference such as an

aesthetic or visual effect to determine selection of movement material - were not always conducive to allowing ideas to be developed and realised in a creative and novel way. Allowing the intention/embodiment of the movement to influence creative decisions was a new approach. Patience and trust within the process and with the dancers were key to the development of the work: it required of me a direct change to a way of working with which I was familiar. It was no longer relevant to 'fix' movement with essentially arbitrary choices: my role as the choreographer changed, as I too had to let go of the need to build the 'ego'. Alongside this, the function of videoing rehearsals changed: rather than being shot and used as a shortcut to aesthetic judgements, or for the dancers to view themselves to see what they should 'correct', they became the repository for triangulation of the process. An increased sense of awareness of the capacity of movement to communicate, and acceptance of a changed role were key factors in my growth as a choreographer within this research project. The principles and practice of meditation had provided the catalyst for this change.

Through the design and process of the research I established the term 'choreographer-as-researcher', identifying clearly my dual role within the study, and describing my particular engagement with this practice-based research. My engagement as 'choreographer-as-researcher' within the project consolidates my position: it acknowledges that subjectivity is unavoidable but it requires a design process that allows the researcher and participants to gain a meaningful understanding of their findings.

A deeper understanding of the potential of collaborative process for both myself and the dancers has emerged from this research. The focus of the dance making process was not only situated in the sharing of creative ideas, but was also located in the collective experiential exploration of presence. In establishing a deeper collaborative process the findings from the research study have presented change in

those who participated and engaged with the process and the findings. Through collaboration, we gained a shared understanding which was manifested through language, practice and performance.

Comparing this research process with my experience of dance training and that of the dancers<sup>58</sup>, *dharmakaya* and the process of its creation differs from the perspectives offered in the dance training tradition which supports the 'hired body' notion: the choreographic process for *dharmakaya* had had its origin in the internal process of the self, the practices of meditation. Yet still, use of the 'created body' was implicit in the abilities of the dancers and me: the creation of the work transcends yet includes the constituent elements of the training of the dancers and me as choreographer. The approach to performance and choreographic training remains prevalent within many leading dance institutions and companies, where the body of the dancer, the 'dancing body' is available 'for hire' to choreographers. *dharmakaya* offers a process of evolution where the 'body for hire' is inferred yet transcended in the choreographic activity; the work contributes to a particular 'tradition' but in so doing challenges the notion of the 'body for hire' by giving greater agency to the dancer; therefore contributing the 'tradition'.

This thesis draws a developmental line, connecting the implicit fact of the dancers' bodies, their (and my) dance training, and the act of the more conventional 'body for hire' concept into the more internally motivated process established from the methodological approach and making of *dharmakaya*. This practice-based research project shifted my method for dance making within a choreographic environment, and an appropriate analytical method had to be designed with the potential to incorporate a continual reflective layer from both the dancers and myself, which could contribute to the creation of *dharmakaya*. The practice of meditation enabled

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<sup>58</sup> See 1.3 Choreographic background and 'tradition' working within, pp. 11-15 for further reference.

the creation of the choreographed work as well as a practice/method from which to choreograph; it influenced also the method and documentation of the analysis. As a group we experienced the results of the meditation practice through a creative process of dancing making, the performance of *dharmakaya* and our reflections upon it.

Through working with dancers in training, I have identified a methodology that has the potential to enhance dance training in particular in the area of the creation and performance of contemporary dance work. Through this research I have identified that meditation can enhance creative processes for both the dancers and choreographer involved.

The key experiences, observations and themes that emerged from the research process created foundational values and practices for the dancers and me, as the choreographer. All discoveries were important and valuable, having significant impact on the process, the dancers and myself in the role of choreographer-as-researcher.

#### **6.4 Two years on and confirmation of findings**

Although not originally designed to be a longitudinal study, two years on from the completion of the choreographic process I contacted the dancers as I was curious to see if the process had had long term effects on them. All of the dancers spoke of experiences which confirmed the findings identified in Chapter 5: that they have carried the experience with them in some way or another. I asked the dancers to write down their final reflections on the research process and I constructed these writings as final realist tales (see Appendices M, N, O and P). These final tales point to an impact beyond the completion of the study.

Through these final realist tales I have identified that the dancers continue to utilise the language developed and employed during the research process, in both how they describe their physical experiences and their thoughts about them. The dancers advised that the meditation concepts and

principles have remained with them and that exploring movement freely and the integration of the concept of non-judgement remain key in their practice. The idea of trusting movement experiences and the self remains important also. Some still use mindful moving in warm-ups as a preparation for creative processes, rather than reverting to more conventional ways of warming-up which tend not emphasise coming to a place of 'presence'. They also identified the benefit of the time and space for personal investigation that they were given within the research project, which seems to have given them the confidence to create and to accept every experience as relevant or important, and avoiding premature judgement.

What they recognise now is that the work was not about trying to replicate 'noticing', a state of 'putting away' of unnecessary distracting thoughts (i.e. the attempt to clear the mind) found in meditative practice. Rather, it was about the practice running in parallel with the creation and performance of *dharmakaya*, as a means to support sharpness of focus on the physical task in hand and to improve clarity in sensing and understanding relations, to body, space and to others. In the context of the work, it was not in fact about 'clearing the mind', but rather allowing relevant information to flourish in the mind and the imagination, and therefore for this information to be able to become clearly present in the body. The dancers identified that they became more 'present' performatively, as a closer connection between mind and body developed. They noticed a growth in their personal sense of embodiment within other work, and believed this was supportive of them moving towards gaining a clearer sense of personal physical expression.

Significantly, they noticed a change in their capacity for understanding relations to others, both in personal and dance contexts and could register emotional responses to others more clearly. The dancers felt that it was important to be a group of four, to exchange and understand their individual processes through working together and also to witness how their own

identities were established and embodied in relation to the practice.

During the making of *dharmakaya*, the dancers discovered ways of avoiding making judgements about what they had created choreographically and they became less concerned with what the others thought about what they had created: their commitment was to experimenting with movement material where the intention and sense of presence was at the fore. This process challenged them and they regard the experience as an influential contributor to their development and subsequent success as performers. The dancers observed that it became clear to them when their fellow dancers became 'stuck' in a mode of self-judgement and when an over awareness of exterior presence (e.g. from a judging panel in auditions) is detrimental.

The dancers did not continue the practice of the sitting meditation on a regular basis after the completion of the project. They have reported, however, that its principles remain with them, continuing to inform their current creative practice and supporting them as mindful dance/performance artists.

Many of the observations, experiences and themes identified in Chapter 5 are re-iterated within the dancers' final realist tales. This is persuasive confirmation that this kind of process, while a lengthy one, can contribute long lasting effects, with the capacity to impact further on and influence the dancers' development as dance artists. It also affirms value in the process of this kind of practice-based research.

### **6.5 Application of the research and areas for further study**

The findings of this practice-based research study could provoke questions of how to integrate mindfulness into the training of dance artists, especially performers and choreographers. It could be recommended that meditation training be incorporated into contemporary dance training in order to augment performance presence and to promote

collaborative work within a choreographic environment. This research demonstrates that, a more focused intention and a greater understanding of what is meant by intention afforded a somatic experience of that intention which resulted in a state of presence which supported the creative process of making and performance. With a practical understanding of mindfulness a dancer could achieve this state of intention and presence more acutely and reliably. Without putting 'presence' first, as I have done in this research, if achieved at all, a dancer would have difficulty in achieving this state without having a reliable method or knowledge to encourage working 'from the inside out'. This research process has specifically identified a practice which not only enhances the creative collaborative process but also the performance of the dance work and importantly supports mainstream practice creating a bridge between didactic and somatic approaches to dance making. I have identified that the practice of meditation has provided a unique and useful understanding of embodiment through the integration of mindfulness, as well as providing a methodology of dance making which encourages reflection and analysis as an ongoing supportive process.

It is common for dancers in training to have an understanding of how to prepare themselves for a technique class but it is often more difficult for dancers to know how to prepare themselves for a creative process. The integration of mindful movement could be one way of achieving this: its root is in discipline, in particular mental discipline and an awareness of the self. In this research project the dancers were able to develop a descriptive and analytical embodied language which encouraged honesty in reflection and articulation which supported the development and shift in theirs and my methodological approach to creating the final dance work.

As the fields of performance and embodiment continue to expand, in particular doctoral practice-based research, it is hoped that this study will be viewed as an original contribution to existing knowledge, the result of an immersion

in practice and teachings, combined with in-depth research and an outlook that was open and responsive. It is the first sustained study of the impact of meditation on a rehearsal process within a teaching environment, on the dancers involved in the process, and which captures the dancers' own reflections on their experiences. Having designed the research study to move from creation to performance to analysis, I have focused on how the dancers approached the idea of presence and mindfulness in a context of dance-making, the impact that had on their experience of embodiment, and the relationship between meditation and theories of creativity. The challenge was therefore constructing a methodology and programme of research that would keep my focus firmly on investigating the impact of meditation of the dancers' process of making and rehearsing, but which would enable me to produce a performable dance work. An interesting tension was produced between attending to the immediacy of the individual dancer's and my experiences, and working towards a performance, which again I clarified was not the focus of my research but might be seen as a validation of the particular approach I was taking. The aim of the research was not to create a 'model' in the way others have proposed (e.g. Shacklock) but to contribute to the 'tradition' of understanding and development of choreographic processes through an engagement with the practice of meditation and its foundational teachings. This practice-based research contributes to the continuing debates about training methods for contemporary dancers and choreographers, the leading/direction of creative dance making processes, and the different ways that dancers engage with the preparation and performance of choreographed work.

This practice-based research project was constructed from a postpositivist standpoint, hence I did not attempt to generalise my findings but rather to lay ground work for further research that could extend from this process. For example, the research design might include a formal longitudinal study, examining the outcomes two and five years later. Additionally, building from the analysis I have

already completed, it might be possible to offer a short-course that could be created and incorporated into professional dance training, so that these findings could find a wider dissemination across the dance community.

Importantly, such work should not be viewed as a fast-track route to understanding of embodiment or presence. A meaningful experience of mindfulness practice can be achieved only through deep level engagement and processes of observing the self and letting go, in particular letting go of the ego and judgements of thoughts of right and wrong. This requires deep commitment and awareness, as I have identified through this research process.

## **Appendix A: Participant letters**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2007

Dear Dancers,

As you are aware my PhD research will focus on choreographic investigation and performance through the practice of meditation. I intend to identify if creativity responds to the practice of meditation and how it can facilitate choreographic and performance practice qualitatively.

Focusing on the following two areas of research, which examines the role of dancer and me, as choreographer-as-researcher:

- 1) Internal - artists' relationship with themselves, engaging with their own general world including mindfulness meditation in the Zen tradition with yogic techniques for deep relaxation; instructor led and self-led meditation practice.
- 2) Rehearsal/creative process towards performance; meditation as a choreographic tool for bodily creation in which the intent is both embodied and transmitted.

The focus of the research is not to 'teach' creativity but fostering an environment that can facilitate creative engagement within a choreographic practice with a phenomenological perspective.

I aim to:

- Investigate and explore how participants experienced meditative practice alongside the collaborative choreographic process and performance(s).
- Evaluate if the meditation practice augmented and enriched the choreographic process and final works for the dancers and myself (choreographer as researcher).
  - if the process demonstrated a shift in the dancers' concept of embodiment through the use of meditation as a choreographic tool
  - if the meditation practice affects articulation and reflection of my own choreographic process and practice

Three individual interviews (which will be videotaped and transcribed) will be conducted throughout the process, the first one at the initial stage of the practical sessions discussing your initial perceptions, at the middle stage of the process and at the end after the final performance. Informal group interviews will be ongoing throughout the process. Each practical session will be videotaped. A journal will need to be kept (I will provide you with one) and

this is where you can articulate your lived experiences relevant to this project, which would include your feelings, observations, perceptions and creative/artistic experiences.

Time-line

Phase 1: from w/c 8<sup>th</sup> May (Wk 4) - 12<sup>th</sup> July, 10 weeks of rehearsals and 10 meditation sessions, Studio Theatre sharing of movement and research investigations on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

Phase 2: from w/c 3<sup>rd</sup> September - 9<sup>th</sup> November, 10 weeks of rehearsal and 10 meditation sessions. No sharing of work/research.

Phase 3: from w/c 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008 (Wk 1) - 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008, 10 weeks of rehearsals and 10 meditation sessions, followed by 1 week of production and a performance in the Bonnie Bird Theatre March/April 2008 date TBC.

Your participation in this project is highly valued and I look forward to this hopefully rewarding experience together.

Best wishes,

Naomi Lefebvre Sell

**Appendix B: PhD research project release form**

I grant permission for Naomi Lefebvre Sell to use the information provided to her through interviews, observations, document analysis, and discussions, transcripts from video and audiotapes and creative practice for use in her dissertation and future publications.

I also agree to be quoted and grant permission for Naomi Lefebvre Sell to use my quotes for this project. I understand that I can request the use of a pseudonym to be used in the final document to ensure confidentiality.

Name of participant:

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Signature of participant:

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Date:

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## **Appendix C - Transcribed interviews**

### Key:

Initials denote the person speaking at the time of their interview.

T: Tara

D: Daisy

L: Lucille

K: Katy

Hand written notes in red, highlight thematic observations identified when re-reading the completed log several times.

































































Insert 34 pages of interviews.





## **Appendix D - Phase 1 - annotated rehearsal log entries**

### Key:

Initials denote the person speaking at the time of rehearsal.

T: Tara

D: Daisy

L: Lucille

K: Katy

N: Naomi

Choreographer-as-researcher observations made during the analytic process of reviewing each videoed practical session.

O: Observation

Hand written notes in red, highlight thematic observations identified when re-reading the completed log several times.

Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

## **Appendix E - Phase 2 - annotated rehearsal log entries**

### Key:

Initials denote the person speaking at the time of rehearsal.

T: Tara

D: Daisy

L: Lucille

K: Katy

N: Naomi

Choreographer-as-researcher observations made during the analytic process of reviewing each videoed practical session.

O: Observation

Hand written notes in red, highlight thematic observations identified when re-reading the completed log several times.

Page 1

Page 2





## **Appendix F - Phase 3 - annotated rehearsal log entries**

### Key:

Initials denote the person speaking at the time of rehearsal.

T: Tara

D: Daisy

L: Lucille

K: Katy

N: Naomi

Choreographer-as-researcher observations made during the analytic process of reviewing each videoed practical session.

O: Observation

Hand written notes in red, highlight thematic observations identified when re-reading the completed log several times.









Appendix G: *dharmakaya* performance advertisement

Advertisement

Appendix H: *dharmakaya* theatre programme





Appendix I: dharmakaya

## **Appendix J: Buddhist story**<sup>59</sup>

Two monks who are walking down the road together, it had been raining for days.

They come along a young lady and a sea of mud is around her, the older monk picks her up and carries her across.

The younger monk later says 'how can you do that, you can't even look at a woman'.

He cannot get this out of his head; the older monk says, 'what, back there? Why are you still carrying her, I put her down ages ago'.

Thinking a thought is a tool, nothing more nothing less and when you no longer need it, put it down. When we have a problem, we often think about it and when we have solved the problem we keep thinking about it. When you have a picture to hang you hammer a nail into the wall, only a fool keeps hammering the nail. Regarding the monks, who suffers? The younger monk because he could not let it drop, the older monk simply did his action and dropped it.

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<sup>59</sup> The traditional stories told were taken primarily from *The Dhammapada* and *The Blue Cliff Record*; both texts are widely used Buddhist works.

## **Appendix K: Buddhist story**<sup>60</sup>

A student goes to his teacher and says he is having problems with meditation in calming his mind.

The master gave him a colander and said fill this with water.

The student takes this as a challenge, covering the holes with his hands but he cannot do it so asks the master to show him how.

The master takes him down to the riverside and tosses it into the water and says is it not full?

It is not about filling the holes, what is necessary, is to throw ourselves into what it is.

When sitting just sit, when walking just walk.

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<sup>60</sup> The traditional stories told were taken primarily from *The Dhammapada* and *The Blue Cliff Record*; both texts are widely used Buddhist works.

## **Appendix I: Buddhist story**<sup>61</sup>

Three animals try and cross the river, the rabbit steps in and is washed away.

The horse sees the opposite bank and swims, a powerful animal who stays focused.

For the elephant, the river does not exist; he simply walks along the bottom.

At different times in life we can be the different animals.

We step out and get washed away, there are times when we have focus and we swim. And there are times when we are like the elephant and we simply walk along the bottom.

Each of these is something of a way of being.

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<sup>61</sup> The traditional stories told were taken primarily from *The Dhammapada* and *The Blue Cliff Record*; both texts are widely used Buddhist works.

## **Appendix M: Final realist tale - Daisy**

Daisy said that she has been practicing the meditation principles and had been using this in some form before auditions or interviews. Particularly when it came to creative tasks, the meditation helped with relaxing her nerves allowing a freer and more honest flow of ideas to emerge. It has been very clear to Daisy when other dancers in the same audition become 'stuck' in their creativity, with self-judgement and an over awareness of exterior presence (the judging panel) getting in the way.

During the making of *dharmakaya*, Daisy was able to discover ways of detaching from the judgement of what she created and to what others thought about what she had created. Daisy did not find a way to override her emotions completely and would not have wanted to; however, gradually over the process she certainly became less self aware and more committed to experimenting with making material regardless of opinion. This concept has stayed with her, and Daisy feels that without a doubt it was and is the act of meditation that enabled her to be creative, both in the improvisation and the setting of material.

The process challenged Daisy in many ways but mostly making her reflect on herself as, a creator of movement, an interpreter of movement, a vehicle to depict concept and as a contributor to a greater idea.

Daisy feels that she can be consumed with her image, pleasing others and lack of confidence, especially in the dance world and especially in training, resulting in lack of creating to her full potential. Daisy feels very lucky to have been part of this research as she regards the experience as an influential contributor to her development and success as a performer.

## **Appendix N: Final realist tale – Katy**

### **A combat against clutter/bold bodily moves<sup>62</sup>**

For Katy the intention is there still to meditate and the concepts and principles remain with her. Katy said many of the meditation discussions and thoughts we had throughout the process still resonate with her, especially in relation to time, what you can and cannot change in any given moment and how this can influence her current attitude/mood/ perspective. Katy finds this particularly useful at work, as a way of not getting dragged into the stresses and preoccupations that people have, and the thought process is still there to encourage her to consider whether or not she reacts appropriately.

Katy also feels that the process has still been one of the most important and positive experiences she has had, especially in terms of exploring moving freely and allowing whatever came out to be as it was and to try not to judge that too much. Trusting her body and not over-thinking her movement are key elements that are still important to her. Katy still uses mindful moving in warm-ups before auditions as a way of reminding herself what she is about; what she can offer that is individual to her. Katy feels that it is in this state that she is not trying to control what she is presenting. Katy performed a two-hour improvised solo installation at The Royal Observatory<sup>63</sup> last year, which she expressed she would never have considered doing had it not been for this project and this experience.

Katy has also recently done some modelling for art classes. Regardless of the length of the pose, she said she very much found herself back in the place of the meditation, focusing on her breathing as a tool to relax and calm herself, especially when time seemed endless and her body was tired. For Katy it was also a way of staying alert and present over an extended period of time.

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<sup>62</sup> Katy added these headings to her writings.

<sup>63</sup> In London, England.

## **Appendix O: Final realist tale – Lucille**

### **Mindful moving/empty head/to frame emptiness/made and undone/the weight of my identity in performance<sup>64</sup>**

For Lucille mindful moving is an 'exercise' that she has often come back to and explored further, particularly as a warm up. More than a body practice, she now approaches it as a preparation for the mind, as a meditative practice. 'Emptying my head' is what she imagines in order to limit her thoughts and access a place where both her mind and body can be in tune together. Lucille said while her body becomes more available and generates unexpected organic responses, her imagination oscillates between inside and outside her body which affects its density/thickness.

Within the choreographic work Lucille perceived her body as a container or as being contained, in relation to where her attention focused, being strongly linked to mindful moving. Lucille commented that the work required a variety of roles, within the performance. She sometimes felt like being a spectator within the piece and/or also being responsible for framing a space. Framing for her meant giving time for something to appear and disappear again.

Performing *dharmakaya* for Lucille felt like unrolling a ball of wool and sweeping it away to make it disappear. The sense of a continuous understated stream always remained for Lucille as a key memory of the piece. Each time recreating moments of tension, suspension or calmness through embodiment and shaping the space. The flow always felt effervescent for Lucille, for her it is about making and undoing, framing and witnessing, until the final clearing.

The trust, freedom and responsibility she was given, as a performer, all through the research project, stimulated Lucille. She says it definitely inspired her creatively as well as fed her curiosity as a dancer. The process also linked to some of her individual and intimate life concerns. She said she very much appreciated benefiting time and space for a personal investigation within the research project. For Lucille the project encouraged her to be more confident in her creativity. Performing *dharmakaya* for Lucille was about letting the self and identity be revealed with both generosity and intimacy. Lucille said that what she has learnt most from the process is to accept every experience as relevant.

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<sup>64</sup> Lucille added these headings to her writings.

## Appendix P: Final realist tale - Tara

Tara said that she has witnessed some significant shifts in the way she approaches her own moving body, and how she is able to be in a 'performance' context. What Tara realises clearly now about this work was that it was not about trying to replicate a state found in meditative practice, which is concerned with the noticing, and through this noticing the 'putting away', of unnecessary distracting thoughts (i.e. the attempt to clear the mind), although there were strong links. In fact it was rather about this practice running alongside the creation and performing of work, as a means to support sharpness of focus on the physical task in hand and to improve clarity in sensing and understanding relations, to body, space and others.

In the context of work, for Tara it became not in fact about 'clearing the mind', but rather allowing relevant information (on the contrary) to flourish in the mind and the imagination, and to therefore for this information to be able to become clearly present in the body. Tara believes she could become more 'present' performatively, as a closer connection between mind and body developed. For Tara, this served also to allow the process to render itself visible in performance, she feels allowing a more secure and charismatic performer to emerge through becoming clearer about one's own choices when moving. In this sense, Tara can notice a growth in her personal sense of embodiment within other work, and believes this was supportive towards a clearer sense of personal physical expression.

Significantly, Tara noticed a change in her capacity for understanding her relations to others, *both* in personal and dance contexts, which she feels not to be separate, but is mutually interwoven. Tara gradually found that she was more able to somehow 'stay with herself' through breath and a more conscious approach to the internal, and thus could register her emotional responses to others in life, and in space more clearly. In this sense, Tara feels that it was very important to be a group of four, in order to be able to exchange and understand their individual processes *through* working together and also to witness how their own identities were established and embodied in relation to the practice.

The practice of meditation in combination with making and performing dance gave Tara a base on which to move more objectively, and with greater awareness and to integrate her internal emotive processes and impulses with her conscious mind. Tara also found that she was able to make links between

the practice of meditation and other eastern practices such as yoga as well as more contemporary Western practices like Klein technique, authentic movement, and even improvisation. Therefore even though she did not continue the meditation after the project on a regular basis, its principles never left, and it continued to support her work. It also supported her maturing and was very important in helping her to become a more 'mindful' dance/performance artist on a sustainable, long term basis.

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