

Beautiful Secrets

by

Jamey Garner

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Naomi Jackson, Chair  
Rachel Bowditch  
Robert Kaplan

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## ABSTRACT

*beautiful secrets*, a movement art piece engaging the audience in the art-making, exists in the in-between, an indeterminable place, fluid like the water of Kiwanis Lake. The performers sang, danced and built an architectural environment with the help of the audience to create a transformational place betwixt here and there, day and night, death and life; an in-between land where the language is mystical and symbolic, and the water of Kiwanis Lake served as a symbol of transformation. Beneath the art was a method called Somatic Yoga Dance in which the performers trained in preparation for the performance. Below the method was a blessing in which *beautiful secrets* took root --- a prayer for peace.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
1 THE METHOD .....	1
2 INFLUENCES .....	19
3 THE PERFORMANCE .....	23
REFERENCES.....	36

CHAPTER 1  
THE METHOD

SOMATIC YOGA DANCE

Somatic Yoga Dance is a method I began building over the winter and spring of 2015 as a requirement for the class Graduate Movement Practices at Arizona State University. This method originally combined the following elements: the eight limbs of yoga, an investigation of the yogic philosophy of the cakras, practice of devayoga, improvisational dance, 'nowness' or living in the present moment, research of Buddhist Tantra and Hindu Shaktism, and application of certain Tantric practices. This method was built as training for the durational performance work I had begun investigating in my graduate work. I continued to develop the method over the course of my graduate studies, traveling to Tamil Nadu, India in the winter of 2014 and summer of 2015 to participate in field-based research to research and experience Indian spiritual customs first hand. I began training dancers in elements of the Somatic Yoga Dance for my applied project, *beautiful secrets*, during the fall of 2016. We continued rehearsals through the winter and spring of 2017, culminating with the durational performance *beautiful secrets* on March 4, 2017.

To prepare for the durational performance work I was investigating while at ASU, such as the pieces *lemon lips in the house of tantra*, *mirrored*, and *beautiful secrets*, I entered into a system of official self-training beginning in spring 2015. I began to follow the eight limbs of yoga as closely as possible. I continued my practice of goddess-worship by exploring the Tantric Buddhist concept of devayoga. I practiced pranayama techniques such as nadi shodhana along with sitting and walking meditations. I continued with my preexisting Shambhala Buddhist studies of focusing on basic goodness in tandem with loving kindness and compassion. I focused on being in the

present moment and living in the now. I practiced improvisational dance, which offered a space in which my thoughts slow down, enabling me to relax and focus my mind.

### DANCE AS YOGA

Somatic Yoga Dance method introduces dance, in particular improvisational dance, as a legitimate form of a meditative practice that falls in accordance with the eight limbs of yoga. I designed the method to be a form of yoga. According to B.K.S. Iyengar, the word 'yoga' means to 'yoke' (Iyengar 14). Yoga is of the astanga path, consisting of eight limbs: yama (codes of ethical behavior), niyama (personal observances), asanas (body postures), pranayama (breathing exercises and control of prana), pratyahara (control of the senses), dharana (concentration and cultivating inner perceptual awareness), dhyana (focus on single thought), and samadhi ("state of total absorption") (Iyengar 31). According to Iyengar, the astanga path is divided into three disciplines: bahiranga-sadhana, antaranga-sadhana, and antaratma-sadhana. Bahiranga-sadhana consists of ethical behaviors of yama, niyama, and asanas. Antaranga-sadhana, emotional and mental discipline, include pranayama and pratyahara. Antaratma-sadhana, "the successful quest of the soul" (15) is dharana, dhyana, and samadhi (15).

*Ahimsa satyasteya brahmacaryaprigraha yamah*

(Patanjali Book 2: Sutra 30 as quoted in Satchidananda 118).

### **Bahiranga-sadhana: Yama, Niyama, and Asanas**

*Yamas* are "codes of ethical behavior to be observed and followed in everyday life" consisting of five principles: ahimsa (nonviolence), satya (truthfulness), brahmacharya (chastity or moderation), and aparigraha (free of desire) (Iyengar 29). *Niyamas* are five personal practices consisting of saucha (cleanliness), santosa

(contentment), tapas (austerity), svadhyaya (study of oneself), isvara pranidhana (devotion to a higher power greater than oneself) (Iyengar 30).

Tapas or austerities are “self-discipline and the desire to purify the body, senses, and mind” (Iyengar 30). According to Brahmin priest Sri. Premarja Shivam, tapas is penance or hard meditation. The Hindu goddess Parvati performed Pancha Agni Tapas to appease the god Shiva. “Pancha means five and Agni means fire. She lit fire on four sides around her and stood on one leg while staring at sun, which was the fifth fire. All while she was focused inside and chanted his mantra” (Shivam 2016). Tapas represents the inner cleansing fire raised to purify body, mind and spirit in the quest for self-actualization or enlightenment. One may create tapas by practicing discipline and generating the inner heat with asanas, and for the Somatic Yoga Dancer, also with dancing and improvisational movement cross-fertilized with training in yoga asanas or postures.

### **Antaranga-sadhana: Pranayama and Pratyahara**

In training and learning to discipline and control the body to engage in the physicality requisite in dance, the dancer already has a firm grasp on pratyahara (control of the senses). Engaging in pranayama breathing techniques, such as nadi shodhana, could afford the dancer even more access to concentration and focus to the physical.

#### **Pranayama: A Deeper Look**

Breathing literally creates more energy inside of us. Empirical research and data support this. The practice of pranayama, as found in the fourth limb of yoga, can support the creation of more energy through the mitochondria and the release of ATP. Becoming aware of one’s breath and then delving into the practice of breathing can allow for an energized body, leading to a clearer connection to one’s soma (this term will be discussed in more detail in a later section).

Mitochondria live in our cells. Breath brings oxygen to our blood. Our blood carries this oxygen to our cells—where the mitochondria live. The mitochondria use this oxygen, along with glucose molecules derived via our digestion, and transform the oxygen and glucose into ATP (adenosine triphosphate). This transformation and transference of ATP gives us energy (Na‘auao).

Thomas Hanna coined the term *soma* in the late 1970’s. “Hanna recovered the older Christian mystical use of the term, whose source is in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul distinguishes between the Greek word *sarx*, which has the sense of “a hunk of meat,” from *soma*, which Paul used to designate the luminous body transformed by faith” (Johnson, p. 4). In reintroducing this word back into the western vernacular, Hanna somatics. “In his view, the teachers of embodiment practices were recovering a hidden sense of the wise, imaginative, and creative body, thus creating a “Somatics,” (Johnson, p. 4). Somatics is imperative to improvisation in dance because the body is the medium, thus the practitioner must be in active dialogue with the soma. It is critical for an improviser of dance to learn how to sense their body in order to explore the plethora of movement possibilities available and in “developing a mind that is not so fixated on the action, or the style of the action, or the relationship to other people, but more working on internal issues of being, essence, mood, emotion, and the relationship with the mind and the body” (Paxton, p. 53). From my experience the somatic practice of yoga serves as an inroad to sensing and working with the body in an effort to experience the corporeal, the soma. By studying yoga, in particular all of the eight limbs, a refinement of the body-mind connection can take place, thereby enhancing the ability to connect to one’s soma.

A pranayama technique such as nadi shodhan, or alternate nostril breathing, can enhance the practitioners’ connection to their soma, transforming the body from a “hunk

of meat” to a “luminous body transformed by faith” (Johnson, p. 4). In becoming aware of and connecting to breath, we can begin to balance our mind and body. For example, nadi shodhan is a practice for balancing the ida and pingala, which spiral around the sushumna. “The sushumna (most gracious) nadi is the body’s great river, running from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, passing through each of the seven chakras in its course” (Bailey). Ida (lunar) originates and concludes on the left side of the sushumna, pingala (solar) does the same to the right. In practicing nadi shodhan, one balances the nadis and allows for the kundalini to rise up through the sushumna. “Balancing sun and moon, or pingala and ida, facilitates the awakening and arising of kundalini, and thus the awakening of higher consciousness” (Bailey).

Hanna referred to the soma, not as just this body of meat and bones, but as something almost transcendent. In choosing to utilize this term in the Christian mystical language taken from the Apostle Paul, he chose to give us the opportunity to think of ourselves as more than a sack of skin, bones, blood, et cetera. He offered us the opportunity to become more than what we think. Our breath is the breath of God.

*“The body is the most precious jewel our soul can ever get”*

*(Shivam)*

### **Antaratma-sadhana: Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi**

I propose that Somatic Yoga Dance can lead to higher consciousness. Utilizing a somatic approach to movement, the dancer experiences the body as the medium to the soul. Engaging in an active dialogue with the soma, conflated with awareness of movement in our bodies, the Somatic Yoga Dancer can experience the sixth limb of yoga, dharana (concentration and cultivating inner perceptual awareness) and dhyana (focus

on single thought). By creating a union, a yoga, of the body and mind, a pathway towards samadhi, or a more peaceful mode of existence can occur, paving a way for the dancer to enter into an ecstatic state, experiencing samadhi.

### DANCE AS HEALING ART

Movement is healing. As Carol-Lynne Moore and Kaoru Yamamoto state in *Beyond Words: Movement Observation and Analysis*, “movement releases the regenerative properties of the body, making dance a healing art. Movement is utilized to heal the mind, as well as the body, of a person in distress” (121). It is my hypothesis that we are all living in some form and degree of distress. Because of this, movement is beneficial and necessary for all human beings.

Dance has enduring origins in the mystical and healing arts. “In Ancient Greece, the cult of Dionysus incorporated music, wine, and violent dancing to drive worshippers into an ecstatic frenzy that was both feared and widely emulated (Kirstein 1969, in Moore and Yamamoto 119). These origins can still be found today in practices such as Candomblé in Brazil, the Whirling Dervish dances of the Sufi, and the deer dance of the Yaquis. In these practices “the body becomes the ‘instrument’ for the transcendent power; and this power is encountered in the dance directly, instantly and without intermediaries” (Wosien 1974, in Moore and Yamamoto 119).

The Somatic Yoga Dancer is searching for this state of samadhi—a place of ecstasy and sense of connectivity. Now, completely in the moment, supported by the experiences of the past and hopes for the future. The state of being in the now puts one into a state of consciousness. This is a place in which to access intuitive and transcendental knowledge. By sinking back into our spines, accessing the great nadi of the sushmna, we can gain a moment of pause to enter into a state of presence and

surrender into a consciousness that can see the ball and instinctually know when the best time is to swing the bat.

*“You’ve got it. Then your body did just what you told it to do. You thought about trying to hit a home run, so your body became tense. Since you were thinking about hitting hard, you stopped thinking and seeing. I know it’s difficult to believe, but if you can stop thinking about trying to hit a home run and put your mind instead on seeing the ball, the chances are much better that you’ll actually hit a home run.”*

*(Vineyard, 132)*

Future thinking leads to being out of the moment and into the projection of the future. However, the future is not real and it is not here yet. The ball is the dance that we are having right here, right now. The home run is what we think we want. While you are imagining your home run, the present moment, the ball, the right now, is flying right by. By concentrating on an end goal, what Missy Vineyard called the “pitfalls of end-gaining” (p. 134), one becomes tense with the anxiety of future expectations and is unable to depend on intuitive knowledge. This intuitive knowledge is an inevitable and pleasurable consequence of living in the now. By concentrating on the ball, you are able to stay present, focus, relax into the now, and eventually hit the ball with a high percentage of accuracy. In end-gaining, we lose the moment of the present and move into the future thinking of planning. The future doesn’t exist yet. To intuitively and reflexively know what to do, we must watch the ball. The ball is in the right now.

When I dance with an improvisational impetus, it is my goal to be free of thought and completely in the present moment. Therefore, I am able to fall into a state in which my intuitive and instinctual knowledge, my internal witness, can set in and make the

choices that my future-thinking mind will only mess up with its ideas of plans and goals. With a mind focused on seeing the dance that is happening all around me, I can enter into a place that is free from judgment and evaluation. This judgment and evaluation is the result of a forward-thinking/“end-gaining” mind. To enter into a space free for immeasurable possibility, a state that is intuitively guided, I must let go of the intentions/expectations of the future and the memories/hindsight of the past, and live completely in this present moment.

When one can enter into a place that is free from thoughts, with their regrets of the past and their anxieties of the future, we can access intuition. We can tap into a deep, intuitive place of knowing—a space that recognizes when the exact moment is to swing so that the bat will hit the ball. When we can exist in the present moment, we can experience the joy of the now. To be in the present moment is to know that this is the dream right before you die, so you might as well relish the trip, no matter the pain or the pleasure or general indifference to the moment of right now. This moment, this now, is about to be gone forever. Did you see the ball fly right by you? Or were you too busy thinking about the glory of your home run that may or may not ever come and is not real. It is not right now. And in a split second, this could all be over. Your dream is finished. The ball flew by and you never swung your bat.

Your present is built on your past. Your present is building your future. Your present is right now. The past has regret. The future has anxiety. Focus on right now with the wisdom of your past and the potential of your future. The present is very important. Right now, the past and the future are in your hands. So let go.

DANCER AS DAKINI

Dakini is a Sanskrit word translating as “sky walker,” “woman who flies,” or “female sky-dancer,” pointing to the “flights of spiritual insight, ecstasy, and freedom from worldliness granted by realization of emptiness” (Shaw 38). The Somatic Yoga Dancer trains to be a dakini, educating her body and mind in the knowledge of embodied intelligence. Knowledge, the embodied knowledge that the dancer holds in her body is of the wisdom lineage. The dancer, in an aware state, is set up to be a dakini.

The Somatic Yoga Dancer spends hours training the body, mind and spirit. This method has the ability to enable the individual to gain massive knowledge on embodiment. This body of knowledge can set a dancer apart from, say, someone who spends most of their time not in a state of consciously inhabiting the physical. Dance anthropologist Andrée Grau states that “dancers belong to a distinct social group, separated from the rest of society because of the demands of their profession” (202). The level of focus and concentration on the physical object and psychic state within the corporeal, as Foucault writes is an “effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain amount of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Grau 202).

Somatic Yoga Dance views dance as a discipline in meditation, a place in which one can gain knowledge and attain transformation. Dance employs rigor to achieve the physical and psychic concentration inherent to the craft. “One should not forget, however, that ultimately training is also about giving the tools to expand and empower the body” (Grau 202). The Somatic Yoga Dancer has a deep knowledge and understanding of the body, mind and spirit nestled in the corporeal.

In the space of the dance, the mover has the ability to enter into a trance of no thought, a place where they can release into their physical being, accessing the innate

wisdom of conscious embodiment. Within this state, the dancer has access to the symbolic language of art and the communication of deep embodiment.

*“Full identification with deity is one of the goals of Tantric practice, whereas the ability to perceive deity is one of the fruits of spiritual progress”*

(Shaw 43).

### DEVAYOGA

Devayoga is a theory brought into practice: a new set of habits, or reaffirming and expanding the seeds of the existing habits. These new, encouraged habits can expand the dancer’s capabilities as a movement artist, a somatic practitioner, and a person navigating their way through life. The dancer, via symbolic thought, can begin to identify with a deity, through an ancient practice called devayoga, and move towards an enlightened state of being. Dr. Miranda Shaw, an expert on Tantric Buddhism, describes deity yoga (devayoga), devayoga as a technique “in which the meditator envisions herself as a deity...The purpose of this practice is to awaken and discover enlightened qualities within” (26). By utilizing the technique of devayoga, the Somatic Yoga Dancer embodies the concept of a dakini in order to delve into the symbolic language of the psyche, working with visualization and imagination in performing their dance of a dakini. “Dance and the sacred have a long-standing interdependent history, largely based on the idea the moving body can communicate with non-human worlds and deities through the integral language of the divine: rhythm, sound, vibration and motion” (Williamson 50).

The prose of the dakini is symbolic. Lama Tsultrim speaks of the expression of the dakini as a symbolic tongue, a language of the inbetween, like the twilight. Amanda Williamson states that “the language of creation is pre-verbal/non-verbal—

movement/dance is the formative language of the divine” (50). Jane Bacon states “it is often difficult to find the appropriate articulations for our creative process because this imaginal reality is resistant to the concrete effects of language” (64). Identifying with dakinis allows the Somatic Yoga Dancer to enter into a meditative state in which they can delve into the symbolic language of the dakini in a conflation of the language of art within the symbolic language of dance.

Dakini speech is allegorical and figurative. It is the language of artists, dancers and embodied practitioners. The vocabulary of embodiment can be one ripe with images, symbolism and psychic reflection. “Jung often used the term ‘subtle body’ to indicate the body that is psychically conceived or imaged; this subtle body is the union of body and mind...He also suggests that when in this state it may be impossible to find words to articulate the experience and only symbols will do” (Bacon 69-70).

The Somatic Yoga Dancer can have a profound understanding of embodiment as a result of the method—dropping the mind into the body and conceiving of spirit. Embodied artists can speak the language of the soul, the psyche. As embodied artists, symbolism and metaphor are the primary means of communication. Somatic Yoga Dance is a method of moving meditation, a place where the dancer, practicing devayoga, can speak the symbolic language of the artist, the twilight language of the dakini, and experience an easy and natural accumulation of knowledge in an encounter of embodied transmission.

In the exploration devayoga, the Somatic Yoga Dancer can begin developing characteristics of the deity in a practice of embodying theory. By consciously focusing and building the characteristics of the deity is a practice of what dance professor Dr. Becky Dyer proposes is the “actual outward manifestation, in physical space, of the mind” (26). The mind is a complex set of grooves, much like a record, and when the

needle is put on the record player, the recorded music plays. The song is the physical being. The record is the mind. The needle and record player are the connectors of mind and body. By practicing devayoga, the Somatic Yoga Dancer is rearranging the grooves on the record, changing the song. “Conscious intending towards bodily action releases new messages into the communicating network, the mind, causing behaviors to be altered and experiences to be reinterpreted, which correspondingly changes the nature of one’s psychosomatic experience” (Dyer 28). Devayoga alters the dancer’s song.

*“Exploring imaginative conceptions of ourselves as living, embodied, autonomous, yet connected human beings can lead us to more fully discover the creative potentials that lie within each of us” (Dyer 38).*

#### MAITRE/AHIMSA

Shambhala Buddhism and Naropa founder Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche spoke of maitre as a “natural gentleness and friendliness to yourself, which very much includes gentleness and absence of aggression in relating with the world” (Rinpoche 4). This concept falls in line with ahimsa, the first yama of astanga yoga, which Iyengar explains as a “creed of nonviolence” (408); the yogic concept of nonviolence as described in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. This section presents the Buddhist concept of maitre in relationship to the yogic idea of ahimsa.

***“Ahimsa pratisthayam tat samnidhau vaira tyagah”***

*“In the presence of one firmly established in nonviolence, all hostilities cease”*

(Patanjali Book 2: Sutra 35 as quoted in Satchidananda 122).

In working with ahimsa, a practitioner engages with and integrates nonviolence, starting with the self. In the process of a meditation practice that is inclusive of svadhyaya “the study of one’s own self” (Iyengar 30), an individual is able to slow down the racing mind and observe one’s thoughts and behaviors. In this, one may begin to notice the violent and aggressive thoughts associated with human existence. “Ahimsa needs introspection to replace negative, destructive thoughts and actions by positive, constructive ones. Anger, cruelty or harassment of others are facets of the violence latent in all of us” (Iyengar 29). A racing, wild mind leads to an unhealthy, unsound, possibly psychotic state of being. In speaking to insanity, Trungpa states “it usually comes from aggression, from resentment and disliking” (1).

The practice of nonviolence can lead to a place of calmness and a sense of assurance. “The key point in overcoming aggression is to develop natural trust in yourself and in your environment, your world. In Buddhism, this trust in yourself is called maitre” (Trungpa 2). In this maitre, one can begin to extend ahimsa towards others. “Maitri can actually be cultivated in yourself and in other people; you can cultivate gentleness and warmth. When you express kindness to others, then they in turn begin to find warmth within themselves” (Trungpa 4). In this type of practice, one may begin to cultivate what the Shambhala Buddhists call “basic goodness.” (shambhala.org). Trungpa states, “Basic goodness is the potential that every human being has to express gentleness and warmth in themselves” (5).

In working with the self first, the mind is trained to reflect on the larger Self, understand existence as interconnected, and train the body, mind and spirit in maitre and ahimsa. As the Somatic Yoga Dancer trains the self, the reverberations go into existence like the ripples on the water from a tossed pebble. With the change of one’s

self, others become affected through due to the interconnectivity inherent in life. We are all but reflections of each other; impressions of One; considerations of the Singularity.

## MEDITATION

The practice of meditation, which can lead to experiences of altered states, may allow for a sense of transcending the boundaries of the human self into a connection with a divine sense of interdependence and connectivity. In the article *The Emergence of the Transpersonal Perspective*, Roger Walsh and Francis Vaughan discuss the model of transpersonal psychology and its relationship to Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism and Hinduism, which address the role of the mind in the creation of reality.

In the study of meditation techniques, the practitioner begins to train the mind. First, one notices and acknowledges ones thoughts without judgment. How can you change your thoughts if you don't first know what you think? And how can you honestly know what you think if you judge what you think? So, first, know what you think without judging it.

As the Indian mystic, guru, and spiritual teacher Osho says, your thoughts are like an ocean. Your thoughts are not even your own. So when we know what we think, then we can begin to quiet the mind with mantras, visualizations, and with, what the Buddha calls, the jewel of meditation, focus on the breath. The Somatic Yoga Dancer notices the inhale, notices the exhale, concentrates on the breath; counting how long their inhale is and counting how long their exhale is. The Somatic Yoga Dancer inhales for five counts and exhales for five counts. All of these are techniques to quiet the mind. When we quiet our minds, when we can gain control of our wild, untamed, monkey minds, then we can begin to control our reality. We are creating our reality by what we think.

## PRACTICE AS RESEARCH

In Sarah Rubidge's article "Artists in the Academy: Reflection on Artistic Practice as Research," she defines Practice as Research as "academic research, which incorporates artistic practice as a research methodology" (2). The site-specific durational performance piece *beautiful secrets* is a form of Artistic Practice as Research (APaR). Investigating improvisation, choreography, visual art and audience engagement over a duration of two hours, the performers traveled through states of consciousness in a site-specific and festive environment in which the ritual was utilized as a means of to transformation

Drawing from Rubidge's definition of APaR as "practical studio experimentation to evaluate the relevance of certain somatic theories to dance performance; creative artistic activity as a research methodology" (4), the performers in *beautiful secrets* delved into the meditation and consciousness altering aspect found in the duration and ritual in *beautiful secrets*.

The length of time and unpredictability of a site-specific environment and audience engagement allowed for a deepening into presence that comes with performativity. Because an audience was constantly observing us over the course of the two-hour performance, the performers could not lapse into a pedestrian state of being. They had to stay in the heightened state of performativity by remaining in the act of being observed and performing.

## RITUAL

Ritual is about bringing about some sort of change. By engaging in a ritual, I want something to happen as a result of the ceremony, the outcome being beneficent.

Questions I asked myself when planning the ritual performance of *beautiful secrets*: how do I create change? Do some states of consciousness effect change more than others? Am I able to actualize these states and subsequently experience shifts in consciousness?

Rituals can change the brain, which can lead toward a higher level of functioning. Performance, which allows for an expedition in altering the performer's consciousness, can allow for the identity to "extend beyond the usual limits of the ego and personality" (Walsh & Vaughan 16). I experience a cyclical connection between movement, consciousness, duration, and transformation. Via movement, I am able to slow down my thoughts and enter into a different state of consciousness. With duration, I am able to sink into the moment and begin to understand the now, existing and finding comfort in the liminal space. Upon completion of the durational, movement-based ritual, I experience a transformation.

Victor Turner defines ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests" (Turner 183). The field of transpersonal psychology "recognizes the potential for experiencing a broad range of states of consciousness" (Walsh & Vaughan 16), possibly allowing for "optimal psychological health and well-being" (Walsh & Vaughan 16).

In "The Emergence of the Transpersonal Perspective," Walsh and Vaughan stated that Abraham Maslow, a pioneer in Humanist Psychology, the theorist behind *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, believed there to be a next step in psychological health.

I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology, to be transitional, a preparation for a still "higher" Fourth psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the

cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like. (Maslow 20)

With the increasing popularity of yoga and the rise in the awareness of meditation techniques, the twenty-first century human has become introduced and acquired the ability, via globalization and the internet, to gain education in ancient technologies. These techniques can assist one in the attainment of self-awareness and a shift to a more enlightened state of being.

As theoretical understanding of altered states of consciousness evolved, it was gradually recognized that these traditions represented technologies designed for the induction of higher states of consciousness. It gradually became apparent that the capacity for transcendent states, which could be interpreted either religiously or psychologically as one chose, and the deep insights into self and one's relationship to the world that accompanied them, lay latent within us all. (Walsh & Vaughan 21)

My own investigation of these ancient technologies, via studying yoga and meditation techniques, has allowed for an increase in self-awareness as well as opportunities for self-transformation. With an awareness and practice of the eight limbs of yoga along with the Tantric practice of devayoga, and incorporating Buddhist philosophy and techniques, mainly drawn from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche of Shambhala Buddhism along with Lama Allione Tsultrim of Tara Mandala, and in tandem with my friendship with Brahmin priest Shri. Premaraja Shivam, I created a training method and performance environment for myself to incorporate the

aforementioned philosophies and techniques in an effort towards self-realization and a shift in consciousness, which could allow for a higher level of functioning.

In the performance of *beautiful secrets*, I aspired to enter into what Stanislav Grof described as a “transpersonal experience...those involving an expansion of consciousness beyond customary ego boundaries and beyond the ordinary limitations of time and space” (Walsh & Vaughan 16). Inside this experience, I attempted to enter into a flow in which I can lose my sense of ego and experience a collective sense of existence, increasing my awareness of compassion and helping me to untangle blocks, psychic and otherwise.

The moments inside the intense focus and energy of performing this durational and improvisational piece allowed for the opportunity to experience a shift in consciousness. Walsh and Vaughan state, “Although still in an early stage, research lends preliminary support to ancient claims that meditation can enhance psychological development, modify physiological (including brain) processes, and induce a range of altered states” (22). Maslow believed there to be a psychology beyond Humanism. “Toward the end of his life, Abraham Maslow, one of the major pioneers in humanistic psychology, called attention to possibilities beyond self-actualization in which the individual transcended the customary limits of identity and experience (Walsh & Vaughan 19).

*“The possibility of realizing an enduring state of being such as that glimpsed in moments of deep meditation or described by various non-Western disciplines proved a compelling attraction”*  
*(Walsh & Vaughan 21).*

## CONCLUSION

Via my research into Buddhism, Hinduism, Yoga and Tantra, along with my existing and continued training of improvisational dance, I was able to actualize altered states and subsequently experience shifts in consciousness via my performance of *beautiful secrets*. I believe these shifts to be a move towards a more enlightened and self-aware state of being. The ritual, duration of time, and embodiment necessary for the performance of the piece allowed for an atmosphere in which blockages, psychic and otherwise, could unwind, leading to a process of rewiring my brain. This changing of my brain can lead to a higher level of functioning and a deeper sense of self-awareness, moving towards what the Humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow called Self-Actualization -- “the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc. Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing” (150).

## CHAPTER 2

### INFLUENCES

#### RITUAL

Victor Turner's ritual process is derived from the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep's critical work *Les rites de passage*. It is a three-part structure consisting of separation, limen/margen, and reaggregation. Separation, the pre-liminal stage, happens when a person or persons detach from the normalcy of everyday life and the existing social structure and norms (Turner). The limen/margin stage is liminality, "a no-man's-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future" (Turner 11). The third stage, reaggregation, is the post-liminal juncture of reincorporation, following the ritual, the participants enter into a new place of existence, in reference to such states as social, mood, status, welfare, et cetera (Turner).

Van Gennep's work referred to traditional societies. Turner addressed liminality in modernity via the idea of the liminoid. Liminality occurs in traditional societies and liminoid is attributed to modernity. There is a differentiation between traditional rituals of the liminal and modern variations of the liminoid (Schechner). It is this place of the liminoid that I will be working. I am not trying to replicate the Hindu rituals I encountered while on fieldwork research in Tamil Nadu, India. Rather, I am synthesizing my somatic response to the rituals.

Turner wrote of the "magic mirror" (16), a concept in which stage dramas and social dramas act as reflections of one another. "The stage drama...is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions, scandals, institutional changes)" (Turner 16). While this piece was not a metacommentary on the previously listed items, it was a statement on spiritual experience and the community that spirituality can create. This is something I believe

Turner was alluding to when writing about *communitas* happening in the space of liminality.

#### SITE-BASED

*“There’s breaking the fourth wall and then there’s disintegrating it into nothing”  
(Sheila Regan).*

The BodyCartography Project, a company I danced and trained with while based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, focused on site-specific work. “The mission of BodyCartography Project is to engage with the vital materiality of the body. We create dance in urban, domestic, wild, and social landscapes” (bodycartography.org). When working with BodyCartography, I learned how to dance and move outside of a studio or theatre, negotiating the demands of a dump truck, the lobby at the Walker Art Center, a house, and a city street. This training deeply affected my creative epistemology, which I drew from in creating *beautiful secrets*.

#### FEMININE SENSUALITY

*“achugar revolts from the inside out, confronting capitalism’s obsession with consumption and immediate gratification by indulging in pleasure to an almost grotesque extent...Through a process of melting the brain into flesh, skin, bones, marrow, and fluids, an acute awareness of bodily desires emerges” (Nikima Jagudajev).*

Luciana Achugar is an Uruguayan dance maker based in Brooklyn, New York. Her work addresses sensuality and pleasure resulting in a unique movement vocabulary. She represents the strength of a woman comfortable in her own sensuousness; a woman that is “growing myself a new body; a utopian body; a sensational body, a connected body; an anarchic body, that is full/filled with pleasure; with love and with some kind of magic,

mystery” (lachugar.org). It is this idea of sensuality and feminine power that fuels my artistic vision. achugar encourages me to ask myself: how can I present my work with the voice of a woman, from a place of beauty and strength, vulnerability and sensuality?

#### ENVIRONMENT / DURATION

*“These people give you time – and I thought that if I could look into that dark hole a little longer I might discover a great deal about life”*

*(Joan Acocella).*

In November of 2010, I saw Eiko and Koma perform their “living installation” piece *Naked* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The duo performed for the month of November throughout every hour the museum was open, totaling 144 hours. Eiko and Koma moved slowly in an environment of feathers, twigs, leaves and other such natural materials. “The result is stark, infused with a relentless stillness that subverts and transcends our everyday notions of time and space” (eikoandkoma.org).

#### AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

*“And every now and then someone will slip into that chair across from her—that’s what it’s there for—and spend some time exchanging stares, or energy, or going blank, or thinking maybe for the first time, about that hard, high-flown, funny word ‘endure”*

*(Holland Cotter).*

In April of 2010, while on an extended stay in New York, New York, I attended Marina Abramović’s seminal performance retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *The Artist is Present* in which she sat for almost eight hours a day for almost three months five days a week, totaling 736 hours. Marina sat in a chair and invited people to sit across from her, one at a time. She and the audience member would simply

look at each other for however long the participant wished to sit across from her. People waited in line for hours to share this experience. In addition to this live performance, MoMA provided a chronological installation of several of her works spanning her over forty year career. As an observer, it had a lasting impact. From that moment on, it has affected my art. There was a shift in me. Whatever she was doing, and had been doing for over four decades, reached deep into me: the symbolism, the duration, the extreme measures, the simplicity. As Abramović says in an interview, “In every ancient culture there are rituals to mortify the body as a way of understanding that the energy of the soul is indestructible. The more I think about energy, the simpler my art becomes, because it is just about pure presence” (Abramović as quoted in Thurman). I began to develop new methods addressing the question of how can I be an honest, raw and present artist.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PERFORMANCE

#### *beautiful secrets*

I created a one-night-only, movement-art piece at Kiwanis Lake in Tempe, Arizona. *beautiful secrets*, the title of the piece, was open and encouraging to audience participation. The cast consisted of four dance artists performing as dakinis (Jordan Klitzke, Yingzi Liang, Alexis Purnell, Sandra Schoenewald), a percussionist and vocalist Guillermo “Bubba” Faz, and a Tour Guide (Molly Schenck), who guided the audience in comprehension and participation in the piece. The performance took place over two hours, allowing for audience/observers to come and go at will. The performance started forty-five minutes before sunset and continued until the sun was completely down. As this was a public performance in the family-focused atmosphere of Kiwanis Park and Kiwanis Lake, the piece was appropriate for all ages. This performance allowed the residents of Tempe to participate in a high-caliber, family-friendly, accessible and free movement-based durational performance.

The performers collaborated with the audience to build an architectural environment and movement art piece to establish a scenario of a transformational place betwixt here and there, day and night, death and life; an in-between land where the language is mystical and symbolic, in which the water of Kiwanis Lake served as a symbol of transformation. The performers sang, danced, and built an architectural environment from natural materials that easily decay, becoming a part of the earth again. The choice of materials that supported the watery landscape, such as seashells, pebbles, mirrors and flowers. The performer in the role of the Tour Guide explained and invited the audience into the art-making. The dancers negotiated the space utilizing Kiwanis Lake and the concept of water as a symbol of transformation.

I chose this location because of the lake. Water serves as a symbol of transformation, directly relating to my work. *beautiful secrets* existed in the idea of the in-between, an undeterminable place that is fluid like water. Kiwanis Lake directly supported and enhanced the ideas behind the piece. Additionally, this area was easily accessible and frequented by the public. In my preliminary research of Kiwanis Lake, I discovered this area to be visited by a large number of people of varying ages ---from families having picnics together, to couples walking around the lake together, to people going on a run alone. In creating *beautiful secrets*, I primarily considered and acknowledged the environment of the lake and the people that frequent this environment.

Some primary questions that drove this project were: How can I make a piece that creates a participatory, community-building experience? How do I encourage the observers to participate in the performance piece? How can this be beneficent for observers as well as performers? The work I developed in my graduate studies at Arizona State University was rooted in the concepts of art, healing, transformation and community. My intention was to encourage the compassion of humanity via community-art performances and exhibits, drawing from theories and practices of art and transformation.

*beautiful secrets* was an effort to develop my artistic work on a larger scale. Building on previous experiences of creating movement-art, environmental and audience-participatory pieces rooted in art and transformation, a primary focus for this project was on the inclusion of the audience. The Tour Guide and dancers/dakinis invited the audience into the art-making by encouraging them to build mandalas and other such designs. The audience was also invited to join the dancers in dancing and singing.

As an adventurer and researcher, I travel into the world to study performance rituals related to community and healing. I have conducted fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, India twice in my first three semesters at ASU, investigating Saktism, Hindu rituals, and consciousness. Prior to my graduate work at ASU, I had extended stays in Kenya and Argentina

Amalgamating my Indian fieldwork in somatic examination, I created two durational performance pieces over my first three semesters at ASU, *lemon lips in the house of tantra* and *mirrored*. To negotiate the demands of durational performance, I developed the training system described above in this document. Somatic Yoga Dance is a hybrid of yoga, improvisational dance, Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Hinduism, and transformation in performance. I have trained in a codified form of Somatic Yoga Dance for three years prior to beginning this project. I have practiced yoga for twenty years and actively meditated for seven years. The performers for this project trained in Somatic Yoga Dance for approximately six months prior to the performance.

The performers circumambulated Kiwanis Lake over the course of the two-hour durational performance. We started on the north side of the lake, processed together counterclockwise to the west, where the percussionist Guillermo “Bubba” Faz and I remained while the dancers/dakinis continued walking south, settling on the east side of the lake by Cabana Three. After the second Sounding section, I left Bubba on the west side of the lake and processed to the east. The dancers/dakinis and I then walked towards the north where we had begun the circumambulation, completing the circle. We then got on boats and sailed to the center of the lake, where we turned off the lights on the boats, signaling the end of the performance.

The four dancers/dakinis and the Tour Guide were on the east side of Kiwanis Lake by Cabana Three. The Tour Guide called the score by ringing a medicine bowl, signaling to the dancers when to move into the next part of the score.

I scored the work in this way to create an unfolding, abstract narrative. Behind *beautiful secrets* was a story. I create abstract work that is not overtly narrative, to allow for each individual to take with them their own unique experience of the piece. My work is always coming from a deeply personal place. From this place I tell a story.

The Score:

Part A

Yoga Dance Warmup – a choreographed section

ABC – an improvised section

Core Phrase– a choreographed section

Stillness – an improvised section

Audience Engagement - Build an architectural environment together

(Sounding) – this is the moment when the performers on east side of the lake communicated and connected with me on the west side of the lake.

Part B

Mourning Phrase– a choreographed section

ABC – an improvised section

Core Phrase– a choreographed section

Stillness – an improvised section

Audience Engagement – Build an architectural environment together

(Sounding) - this is the moment when the performers on the east side of the lake communicated and connected with me on the west side of the lake.

### Part C

Celebration– a choreographed section

CCC – an improvised section

Audience Engagement – Flower Wishes

Guillermo “Bubba” Faz and I were across the lake on the west side in what is referred to as the “fire circle.” Our score consisted of:

### Part A

Songs for the Siete Potencias (singing, dancing and drumming)

### Part B

Songs for Yemaya (singing, dancing and drumming)

### DANCERS / DAKINIS

I set up the dancers as dakinis as a representation of the liminal and mystical nature of the performance. The dancers’ intention was to be otherworldly, from another realm, and they were present at Kiwanis Lake only for the duration of the performance, which lasted approximately two hours, primarily taking place at sunset. It takes about an hour for the sun to completely disappear from the sky. We began 45 minutes before the official sunset time of 6:27 pm Arizona time on March 4, 2017. We continued throughout the sun setting and disappearing from the horizon. When I could no longer see any sunlight in the western sky, I left my place in the fire circle and headed to the east where the dancers/dakinis were offering and receiving the flower wishes to the audience. We then took the wishes of the audience with us as we headed north to the boats and sailed out to the middle of the lake. When we turned off the lights on the boats, this signified that we had left this earthly realm and headed back to the beautiful secrets, where we could deliver the wishes of the audience. My intention was to bring a blessing to the area,

to offer a transformational experience rooted in ritual, and to be a bit whimsical and magical alongside the gravitas of the root of the piece...what happens in the in-between? What happens between death and rebirth?

I made this piece for my father. He died from complications of a brain tumor in 2007. He became sick in 2005 and suffered greatly for almost two years. As he was dying, he looked me directly in the eyes and told me, "They are singing and dancing." Wherever he was going, they were singing and dancing. Ten years later, I created *beautiful secrets* and we sang and danced for him. We also sang and danced for our ancestors, our family, our community, and for everyone present at Kiwanis Lake the evening of March 4, 2017.

The durational part of the performance is to offer an extended period of time for mindfulness and awareness, what I refer to as duration as meditation, in which to enact a blessing for the performers, participants and spectators. It is my belief that this duration as mediation offers an opportunity to experience a transformation via mindfulness and awareness. The performer spends this time in duration in a state of heightened awareness due to the inherent nature of performance, ultimately leading towards a transcendental experience that can move the performer towards a self-actualization in tandem with the practice of the method Somatic Yoga Dance.

### AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

The Tour Guide role in this performance was vital as this was the person that bridged the gap between audience and performer. The Tour Guide communicated with the audience and gently invited them into the piece as participants. Kiwanis Lake is visited by a large number of people. The Tour Guide engaged with these people to help them understand what was going on and how they too could be a part of the experience.

The Tour Guide was able to communicate with all ages, as all ages of people frequent Kiwanis Lake. From children to grand parents, the Tour Guide engaged with and communicated an invitation into the piece. *beautiful secrets* was appropriate for all ages. The audience helped the performers build the environment of mandalas and other designs utilizing the aforementioned objects such as flowers, pebbles and seashells. Along with building the architectural environment of mandalas with the provided materials, the audience was also invited to join in the moving and singing.

I have an interest in breaking through the fourth wall. When I began making duration work, I decided that a tool for keeping the audience engaged was to invite them into the art making. I didn't want the audience to get bored. I suppose the desire to break through to audience inclusion stems from my insecurity of making interesting work. To keep the audience interested, I would get them to engage with the performance.

I created the role of the Tour Guide to help the audience understand what was going on and to openly invite and instruct the audience in how to engage with the piece. I also worked with the dancers on techniques for relating with the audience, such as using simple phrases such as "dance with me" and "play with me," and each performer created their own unique techniques for audience engagement.

### **Building architectural environments**

In the creation of an earlier piece, *lemon lips in the house of tantra*, I created a game to help the performers pass the time. This was a two-hour duration performance in which we inhabited the lobby of Galvin Playhouse at Arizona State University. We had to stay in performance mode throughout the entirety of the show, even when the audience was inside the theater. To pass the time and to keep us in a heightened state of awareness, I brought in objects such as rose petals, pebbles and seashells to build an

architecture on the floor of Galvin Playhouse. Often referred to as building a mandala, I consciously moved away from using that word in regards to issues of appropriation and that what we were building was not a mandala, per se, but a unique architecture we created together as a group. In *beautiful secrets*, I asked the dancers to engage with the audience to build an architectural environment together in which to invite the audience into the sharing of the art making and a heightened state of awareness.

### **Flower wishes**

Two dakini performers passed around flowers to the audience, inviting each individual to make a wish. Two other dakini performers followed up and collected the flowers. The performers took the flower wishes when they departed the performance. This was done in an effort to create a visceral, imaginative link to the individual's wish, expediting the process of transformation. If the audience member held the flower, made the wish, gave it to the dakini and then the dakinis took their wish with them to wherever they were going, a locale referred to as the *beautiful secrets*, then maybe this person's psyche could transform with the wish.

### **FINAL WORK ANALYSIS**

The movement art performance piece *beautiful secrets* is rooted in the concepts of art, healing, ritual, transformation and community. I created a site-specific, durational performance that included the audience in the making of the art. I am interested in how participating in ritual creates change. The questions I was investigating were: How can the use of ritual be incorporated into a public, durational, movement-art piece? How can I make a piece that builds participatory, community-building experiences? How can I encourage observers to participate? How can I make dance accessible?

The primary question post-performance is: did it work? I do not have an objective perspective to reflect back on the overall work because as an artist, once I have presented a piece, I have to take a step back from it. I need space between myself and what I created. This space opens up my processing and synthesizing of the experience. In retrospect, I realize it would have been a good idea to have some predetermined questions for dancers and select audience members. I would email these questions to the dancers and audience members and have them email their responses back to me.

What I gather from friends, family and audience members who have contacted me, is that people seemed to be receptive to being outside and at the lake at that time of day. Some of the folks at the lake who were not expecting a performance seemed to enjoy the experience. A little boy at the lake with his family engaged with the *dakinis* and was running around, playing and dancing. There was a fisherman who would quit fishing to watch. I observed a Muslim family, mother, father and son, watching Bubba and me. They were smiling and seemingly enjoying our performance. One woman was singing along with us. When I circled around from the west side of the lake to the east side to join the *dakinis*, the audience was gathered around and engaging in the process of the flower wishes. When the piece ended as the lights went out on our boats in the middle of the lake, people were clapping from all sides of the lake.

In regards to the method Somatic Yoga Dance, as the rehearsals progressed, the method was not as much of a focus. Due to the demands of creating a compositional structure for performance, alongside time limitations, the focus moved away from Somatic Yoga Dance and into composition. The performative aspect got in the way of the Somatic Yoga Dance method due to the time crunch of getting ready for the performance. In retrospect, it would have been prudent to establish a protocol for approaching the work, such as the cast coming together with a ritual or meditation—

some type of activity that brought the dancers into being present and engaged—a every rehearsal. This ritual or meditation, such as the opening Somatic Yoga Dance phrase or a meditative walk around the lake, would allow for each individual to drop into a heightened state of presence, with each person finding a personal balance that could then bridge out to connect as a group. As a result of this process, I realized that this type of work needs time in which the performer can go deeper in the act of exploring content. Consistent personal practice is vital to sinking into the depths of the method.

Making a piece is like trying to catch the wind. The inspiration begins to whisper in my sub consciousness. I catch only brief phrases and single words. When I am asked how I construct the piece, it is difficult to answer. I'm not sure how I do it. I circle in on the piece. My process is not linear. I do not start at Point A, proceed to Point B, and end at Point C. Rather, A starts to move, finds a place of stillness, then B begins, finds stillness, and then they move together as C.

ABC is, in fact, one of the scores I used in the construction of *beautiful secrets*. I learned this score from K.J. Holmes, a master improviser and teacher who has been a huge influence on me as a dancer and artist. When I was crafting *beautiful secrets*, I knew that the dakinis would be improvising for large portions of the piece, so it was imperative to work with a solid improvisational structure. K.J.'s score was perfect for those sections.

Certain other sections of *beautiful secrets* were choreographed. The first was called the Yoga Dance warmup. This is an exercise developed from my dance technique classes which combines flow yoga with elements of postmodern dance. The dakinis were in a state of Meditation transitioning to Welcoming during this section.

States:

Meditative

Welcoming

Mourning

Wonder

Celebration

Meditative

The score for the dakinis consisted of states of consciousness alongside the physical movement score. I derived the concept of assigning states to the piece from studying Richard Schechner's *Rasa Boxes* with Dr. Rachel Bowditch at Arizona State University. The states I chose are different than the rasas as developed by Schechner, except for the state of Wonder, which is Adbhuta, though my state of Mourning is akin to the rasa Karuna (sadness) as is Hasya (joy) to Celebration. These states were devised as a way to create an intention for the dakinis, which the audience could pick up on.

I will briefly discuss the state of Mourning in conjunction with the choreographed section Mourning, as a way of thinking through the strengths of the final work. This was the only sectioned choreographed in the site. The other choreographed sections, Yoga Dance (Meditation), Core Phrase (Welcoming, Mourning into Wonder) and Celebrate (Celebration) were choreographed in the studio and reworked to fit into the site. The feedback I received from observers was unifying in the sense that the Mourning phrase resonated with people the most. In creating Mourning, I worked with the architecture of a hill at the site. The dancers started at the bottom of the hill and worked their way to the top. They started by falling to their knees in a state of mourning, and I used the flavor of this state, alongside the architecture of the hill, to create a mournful dance of falling and crawling and falling again up the hill until finally they made it to their feet at the top of

the hill. This was created and performed as the sun set. Mother Nature provided incredible lighting. The inspiration came from my state of mourning my father's death. The success of this section inspires me to in the future to choreograph all movement in the site.

The Celebration (Celebrate) section was also a choreographed section. This choreography was culled from a phrase I created for the Modern II technique course I was teaching as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Arizona State University during the spring semester of 2017. The choreography was tweaked once on site at Kiwanis Lake due to the different demands of dancing in tennis shoes on grass at the lake in juxtaposition to dancing barefoot on a marley floor in a dance studio. The inspiration for this section was the sense of celebration I felt the morning my father died. He was finally free of the intense suffering he had encountered during the last 20 months of his life. I tried to depict this moment via the choreography and state of consciousness requested of the dakinis.

How did I decide which section went where and what state went with what? At some point I realized I had to put all the pieces together, so I sat down and wrote out the score. What did I experience as my father died? What did I imagine, or hope for, my father to encounter as he crossed over? Meditative, Welcoming, Mourning, Wonder, Celebration, Meditative.

As I've come to understand the astanga path of yoga, so I came to understand the *beautiful secrets* states --- they operate cyclically, not as a straight path from Point A to Point B, but rather as a state of circling in...just like my artistic process. Catching the wind is akin to finding the end a circle.

## NEXT STEPS

I am in the process of dreaming up and creating where Somatic Yoga Dance could possibly go. I will continue making community-engaged, ritual art similar to *beautiful secrets* alongside making dances with elements of ritual for the concert stage. I look forward to creating a new and unique approach synthesizing the divergent choreographic methods I utilize in making dances, such as improvisation and set choreography made on-site. I plan to continue developing the method Somatic Yoga Dance to employ as a technique for training performers in my work. Since my art-making is focused on ultimately bringing people together to share in a blessing, the performers need to be prepared for the spiritual, durational, improvisational and transformational nature of the performance journey inherent to my work. Beneath all my work is a blessing. In times such as these, when we live in an age of divisiveness, unbridled competition, aggression, and the constant threat of violence and war, the option that presents itself most clearly to me in how I can help in bringing about more peace is to make work such as *beautiful secrets* --- pieces that are rooted in a blessing.

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