Self and No Self: Buddhism as Pedagogy in Contemporary Performance Art

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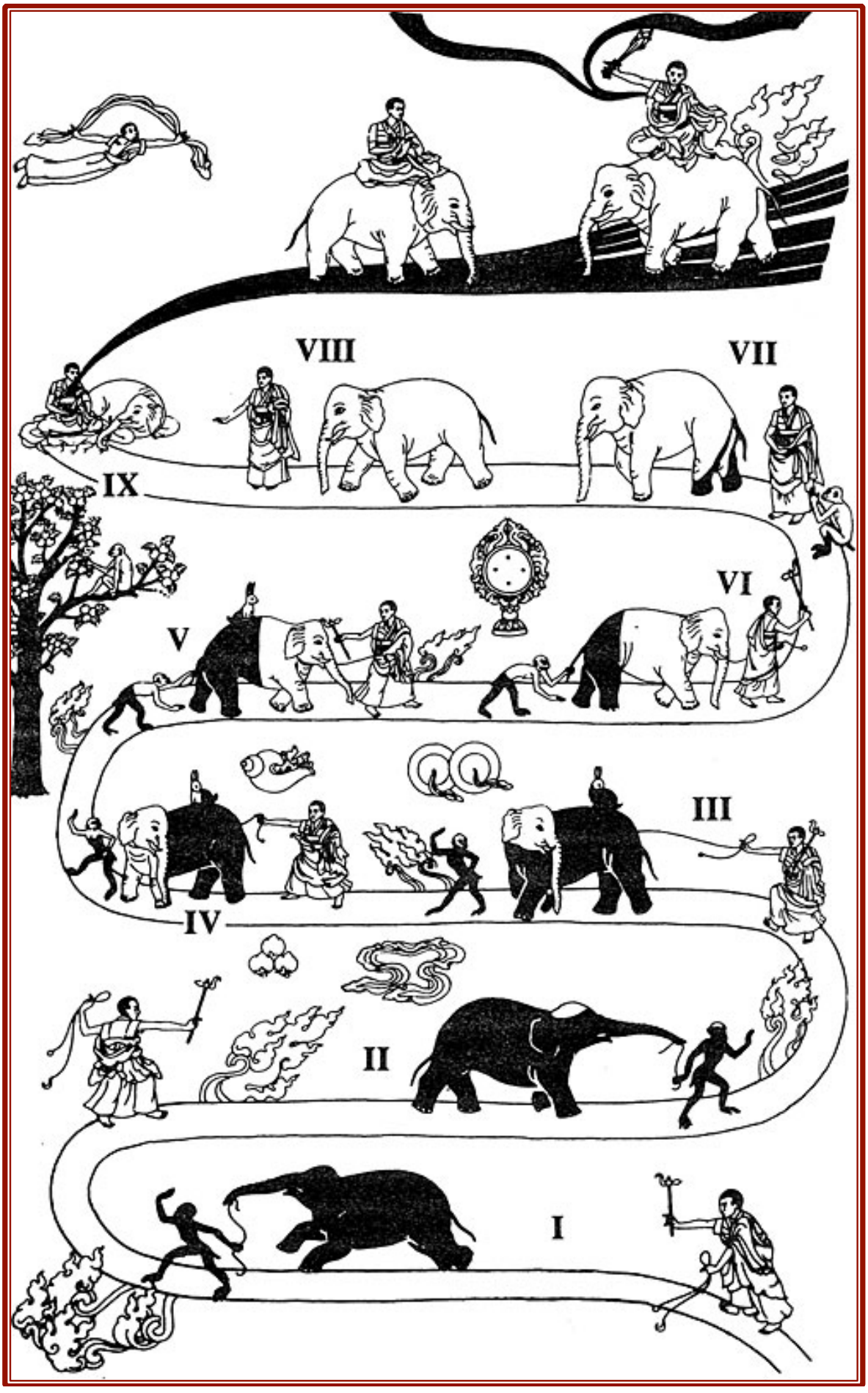
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John Cage
X: Writings '79 – '82

Yes, Kālāmas, it is right for you to doubt, it is right for you to waver. In a doubtful matter, wavering has arisen. Come, O Kālāmas, do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do not accept anything by merely considering the appearances. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable.

Words attributed to the Buddha from the *Anguttara Nikāya*

Abstract

Self and No Self: Buddhism as Pedagogy in Contemporary Performance Art is a practice-based investigation into the development of an autobiographical performance art practice based on Buddhist meditation. Specifically, the performance work, entitled *Sutra: Five Works for Performance*, is a response to trauma testimony and the performance art event as a catalyst for transformation. The performance projects are examined alongside literary and performance theory in order to further understand the ways in which Buddhism is absorbed and expressed in contemporary Western performance culture.

The practical work asks the question, What is the role of Buddhist practice in the creation and performance of autobiography? The thesis investigates this further through an examination of literary theory that pertains to *Sutra* such as trauma and affect theory. Specifically, the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick contributes to an understanding of the workings of the genre through her notion of the 'beside.' Contemporary artists whose work is directly influenced by Buddhist philosophy and/or practice is also examined as a way of foregrounding the intertextuality of the genre. Beginning with John Cage as the 'father' of Buddhist-influenced performance art, artists include the Happenings and Fluxus movements, Marina Abramović, Meredith Monk and Ann Hamilton as exemplars in the field. To the degree that contemporary Western Buddhist art can be said to reflect as well as influence new expressions of religious faith, it can also be said that they question fixed views of institutionalized religion and foster inter-religious as well as secular dialogue on shared humanitarian principles which are the key components of Buddhist-influenced arts praxis. It makes the conclusion that the framing of Buddhist-influenced performance art within the context of contemporary Western society takes on an implicit pedagogical value beyond mere entertainment or commodified experience.

Acknowledgements

This research project represents the bringing together of the two passions in my life: Buddhism and the performing arts. For this reason, I must begin by thanking my Buddhist teachers, without whom I would never have benefitted from the profound teachings of the *Buddhadharma*. Their kindness and support throughout the past nineteen years is immeasurable. They are: HH Shenphen Dawa Norbu Rinpoche, Geshe Tashi Tsering and Ven. Robina Courtin.

On the academic front I must thank my supervisors, Dr. Holly Maples and Dr. Karen Schaller for supporting this project and providing me with much welcomed criticism, encouragement and inspiration. I would also like to thank Prof. Ralph Yarrow, Steve Waters and Tony Gash for their helpful insights in the early stages of development. Thanks to Scott Brown at the UEA Drama Studio for his support and patience as well as Norwich Arts Centre, Warwick Arts Centre, the Goldsmiths Graduate Festival, Dr. Veronica Secules at The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and the Boscombe Fringe Festival for providing a professional platform for my work as well as the 2016 Performance and Mindfulness Symposium as the University of Huddersfield for welcoming a re-performance of *Boudhanath*.

I would also like to thank the following artists and photographers for allowing me to use their work in this thesis: Marina Abramović, Annabel Clark, Philip Corner, Paul Craig, Robert Eke, Ann Hamilton, Prof. Peter Harvey, Thibault Jeanson, Meredith Monk/House Foundation and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. Further acknowledgement goes to the BBC for permission to use their video and radio archive material in *At Sea: 1980-2010* and *No(h) Father*.

Personal thanks must also be extended to my friends and family with special mention of my parents for giving me the life of this project, my sister Annabel Clark for her contribution to *Still Life* and my partner Nick Bishop for not only sharing his story in *Boudhanath* but for helping me to see outside of myself.

§§

Dedicated to Dr. Jane Galton

Author's Declaration

Extracts of research presented in the Introduction of this thesis have appeared in my article, 'Performing Sand: A Case for the Abandonment of Video Documentation in Buddhist-inspired Live Art.' *Journal of Dance, Movement and Spiritualities*, 2 (3), December 2016, pp. 309-321.

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Illustrations

Terminology

The following words are used throughout the text in direct reference to traditional Buddhist terminology. Although they exist in both Pali and Sanskrit forms, I am using Sanskrit as it is used in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, the Buddhist schools which arose in India during the 2nd century AD and Tibet during the 7th century AD, respectively, and from which I have studied the most extensively over the past nineteen years.

For the sake of definition, the terms *Self* and *No self* appear capitalized throughout the text in order to distinguish them in their Buddhist context as opposed to 'self' in reference to common self-identity.

Abhidharma = Buddhist logic

Ātman = Self; an 'I' or ego predicated on the illusion of a fixed, permanent identity. The term also applies to other types of phenomena.

Anātman = (Pali: *anatta*) No Self or Non-self; without substance. The doctrine that posits all phenomena (including human identity) as lacking an intrinsic Self or independent existence without reliance on causes and conditions.

Anitya = (Pali: *anicca*) impermanence

Ayatana = sense bases or 'gates'

Bodhisattva = A person whose actions are motivated solely by the wish to benefit others and chooses to forego *nirvana* until all sentient beings are liberated from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Buddhadharma = The spiritual teachings of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in India circa 565 BC.

Chakra = wheel

Chörten = a heap of stones created to form a burial mound. Over the centuries the form developed into the elaborate *stupa.*

Dharma = The essence or essential quality of human nature; law; something firmly established. There is no direct translation in European languages.

Duḥkha = (Pali: *dukkha*) Sometimes defined as suffering or dissatisfaction, this refers to the entire spectrum of human suffering from the unease of unpleasant

emotions to the grosser levels of suffering such as those manifested in extreme illness or injury.

Hana = (Japanese) The core principle in Japanese Noh theatre, summed up as 'cultivating the flower'. *Hana* creates the impression of beauty for the audience.

Mala = a set of beads used for counting mantra/prayers

Nirvana = The state of complete realization of the emptiness of inherent existence. In other words, the transcending of the perception of duality (e.g. good/bad, happy/sad, like/dislike) resulting in the experience of non-duality.

Karma = The workings of cause and effect.

Kōan = (Japanese) A short pithy teaching in the form of a riddle with no definitive answers. It can take the form of a question, statement or dialogue by which the student is tested through doubt as a tool towards awakening to the empty nature of mind. Often given to students as a meditation tool in the Chan and Zen schools of China and Japan. A classic example is, 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?'

Mūlakleśa = unwholesome factors or deluded mind states which include: attachment (*raga*); anger (*pratigha*); ignorance (*avidya*); pride or conceit (*māna*); doubt (*vicikitsa*); and wrong view (*dristi*).

Prajna = wisdom

Pratītyasamutpāda = dependent origination

Samadhi = The highest stage of meditative concentration.

Saṃsāra = Refers to the notion of an endless cycle of rebirths for the unenlightened sentient being and is an important aspect of the Buddhist worldview. It is defined as clinging to false concepts of the self, resulting in dissatisfaction and suffering.

Smṛti = (Pali: *sati*) Mindfulness. Etymology: 'to remember', 'to recollect', 'to bear in mind'. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness refer to states leading to awakening or enlightenment.

Shamatha = A form of Buddhist meditation defined by its focus on 'calm-abiding' or settling the mind. Considered a precursor to single-pointed concentration in the Tibetan tradition.

Shunyata = emptiness (i.e. the emptiness of inherent existence); the interdependent principle from which all phenomena and experience arises; sometimes referred to as the 'void' although the translation has led to misunderstanding of the term in its Buddhist context.

Skandhas = aggregates

Stupa = dome-shaped shrine representing the mind of enlightenment.

Sutra = scripture (Pali: *sutta*). Both Pali and Sanskrit sources are cited within the thesis depending on their school of origin.

Tudong = lit. 'that which shakes off.' *Tudong* is the Thai word for the Pali term *dhutanga*. The nomadic wandering of monks during the dry season.

Vinaya = monastic code

Vipassana = A form of Buddhist meditation defined by single-pointed concentration. Practiced primarily in the Theravada and Tibetan traditions (Tib. *vipashyana*).

GROUND

Introduction

Kopan Monastery
Kathmandu
1997

I saw my mother before I left London. She told me she was proud of me. God, how I love that woman.

I have arrived in this place of practice, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery above the Kathmandu Valley. Looking down I see Boudhanath stupa surrounded by dilapidated buildings and laughter. Looking up I see the sky. And between the stupa and the sky I see the temple, both hiding place and refuge. I have flown halfway across the world to get away from home after finding Buddhism not so many months ago. Becoming a card-carrying Buddhist somehow feels very important but I'm not yet sure why. Will it make me hate my father any less? Will I ever be free? No one deserves hatred. Not even him.

I go for a walk down to Pashupatinath where they burn the dead. As I walk a stereo blasts 'Hotel California' in the distance and I am immediately transported back to Los Angeles where my parents live. So with the Eagles in my head I walk amongst the funeral pyres under the falling ash. A foot sticks out and teaches me something that day, my first lesson in the doctrine of impermanence.

I take refuge in Buddha. *I take refuge in Dharma.* *I take refuge in Sangha.*

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I take refuge in Buddha. *I take refuge in Dharma.* *I take refuge in Sangha.*

I start.

Why Performance Art?

Where does the path of Buddhist art lead? What are its parameters and boundaries? Are the possibilities limitless? I ask myself this because I wonder if I love the form even more than its content. Those who have gone before me and will continue after me are the flameholders of a peculiar practice not unlike that of school children taking part in show-and-tell. As Buddhists we cannot help but reach out towards others who may benefit from these teachings and if the Way is through art, then that Way is a path. Almost twenty years have passed since the month I spent in Nepal learning the fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism while I read, wrote and cried a path of discovery. In my naivety I thought Buddhism was going to help me feel more peaceful but instead it aroused all my anger and dismay at the injustices I perceived myself to have been subject to in the family home. After many years of study and practice, I now understand that the path I set out on is not straight: it is bent, curved, rocky, steep, willful, thorny, dangerous, deliberate, wild, cautious, frustrating, insightful, mysterious, consuming, unequivocal, daunting and captivating. Above all I discovered it to be liberating. Just like it says on the box.

As the years went by I no longer experienced a distinction between Buddhism and life. I read as much as I could and attended teachings whenever possible. After having a family and as a single mother I took monastic vows for two years during which time I also embarked on academic study, eventually gaining an undergraduate degree in theatre. When it came time to write my BA dissertation, I immediately gravitated towards Buddhism and focused on writing a play in which Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc was a main character. His self-immolation in 1963 captivated me as I sought to fuse Buddhism with theatre in my writing. The same held true for my masters dissertation, only this time my protagonist was a Western Buddhist nun. In pursing those two projects, both using the form of the dramatic text for the theatre, I was no closer to finding out how to perform philosophy. I wanted to find out if what eluded me was not the philosophy but, perhaps, the vessel. What if there was a way to give voice to the various doctrinal themes of Buddhism in a form more akin to painting? Less reliant on text and more symbolic in form? What if I took my life and treated it like art? According to art critic Thomas McEvilley, the burgeoning art-life paradigm instigated by the influence of

artists like Marcel Duchamp challenged a prevailing culture of formalism, leading to the experiments we know today:

> This doctrine went totally contrary to the Kantian tradition which underlay modern formalism and which held that the concerns of aesthetics are irredemiably separate from those of cognition on the one hand and ethics on the other. It found its realization first in existentialist or action painting, then more fully and perfectly, in Performance Art (McEvilley 2010:57).

McEvilley's description of the art-life paradigm sits alongside my own concerns about the unitive function of art and the ways in which it acts as a particular kind of research. In many ways, my creative work has always been research-based, seeking ways to move from text to the body. In Buddhist practice, embodied research deals with the fundamental questions of existence through experience and so it is only fitting that I take the same approach in my performance art practice. In performance art I could do away with narrative structure and develop a way of conveying the complexities of memory and consciousness through symbolic time. I wanted to create work that combined elements of rite and ritual, exorcism and catharsis, as well as commemoration. Richard Schechner's term 'transformance' (1971) is wholly applicable to this project when he describes it as suggesting 'the change-evoking possibilities of ritual' (Grimes 2010:52). Like everything in Buddhism and life, change is the only thing of which we can be sure.

The other concern for which I turned to Buddhism almost twenty years ago and which occupies my autobiographical performance practice is the subject of trauma. This includes both overt and covert traumatic experiences.[1] Not only does performance art offer a unique vessel for the expression of trauma and shame-based personal histories but its ability to cross disciplines elicits insights that serve to further discourse in Buddhist philosophy and the ways in which it can be used to treat some of the psychological imprints of trauma. This thesis is going to do this through both an experiential and theoretical approach to the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* or No self.

[1] Overt trauma includes physical and sexual abuse as well as trauma arising from combat or natural disasters, etc. while covert trauma includes long term emotional abuse and neglect.

Why Pedagogy?

From the start, my relationship to Buddhism has always been a pedagogical one as opposed to merely a faith driven exercise in worship and prayer. The *Buddhadharma* is often referred to simply as 'the teachings' and throughout my past twenty years of engagement with it, I have continued to experience Buddhist practice as being wholly pedagogical. What I mean by this is that personal experience continues to teach me what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as 'tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy' (Sedgwick 2003:1).

Throughout this thesis I make reference to pedagogy in a multitude of ways. In starting out with some basic definitions, pedagogy refers to the following:

- 'The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.'[2]
- 'The art, science, or profession of teaching.'[3]
- 'Pedagogy is the discipline that deals with the theory and practice of education; it thus concerns the study of how best to teach.'[4]
- 'The word is a derivative of the Greek παιδαγωγία (*paidagōgia*), from παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*), itself a synthesis of ἄγω (*ágō*), "I lead", and παῖς (*país*, genitive παιδός, *paidos*) "child": hence, "to lead a child."'[5]

Drawing from these basic definitions, I want to broaden the scope of its application beyond the classroom setting and apply it specifically to performance art as a teaching tool. Although it could be said that all performance art is pedagogical in terms of teaching the audience something about a subject, phenomena or way of being, there is something about Buddhist-inspired performance art that seems to set it apart from the rest. Drawing from its fundamental connection to the *Buddhadharma*, work is created not just as a response to the philosophical tenets of the faith but as a teaching tool for the audience to be introduced to aspects of their own innate qualities of awakening

[2] See: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pedagogy
[3] See: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pedagogy
[4] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedagogy
[5] See: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=pedagogue&allowed_in_frame=0

lying dormant within their mindstreams. Just as anthropologist Elizabeth Marshall Thomas describes cats as 'assuming the role of educator when they bring prey indoors to their human owners' (Thomas 1994:105), inviting onlookers to practice their hunting skills (as opposed to merely accepting the prey as a gift), Buddhist-influenced performance art offers the viewer a model for practice. Whereas non-Buddhist performance art may be teaching the audience something about the experience of the artist, Buddhist-influenced performance art aims to teach practical tools towards awakening. Amongst the variety of studies on contemporary Buddhist art such as Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob's *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (2004) and Baas's *Smile of the Buddha* (2005), the focus tends towards stylistic interpretations of the aesthetic qualities pertaining to the genre as well as artistic influences. As Baas states, 'It is important to remember that the game of sources has no beginning and no end, and Western art has been influencing Asian art for as long as Asian art has been influencing the art of the West' (Baas 2005:9). This thesis is unique in its approach in that its main focus is on the pedagogical implications of the art form and specifically the ways in which performance art can be used as a tool for modelling meditation practice for the viewer. In this way I am seeking to establish the genre within a pedagogical framework in order to contribute to the prevailing studies in existence.

Planting Seeds: Buddhism Performs

> **The appeal of the Buddhist perspective for artists is just this: like art, Buddhism challenges thinking as a path to knowing. And what both the creation and the perception of art share with Buddhist meditation practice is that they allow us to forget ourselves and thus realize ourselves. They are parallel practices. This is, perhaps, what the American painter Ad Reinhardt meant when he wrote, 'The fine artist need not sit cross-legged.'**
>
> **Jacquelynn Baas [6]**

This thesis is a practice-based examination of the nature of Buddhist practice and the ways in which it informs performance art within a contemporary cultural milieu. The creative project *Sutra: Five Works for Performance* (see DVD) presents a range of autobiographical performance art works and through them examines how

[6] See: Baas, Jacquelynn (2005), *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 11

Buddhist philosophy and practice are reflected through the combination of testimony and meditation. Specifically, they form a practical inquiry into the ways in which Self can be used to point to No Self. The performance art works were carried out during the first year of my study and took place in public performance spaces, festivals and museum galleries. The five works in question are: *At Sea: 1980 – 2010*, a durational multi-media installation; *No(h) Father*, a short theatrical soundscape; (*whispers)*, a durational performance sculpture; *Still Life*, a meditation in response to a photographic work and *Boudhanath*, a theatrical monologue. *At Sea* includes a book of performative writing in response to the theoretical challenges of documentation (see Appendix B for text). Each work responds to the overarching theme of trauma, a subject for which literary theory has much to contribute. In order to create the arc of my life story, I focus on different aspects of my relationship with my parents as well as my place within my partner's life as he confronts his relationship with parents. Each work contains the seed of a fluid journey through identity using Buddhist meditation as performance methodology in order to cut through the limiting factors of ego-clinging that seeks solutions from without. I also wanted to create specific sites to challenge the forces of memory and its associated affects.

Moving on to the formulation of a practice-based thesis in a drama department, it is worth pointing out that the form varies widely depending on the particularities of the project. In wishing to keep within a Buddhist framework for analyzing the development of my research over the past three years, I have divided the entire thesis under three main headings: Ground, Path and Fruition, reflecting the categorization of meditation practice in the Tibetan tradition.

Specifically, *Sutra: Five Works for Performance* examines how meditation can be used by the performer to confront some of the psychological challenges of the autobiography as well as serves as a pedagogical model for meditation practice. I am using Buddhism as a way to further performance art as much as I am using performance art as a way to further Buddhist practice. Amongst the variety of theoretical positions I draw from, the most interesting in the context of Buddhist-influenced performance art is that of the 'beside', developed by literary and cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick. It is of particular interest to me in light of her personal study and practice of Buddhism, a position she turned to after being diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991. Although eventually succumbing to its

metastatic spread in 2009, she left behind a legacy of seminal works in the field of literary and cultural discourse including *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), the text to which much of my own critical analysis is indebted to, particularly the final chapter entitled 'Pedagogy of Buddhism'. Sedgwick invokes a similar stance to art historians when she says that

> Since the 1960s any number of Western academic, popular and professional discourses have been cumulatively invoking non-dualistic approaches in physics, gender and sexuality, art, psychology and psychoanalysis, deconstruction, postcolonial relations, pedagogy, religion and spirituality, race, mind-body problematics, the recovery movement and science studies, among many other areas. But of course it's far easier to deprecate the confounding, tendentious effects of binary modes of thinking – and to expose their often stultifying perseveration – than it is to articulate or model some other structures of thought. *Even to invoke non-dualism, as plenty of Buddhist sutras point out, is to tumble right into a dualistic trap.* I've always assumed that the most useful work of this sort is likeliest to occur near the boundary of what a writer can't figure out how to say readily… (Sedgwick 2003:1-2, my emphasis).

This quote is particularly useful in relation to the way performance art and Buddhist practice can be used together as a vehicle for transformation, particularly with regard to affective states such as shame and trauma. In psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk's, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (2014), he writes about 'Treating Trauma through Theatre': 'It is surprising how little research exists on how collective ceremonies affect the mind and brain and how they might prevent or alleviate trauma' (Van der Kolk 2014:334). He pays particular attention to the therapeutic role of theatre and performance through a variety of schemes such as Jonathan Fox's Playback Theatre and Psychodrama as well as countless programmes taking place in prisons, psychiatric wards and schools. As a psychiatrist working to alleviate the suffering of patients with PTSD, he points out that

> [d]espite their differences, all these programmes share a common foundation: confrontation with the painful realities of life and symbolic transformation through communal action. Love and hate, aggression and surrender, loyalty and betrayal are the stuff of theatre and the stuff of trauma. As a culture we are trained to cut off from the truth of what we're feeling. In the words of Tina Packer [founder of Shakespeare & Company in Massachusetts]: 'Training

> actors involves training people to go against that tendency – not only to feel deeply, but to convey that feeling at every moment to the audience, so the audience will get it – and not close off against it' (2014: 335).

Van der Kolk's description of the therapeutic uses of theatre and performance is, in essence, a form of practice-as-research (PaR) using the elements of drama to investigate the workings of the psyche.

Adhering to the protocols of PaR in order to establish a dialogic relationship between practice and theory, this thesis frames my creative work within theoretical discourse while aiming to address some of the broader questions of Buddhist-influenced performance art in general as well as specific questions posed by individual performance works. Broad questions include the problematizing of the Buddhist notions of impermanence and emptiness, which are directly linked to the ephemerality of time-based art, while specific questions include an examination of Buddhist aesthetic principles alongside affect theory.[7] While the unity of the collection of my work seeks to elucidate the philosophical issues contained in the research, each specific performance brings its own set of questions unique to its psychological and familial context.

According to the *Buddhadharma*, all experience is not only lived in the mind of the perceiver but all phenomena and the imputations of meaning we give to them arise in the mind through the six senses. Unlike the Western identification of merely five senses, Buddhist epystemology refers to six internal and external *ayatana* or sense bases. The internal sense bases are often referred to as 'gates' while the external sense bases are known as 'domains'. They are: the eye and visible objects or phenomena; ear and sound; nose and odour; tongue and taste; body and touch; mind and mental objects. Ultimately, it is the mind that perceives through these gates and, therefore, it can be said that all phenomena exist in the mind. Furthermore, it is important to understand the application of the sense gates as offering a perspective on affect for, according to Buddhist philosophy, all feelings arise through these gates. In the sutra known as 'The Fire Sermon' (*Adittapariyaya Sutta*), affect is described through its associated sense bases and processes of mental cognition:

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[7] Buddhist discourse posits emptiness as the essential nature of phenomena being empty of inherent existence, i.e. the impossibility of existing from its own side without reliance on causes and conditions. This is expounded upon in the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra (commonly known as the Heart Sutra).

> Monks, the All is aflame. What is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Consciousness at the eye is aflame. Contact at the eye is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye – experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain – that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses and despairs (Thanissaro 1993:1).

Keeping this explanation of the Buddha in mind, the construction of *Sutra* is predicated on the understanding that if human consciousness has the capacity to accommodate trauma, then any creative response to it will reflect the performer's capacity for reflection and integration of the trauma experience. In this case it is enacted through the use of symbolism as a way of anchoring the sense gates firmly within waking consciousness in order to avoid dissociation. In an article entitled 'Complex Trauma, Dissociation, and the Use of Symbolism in Therapy', the authors argue that 'symbols provide a potentially powerful means of assisting reintegration [of selfhood] and that this can be used within a range of therapeutic traditions… [T]he symbolic function is central both to the fracturing of selfhood due to early trauma and to its resolution' (Spermon, Gibney and Darlington 2009:436).

As trauma resides in the body, it is important to understand the place of the body within Buddhist epistemology as it gives insight into the ways in which affect and embodiment interact for the performance artist. Buddhism does not posit an essentially separate body and mind but positions them as a complex network of interdependence. 'A human being is an impermanent composite of interdependent physical, emotional and cognitive components' (Markham and Ruparell 2001: 197-198), according to the teachings of the Buddha. The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* states that neither the body nor the mind should be confused as the 'self' which is said to arise out of the 'constituents of a person's body and mind' (Thanissaro 1993). In this way it can be said that, from a Buddhist perspective, the experience of trauma is an illusion arising out of confusing the bodymind with 'self'. As the Buddha is said to have instructed his monks,

> Thus, monks, any form, ... feeling, ... perception, ... fabrications, ... consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or

> near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'
>
> Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released' (Thanissaro 1993).

It is through disenchantment that the performance artist 'loosens the grip' of traumatic memories in order to enter into a healthy relationship with the past. This enables the performance to attempt to become a teaching ground for the audience and performer alike.

The designations of the sense gates destabilise understandings of reality itself. We could say that the fundamental philosophical question underpinning 'Who am I?' is 'What is all this?' Taking this question as the basis for analysing performance documentation, the appropriateness of traditional documentation methods for a project that is working with Buddhist philosophy is in flux. Since the entire Buddhist worldview relies on the doctrine of impermanence, I have developed a secondary form of documentation that does not pretend to be the performance nor a representation of a performance but a type of autoethnography to enable the spectator to experience the performance without having attended the original event and yet retain the principle of performance as outlined by Bill Viola. The secondary performance is contained within my book of *At Sea: 1980-2010* (created specifically for this project, see Appendix B). It is predicated on the idea of the performance directive, a form of instructions for the participant to be able to engage with the work of art outside the framework of the museum, gallery or theatre. Examples of these kinds of instructions have been utilized by performance artists such as Yoko Ono (*Grapefruit,* 1971), Marina Abramović (*Spirit Cooking with Essential Aphrodisiac Recipes*, 1996) and Linda Montano (*You Too Are a Performance Artist*, 2013). This type of imagined performance primarily falls under the sensory perception of mind consciousness as it requires the participant/reader to position herself as the performer with the action taking place entirely through the imagination.

The six sense perceptions form the basis for an analysis of the debates within performance documentation and an argument for the abandonment of traditionally accepted methodologies such as photographic or video documentation.[8] How do we experience a live performance? Assuming the spectator has access to each of the sense perceptions, including the mind, the performance reveals itself to us through the eyes – some form of aesthetic realm is experienced; the ears hear the gross and subtle soundscape, including the resonance of the performance space which is a prime aspect of the experience of liveness; the nose perceives the smells of the environment, for the most part unintended but helps to inform and influence the spectator's experience of the art work; tongue and taste are less influential although interactive performances involving food or drink would bring this sense more to the fore; body and touch places the spectator both spatially and sensorially in the performance space and provides the phenomenological grounding; and, most importantly, the performance is experienced through and in the mind with every single object of perception.[9] These are all mental objects. In other words, the assessments made about every phenomena within the performance environment coinciding with anything occupying the mind (past, present or future). Buddhist philosophy deals with these principles in the *Satipattana Sutta* in which the Buddha teaches the fundamentals of what are known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness or that which should be attended to in order to develop mental quiescence: form, feeling, mind and mental objects. By way of definition, two examples describe mindfulness as 'the gentle effort to be continuously present with experience' (Bodhipaksa 2005:35), and '…paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally' (Kabat-Zinn 1994:4). These are just some of the considerations concerning the development of *Sutra* in the form of live art.

Sutra also bring up the question of intertextuality that is a prevailing feature of any cultural movement. Art critic and Abramović biographer Thomas McEvilley states that

> [f]or two decades or more now it has been widely felt that aesthetics and ethics – art and life – are to a degree meaningless without each other. The point is that in a sense

[8] For the purposes of this thesis, I have provided video documentation if only to suggest the aesthetic framework.

[9] See: Auslander, Philip (1999), *Liveness*, London: Routledge

> each is the defining characteristic of the other. Art that lacks real connection with life is dead, or, as the phrase has it, merely academic. Life, on the other hand, that does not somehow partake of the motivation that the word *art* connotes may be seen as less than human (McEvilley 2010:57, my emphasis).

In the post-war fervor of the second half of the twentieth century, movements in art praxis reflected the growing chasm building between the principles of reason and logic (firmly embedded into Western culture during the European Enlightenment) and feeling and emotion whose expression reached fever pitch in the 1960s as seen through the Civil Rights movement, anti-Vietnam war rallies and the attempts to challenge the authority of the Soviet system as seen in Eastern Europe. This period saw ripple effects into the following decade and beyond.

The hyper-experimentalism of the 1970s also witnessed similar advances in science. One of the areas being explored was that of the science of emotions.[10] Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux and his colleagues were amongst the first to take interest in what is now considered a serious subject of inquiry (LeDoux 1998:9).[11] In short, what they discovered was the way in which different parts of the brain communicate which opened up new ways of treating emotional disturbances such as trauma and other affective disorders. They refer to the workings of the amygdala (in the frontal portion of the temporal lobe) as the 'emotional brain' and have demonstrated how it makes no direct connection to the analytical and rational mind (located in the dorsolateral pre-frontal cortex). For the purposes of this thesis, LeDoux's research offers the most fundamental of scientific insights in support of the practice of meditation for the treatment of trauma:

> [T]he only way we can consciously access the emotional brain is through self-awareness, i.e. by activating the medial prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that notices what is going on inside us and thus allows us to feel what we're feeling (the technical term for this is 'interoception' – Latin for 'looking inside')… Neuroscience research

[10] In the 1930s anatomists such as James Papez, under the influence of the work of C. Judson Herrick (a specialist in the field of brain evolution) made a major contribution to the theory of emotions in his discovery of the way in which information flows between the hypothalamus, the medial cortex and back to the hypothalamus (a process known as the Papez circuit) (LeDoux 1998:87).

[11] See: LeDoux, J.E. (2000), 'Emotion Circuits in the Brain', *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 23 (1), pp. 155-184; Morgan, M.A., Romanski, L.M. and LeDoux, J.E. (1993), 'Extinction of Emotional Learning: Contribution of Medial Prefrontal Cortex', *Neuroscience Letters*, 163 (1), pp. 109-113; Moscarello, J.M. and LeDoux, J.E. (2013), 'Active Avoidance Learning Requires Prefrontal Suppression of Amygdala-Mediated Defensive Reactions', *Journal of Neuroscience*, 33 (9), pp. 3815 – 3823.

> shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our *inner* experience and learning to befriend what is going on inside ourselves (Van der Kolk 2014:206).

Along with the development of Buddhism outside of its Asian roots comes a host of challenges specific to the Western scientific and materialist mindset. Western Buddhist teachers such as Sangharakshita, founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, have emphasized the need for Western society to shift its emphasis on material gain in order to integrate Buddhist principles as a solution to the empty promises of secularism (Sangharakshita 1992:4) while Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama encourage Westerners not to change religions but to ground themselves in their own culture's religious belief systems in order to build stronger societies (Dalai Lama 2011:20). He also warns of the risks to cultural identity inherent in taking on a belief system from outside a person's own culture, thereby becoming 'half westernized or half-Tibetanized' (Ingram 1990:14).

One of the theories that makes a major contribution to the genre of Buddhist-inspired performance art is the concept of *autopoiesis.* Working towards a new theory of performance, theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte uses the term originally coined by biologists to describe the process of self-reproduction and maintenance in living systems. Performance as a circular system of producers and products form the basis for Fischer-Lichte's thinking around the nature of performance as essentially transformative. It is the transformative power of performance which creates 'moments of enchantment, resulting in a sudden deeper insight into the shared process of being in the world' (Fischer-Lichte 2008:9). She uses Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975) as an example of a performance work whereby the audience were exposed to both aesthetic and ethical directives. Subjecting herself to freezing, cutting, burning and whipping, spectators at the event were compelled to put an end to Abramović's show, no longer able to endure the spectacle of self-torture. Fischer-Lichte examines the dynamic created by the performance and its transformative effect on a sympathetic audience, turning them into actors in a prime example of autopoiesis in performance, a process she refers to as the 'autopoietic feedback loop' (2008:75). She concludes with an assessment on the aesthetics of performance and its aim to re-enchant the world through the recognition of the lack of boundaries between art and life. 'In a way, performance can be thought of both as life itself and as its model. It is life itself because it takes up

the real time of the participants' lives and offers them the possibility to constantly bring themselves forth anew… Our lives are given appearance in performance – they become present and past' (2008: 205). In relation to Buddhist-inspired performance art and especially the *Sutra* project upon which this thesis expounds, it is not possible to separate my life from my art for it arises from the causes and conditions or karmic imprints of my life. Through the autopoietic loop I am offering back something that may be useful in the lives of others, even if only to provide a momentary space for reflection on the complexity of the parent-child relationship and identity formation. In the following section I outline an approach to documentation that arose out of the struggle to articulate the nature of my relationship with my parents.

Documentation: Rationale and Materials

> **If the artist, as a human being, full of the best intentions toward himself and the whole world, plays no role at all in the judgment of his own work, how can one describe the phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art?**
>
> **Marcel Duchamp[12]**

> **The story is told that a student was trying to interpret the posture of some contorted Blake figure in one of [William] Blake's illustrations, when a prominent Blake scholar said to him, 'Put yourself in that posture; maybe you will learn more about its meaning.'**
>
> **Ronald L. Grimes[13]**

There are a variety of terminologies used to describe the process of performance-making that are specifically linked to research outcomes. These include 'performance-based research', performance-as-research', 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research' and 'practice as research' (Candy 2006:3). While 'practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice' (2006:3), it may or may not include any creative artifacts in its espousal of the advancement of knowledge about practice. By contrast, a useful working definition of practice as research is the following:

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[12] See: Sanouillet, Michel and Peterson, Elmer (1989), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, New York: Da Capa Press, p. 139

[13] See: Grimes, Ronald L. (2010), *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, p.4

> The term 'practice as research' carves out a territory for arts practice in academic environments, and refers to a broad range of research activity. Practice as research might denote a research process that leads to an arts-related output, an arts project as one element of a research process drawing on a range of methods, or a research process entirely framed as artistic practice. Research might start or end in arts practice, draw on arts practice as a part of its process, or be wholly integrated into the shifting forms and outputs of an arts project (Sjoberg and Hughes 2016).

Whether there is a difference between 'practice-based' and 'practice as research' is debatable so for the sake of simplicity I will be using the term practice as research (PaR) throughout this thesis.

One of the reasons for the contested nature of PaR in the academy is due to the ephemerality of live performance and its inability to translate directly into documentation. Hence, its comparison with other archival text-based research is difficult to quantify. PaR has also contributed to 'an intrinsic examination of the academic and professional questions raised when performance practice identifies itself as an ipso facto research outcome' (Freeman 2010:xi). Using the analogy of the Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala, the identification of performance art as ephemeral and lacking in a fixed, permanent or collectable art object is predicated on the participation of a live audience.[14] In the case of both the mandala and Buddhist-influenced performance art, the purpose is primarily pedagogical, taking as they do the *Mahayana* directive to perform actions in keeping with the ideal of the *Bodhisattva* path.[15] Leaving aside religious implications, the character of both

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[14] Taking several days to complete, the sand mandala is the visual representation of the mind of enlightenment. It is created out of coloured sand and, upon completion, is destroyed and poured into a body of water. The entire process is part of a complex ritual involving prayers and visualizations. It is necessarily impermanent as a challenge to the pervasiveness of attachment to sense objects.

[15] Within seven centuries after the death of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, three main schools of Buddhism arose in response to the advancement of different types of meditation practices as taught in the *sutras*. They are the *Theravada* (the earliest of the Buddhist schools, it is also known as the *Hinayana* or 'Small Vehicle') as currently practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Cambodia; the *Mahayana* ('the Greater Vehicle') as practiced in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam and the *Vajrayana* (also known as the *Tantrayana* or Diamond Vehicle; the vehicle of skillful means) as practiced in Tibet; The *bodhisattva* ideal is what differentiates both *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* philosophy from the *Theravada* with its focus on *nirvana* for the sake of individual liberation from suffering alone. The *bodhisattva* is motivated by the wish to benefit all sentient beings through benevolent actions of body, speech and mind.

[10] Buddhism defines mind as a phenomenon lacking in form, shape or colour but is analogous to a mirror in that it reflects objects.

actions serves as a teaching on the transitory nature of existence. This process is reflected in Peggy Phelan's analysis of performance documentation in her chapter on representation without reproduction in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993). She emphasizes how the only life performance can live is in the present and how it can't be 'saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance… Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity… becomes itself through disappearance' (Phelan 1993:146). This is what Buddhist video artist Bill Viola means when he says that 'the most important place where my work exists is not in the museum gallery, or in the screening room, or on the television, and not even on the video screen itself, but in the mind of the viewer who has seen it' (Viola 1989:175). [10]

In the case of documentation, it is not possible to document on video an accurate experience of liveness in performance when it involves both the form, feeling, mind and mental objects as perceived by the performer as well as the form, feeling, mind and mental objects of the spectators. Matthew Reason's *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (2006) argues that video documentation's overriding purpose is to preserve and make 'present to see and know something that without being recorded would be inaccessible and unavailable' (Reason 2006:80). A counterargument would posit that video cannot help the viewer 'know something that without being recorded would be inaccessible and unavailable' (ibid.). As an example, the performance of *At Sea: 1980-2010* is not primarily about moving stones or walking slowly back and forth in public for hours at a time. It is about an internal process that can only be fully realized in real time in direct relation to the sense objects in the performance space which include the representation of my parents and their graves. The solution for the post-performance audience, in order to access the artist's internal process, is to provide a counter-document in the book form included for this thesis (see Appendix B).

This leads into the debate as to the ontological value of the documentation of performance. What is the value in capturing time, which is the prime function of video recording, if it is unable to relay liveness? If the process of meaning making in Buddhist-influenced performance art is to reach fruition then the stages of artistic

development must be considered alongside each other. I propose the following outline:

The idea (future oriented)
The implementation of the idea (the performance: present oriented)
The documentation of the idea (photos/video: past oriented)
The documentation of the documentation (performative writing: present oriented)

In this manner, the engagement of a 'time loop' from future to present to past and back to the present takes place. Henri Bergson reminds us that 'when we think of this present as what ought to be, it is no longer, and when we think of it as existing, it is already past… all perception is already memory' (Bergson in Freeman 2010:xx). For an art form lacking in a primary art object, the performance book enables memory to become newly formed with each engagement with the work. By dealing with autobiographical memory, Bergson's premise of perception as memory is rendered more complex. It adds to the documentation debate through the embedding of memory or perception within memory itself. [16] If the standard protocol of capturing time solely through photographic and video evidence were to be abandoned in favour of the performance book, it might be possible to achieve what could be considered the ideal aim of performance documentation: not to capture time but to enable the witnessing of its unfolding both externally through the aesthetic realm and internally as meaning is formed and new memory is established in the mind. The way in which consciousness is unfolding moment by moment in the human being is the central concern of Buddhist philosophy and its cultural manifestation: Dharma art.

[16] In other words, the performance book is made up of autobiographical memory while the reader/spectator forms new memories based upon personal engagement with the material.

Dharma Art and Performance: A Review of the Literature

> **When we reach the state of non-aggression, it is not that we cease to perceive anything, but we begin to perceive in a particular way. With the absence of aggression, there is further clarity, because nothing is based on ideas or ideals of any kind. Instead we are beginning to see things without making any demands. We are no longer trying to buy or sell anything to anybody.**
>
> **Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche[17]**

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche describes dharma practice as the gradual development of the conceptual mind. Before direct realization, he says, 'our understanding of dharma involves words, images, letters and feelings… we are using concepts to go beyond concepts' (Mingyur Rinpoche 2014:48). Throughout this thesis I contend that the pedagogy of Buddhist-inspired performance art works in a similar way using a conceptual framework or assertion of Self to point to No-self. Art historian Mary Jane Jacob maintains that 'Buddha reveals himself when he is not more asserted; that is, for Buddha's sake, Buddha is to be given up… So long as one is talking of nothingness or of the absolute one is far away from Zen' (Baas and Jacob 2004:241). Although what lies between assertion and non-assertion is inexpressible, when relegated to the arts it seems to come closer to forming a language of expression of the ineffable than linguistically possible.

The literature relevant to my research into Buddhist influences in contemporary performance and the autobiographical element of my practice-based research project covers a range of fields from theatre and performance, Buddhist philosophy and psychology to phenomenology and memory studies and defines the parameters through which this type of presence-based performance practice is carried out. This review is a summary of the most relevant themes for the research in question, explored through an investigation into the performance practices of artists whose work exhibits both implicit and explicit influences from Buddhist philosophy. By introducing the performance work of John Cage, Marina Abramović, Zhang Huan, Meredith Monk and Bill Viola within this review of the literature, I examine a range of performance practices in order to highlight some of the overarching themes of the genre. Then I outline the literature of a selection of

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[17] Trungpa Rinpoche (2008), *True Perception: The Path of Dharma Art*, Boston: Shambhala Publications p. 73

specific Eastern and Western theoretical perspectives and review of some of the developments within Buddhist influenced performance praxis and methodology.

In order to draw out some of the prevailing elements of Buddhist philosophy taken up by post-war artists as a way of seeking to define the field in which my performance art practice sits, the following survey will foreground the genre of Buddhist-influenced performance art. Between 2001 and 2003, art historians and curators Jacqueline Baas and Mary Jane Jacob coordinated a programme in the United States of more than fifty public exhibits and performances under a consortium entitled 'Awake: Art, Buddhism and the Dimensions of Consciousness' (2004). The work produced was brought together in a book of essays and interviews, including Marina Abramović, Bill Viola and Zhang Huan, amongst others. The aim of the consortium was to fill the gap in the literature on Buddhism and the arts and bring attention to artists working in the field. Using Marcel Duchamp's 'art-life paradigm', the contributors investigated conceptual art's relationship to the Buddhist philosophical tenet regarding suffering and its basis in the mind. Quoting Duchamp, 'It's not what you see that is art, art is the gap' (Baas and Jacob 2004:21), the authors conclude that conceptual art and the concept of art itself 'has meaning only within the context of a specific interaction (ibid.),' that being the relationship with the audience and the meaning created within their own minds which may or may not reflect the intention of the artist. Other contributors such as John Cage biographer Kay Larson propose that the Buddha was the world's first performance artist and poses questions on the nature of the Buddha's manifestations: '[D]o I take a cue from the Buddha and regard my own life as a work of performance art that conveys intimately and decisively the state of my awareness and the condition of my compassion? Can I act when need be? And if not, what gets in the way?' (2004:65) Finally, the conclusion reached by each contributor reflects the same sentiment as Duchamp and Cage, that life and art are not separate entities but one and the same expression of mind's mirror-like quality.

Out of the *Awake* consortium's aims, Baas developed another study in 2005 focusing specifically on Buddhism's influence on Western art from Monet to the present. Mainly concerned with visual art, a chapter from her book *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art* (2005) is devoted to four performance artists whose work has been directly influenced by Buddhism: John Cage, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono and Laurie Anderson. The essence of Cage is summed up in his wish

to make chance art, 'in accord with what happens' (Cage in Baas 2005:165); in Paik's work, the Zen Buddhist expression of surprise and shock as a teaching dominate; for Ono 'the only sound that exists for me is the sound of the mind. My works are only to induce music in the mind of people' (2005:197); and for Anderson the Buddhist themes of loss and impermanence alongside the recovering of balance infuse her work. These four artists exemplify the creative expression of a path towards freedom from conditioned thought. Baas makes it clear, however, that she is more interested in expression over style. In other words, a Buddhist-influenced work of art may not have a Buddhist aesthetic in either subject or style of expression. She is not wishing to create a new category of Western Buddhist art but to present the work of artists who have utilized Buddhist practice and/or philosophy as a basis for dealing personally and publically with issues relevant to the destabilizing aspects of our modern world. Far from a new discovery, Dharma art has roots in medieval Japan where Buddhism infused every aspect of society.[18]

The earliest Buddhist-inspired treatises on the art of performance come from Zeami, one of the founders of the Japanese Noh theatre in the fifteenth century. The Way of Noh is referred to as 'a religious discipline, the realization of which is the performance' (Wilson 2006:38). Based on a nine level system of training, Zeami instructs actors to begin in the middle with naturalism. Once mastered, they move on to heroic and god-like archetypes, eventually reaching a point in training when they can take on demonic roles. Although a lengthy and complex training, the core principle in Noh can be summed up as 'cultivating the flower' or *hana*. *Hana* creates the impression of beauty for the audience through strict adherence to the training, though Zeami never explicitly explains the principle. Attributing the origins of Noh to 'land of the Buddha', Zeami insisted on it being a 'Way' rather than merely an art or a job. Trained in Zen Buddhism, he views training and performance in equal measure, following the line of the Zen teacher Dogen: 'To think that practice and realization are not one is the view of heretics. In Buddhism, practice and realization are the same' (2006:38). He goes on to warn Noh practitioners that if they are unduly influenced by worldly concerns, the Way will decline, as has been observed in many Buddhist societies in the 20th and 21st centuries (McCurry 2015). I make reference to Zeami because he expresses what I consider to be a universal principle

[18] See: Suzuki, D.T. (1938), *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society

of Buddhist-inspired performance art: 'practice and realization are the same' (Wilson 2006:38). It is this confluence that defines the genre of Buddhist performance art as it began its development after WWII and within which my own performance practice is framed.

The flourishing of Buddhism in the West began in the 1950s through the arts after the initial meeting in New York in 1944 of the founders of the American Beat movement, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. Religious scholar Stephen Prothero sees them as 'transitional figures' who bridged the early influx of 19th century scholarly Buddhism in the West with its contemporary form based firmly in meditation study and practice under a qualified teacher (Prothero in Tonkinson 1995:4). Responsible for this period of grounding study with practice was the Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher D.T. Suzuki, considered by scholars to be the foremost influence in bringing Buddhism into mainstream Western consciousness (Sutin 2006:247). It was in 1950 when Suzuki was a guest lecturer at Columbia University that the American composer John Cage was exposed to Buddhist teachings that would launch him as the founder of a new form of expression in the performing arts. Kay Larson suggests that some of the infusion of Eastern thought into American culture arose as a result of the intensity with which the West viewed parts of Asia as the enemy by the end of the war. By the early 1960's, however, Cage would articulate the new attitude afforded the East, at least amongst artists:

> Actually, there is no longer a question of Orient and Occident. All of that is rapidly disappearing;… the movement with the wind of the Orient and the movement against the wind of the Occident meet in America and produce a movement upwards into the air – the space, the nothing that supports us (Cage in Larson 2012:3).

Originating out of his own Zen Buddhist practice, Cage would continue to influence generations of artists in diverse creative fields from music and painting to poetry and performance.

The next tradition to take hold in the West was Tibetan Buddhism after the Chinese invasion in 1959. The teacher responsible for its dissemination in the United States was Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche whose contribution to the arts extended out of his studies at Oxford University in the early 1960s. His early monastic arts training had been highly prescribed and left no room for individual

expression. After settling in the West, Trungpa developed a new theoretical approach to arts practice, although it was hardly new to Buddhist art (particularly in its Japanese Zen form):

> The term *dharma art* does not mean art depicting Buddhist symbols or ideas… Rather, [it] refers to art that springs from a certain state of mind on the part of the artist that could be called the meditative state. It is an attitude of directness and unselfconsciousness in one's creative work (1994:1).

Trungpa discerned the difference between exhibitionist art and its split from the audience and that which is produced in order to affect and embody the viewer to the same extent as the artist. In other words, it is a training in 'sensitivity to the interplay of form and space' (Worley 2001:123).

In 1973, Trungpa hosted an experimental theatre conference at the Naropa Institute in Colorado.[19] Along with his Western Buddhist students, participants included Joseph Chaiken's Open Theater, Robert Wilson and his company The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds and playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie. This was the first formal effort to introduce a non-dual approach to performance making in the West.[20] The conference contributed to a wider body of work around the concept of Dharma art. The importance of this approach is in order for the spectator to become engaged in the work as much as the creator in order to recognize the potential for awakening to the realization of the nature of mind or *rigpa* (Tibetan for 'knowledge') and, thus, the cessation of suffering, the primal aim of Buddhist practice. In this way, the work of art becomes a means of conditioning the mind towards the awakened state and loosening the grip of attachment to sense objects. Trungpa ascertained that one of the problems in the transmission of ideas is the tendency of the artist to maintain a separation from the spectator in order to promote an agenda in the hope that particular meanings are understood. There is a relative aggression to this approach that runs counter to the Buddhist aim of not harming self or others. For this reason Trungpa emphasized the training of the

[19] Now known as Naropa University.

[20] Up until this point there had been a number of Buddhist-inspired performance works such as John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), Nam June Paik's *Zen for Head* (1962) and Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964). The development of a performance methodology that could be taught, however, began at the Naropa conference and became known as Mudra Space Awareness. This practice has continued to be propagated in performer training through Lee Worley at Naropa University and beyond. See: Worley, Lee (2001), *Coming from Nothing: The Sacred Art of Acting*, Boulder: Turquoise Dragon Press.

artist's body, speech and mind (process) as opposed to the final work of art (product).

In the field of performing arts, the act of expressing the tenets of Buddhism were pioneered and exemplified by John Cage. Originating out his own Zen Buddhist practice, Cage would continue to influence generations of artists in diverse creative fields from music and painting to poetry and performance. Bernstein and Hatch (2001) illustrate how Cage's influence forged a new paradigm in the arts through his music, art and writings in which he experimented with a multiplicity of forms. One of Cage's major musical influences came from his time studying Indian classical music with Gita Sarabhai who told him that the prime function of music was ' to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences' (2010:122).

Some of the ways in which performance can be experienced as a spiritual practice akin to Sarabhi's directive are brought together by Brask and Meyer-Dinkgrafe in a collection of essays on *Performing Consciousness* (2010). What they refer to as spiritual practice encompasses methods for overriding the memory of the conditioned self. This is highlighted in Fitzmaurice's analysis of *Zeami Breathing* which describes 'breath, or the inner spirit, is that essential element that makes each performance new, immediate and present' (Brask and Meyer-Dinkgrafe 2010:8). In Weiss's essay 'The Ego and the Self in Actor Training', the author disseminates the process of the sacrificing of the ego in order to fulfill both ritual and spiritual intentions within some of the abstract theatrical forms prevalent in the works of Grotowski, the Open Theatre, Roy Hart Theatre, the theatre of Robert Wilson and Noh and Bhuto performance. In 'Theatre: Re-assessing the Sacred in Actor Training', McCutcheon focuses on trance and shamanic practices as gateways into experiments in performer training while Robbins argues the case for 'The Healing Power of Butoh' through a case study of a Butoh performance in the United States two weeks after the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre. Significantly for the research in question, Daboo makes the case in 'The Altering I/Eye: Consciousness, 'Self', and the New Paradigm in Acting' for the place of Buddhist theory and practice in contributing to the development of a 'new paradigm' in performance scholarship. His essay includes an analysis of 'states of being' in performance such as those explored through some of the psychophysical approaches of practitioners such as Michael Checkhov and Jacques Lecoq. As a collection, the text engages in the

performance practices which contribute to the disappearance of the duality of mundane existence, instead pointing to a transcendence of the self in a process of healing personal and collective trauma.

Not surprisingly, much of Cage's new paradigm of performance making was based on a system of chance operations derived from the ancient Chinese form of divination, the I Ching. Through this system, he was able to explore the idea of infinite possibilities, particularly ones that crossed cultural boundaries. A Zen Buddhist since the late 1940's, Cage's initial influence came through the works of Carl Jung, specifically *The Integration of the Personality* (1939). The book highlights the value of religious experience, particularly Eastern forms of spirituality, and had a strong influence on the American avante-garde from the 1930's onwards.

> Jung was for Cage and many artists an authority on Depth psychology as well as on the psychological implications of Eastern religions. Cage believed that the goal of the creative process was the transformation of the individual, a concept for which he found much support in Jung, who regarded the purpose of psychological work as discovering from images thrown up from the unconscious the meanings that guide the individual on the path to wholeness. Jung called it 'the process of individuation' and looked to the East for an analogy, which he found in Zen and the I Ching (Bernstein and Hatch 2001:82).

Kyle Gann (2010) expounds upon a prime example of Cage's adopted philosophy in action. First performed in 1952, the score for *4'33"* contains no musical notation, only instructions to the musician(s):

I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, NY, August 29, 1952, the title was 4'33" and the three parts were 33", 2'40", and 1'20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who

indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time (Cage in Gann 2010:184).

Breaking radically from musical conventions, not only did the work originally contain no title other than the length of the piece but the use of the word *tacet* was used for the first time in a solo composition (it is normally used in orchestral scores to indicate when a particular instrument does not play). More than simply a piece of experimental music composition, *4'33"* is a work of pure performance containing theatrical gesture in the opening and closing of the keyboard lid and the framing of the work through the sounds elicited from both the environment and the audience. Cage later remarked that the work did not necessarily need a performer as it was 'simply an act of listening' (2010:186). Referencing the influence of the work on his own life, Cage conceded the following:

> Well, I use it constantly in my life experience. No day
> Goes by without my making use of that piece in my life
> and in my work. I listen to it every day… I don't sit down
> to do it; I turn my attention toward it. I realize that it's
> going on continuously. So more and more, my attention,
> as now, is on it. More than anything else, it's the
> source of my enjoyment of life (2010:186).

Maintaining resonance with Zen Buddhist philosophy, Cage's influence on the avant-garde movement continues into the present and can be found in some of the seminal works of Jugoslav performance artist Marina Abramović.

Performance, according to Abramović in *Cleaning the House* (1995), is all about presence and energy and the way in which the artist affects the consciousness of the audience in order to 'extend eternity' and go beyond past and future to the present moment. In a collection of essays on the processes and philosophies pertaining to performative presence, Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks (2012) provide an archaeological framework in order to contextualize and problematize its nature. Published post-millenium, *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being* posits more recent theatre theory on the experiential aspects of presence as emphasized over the postmodern approach of the deconstruction of performance. In broader terms, 'presence prompts questions of the character of self-awareness, of the performance and presentation of self and role. Presence also implies witnessing and interaction – a *being before* or *being in* the presence of

another' (Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks 2012:2). Case studies are demonstrated alongside essays on theatrical production, live art installation and performance art, supported by theories from post-structuralism and phenomenology to reception theory and intercultural practices. Composed of three sections, *Being Here: Place and Time* questions the roles of space and time in the production of presence; *Being Before: Stage and Gaze* interrogates the performer-spectator dynamic; and *Traces: After Presence* offers readings in post-event documentation. As noted by the editors, the following questions are examined through the convergence between archaeology and performance theory:

- What are the principal signifiers of theatrical presence?
- How is presence achieved through theatrical performance?
- What makes a memory come alive and live again?
- How is presence connected with identity?
- Is presence synonymous with 'being in the moment'?
- What is the nature of the 'co-presence' of audience and performer?
- Where does performance practice end and its documentation begin? (2012: i)

Considering herself a 'nomadic artist', Abramović draws inspiration from her anthropological observations of diverse cultural expressions of energy, mainly through performative religious rites:

> When I went to Tibet and the Aborigines and I was also introduced to some Sufi rituals, I saw that all these cultures pushed the body to the physical extreme in order to make a mental jump, to eliminate the fear of death, the fear of pain and of all the bodily limitations we live with… Performance was the form enabling me to jump to that other space and dimension (Abramović 1995:100).

Not only did her observations of other cultures' ritual practices compel the artist to pursue works of longer duration but they also served to inform the way in which she experienced her own identity. Through the creation of ritual space, it is possible to perform the self in a transcendent spectacle of experience devoid of pure

representation, which Derrida believed was the only thing art could possibly hope to achieve.

Arguing for an 'anthropology of experience', Victor Turner in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies in Theatre and Ritual* (1990) traces the performing arts from its foundations in social ritual as arising out of 'the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of the social drama' (Turner in Schechner & Appel 1990:13). He describes theatre at its highest point as an interpenetration of the self with the phenomenal world and likens this process to both ritual and meditation in recounting '… a brief ecstatic state and sense of union (often lasting only a few seconds) and may often be described as no more than a shiver running down the back at a certain point' (1990:13). Significantly, Turner posits an interrelationship between social and stage drama and the ways in which society assigns meaning to performance as a way to extricate patterns of crisis within society. 'Each performance becomes a record, a means of explanation' (1990:17), a statement relevant to all of Abramović's performance work.

Abramović differentiates meaningful actions from meaningless and relegates the latter to the arts. Out of her travels she has devised exercises for herself as a performance artist, particularly ones that must be performed for a few hours at a time. These have also been developed for her seven-day 'Cleaning the House' workshops for performance artists which she ran between 1979 and 2003. She emphasizes the use of the mind alone to develop the capacity for creativity: 'You can do the work with just the power of your mind. You can transmit things, just directly, mind to mind' (1995:38). Some of these exercises include the following:

- Write your name. Duration: 1 hour.
- Pour a pile of rice on the table made up of different colours (white, brown, red, black). Separate the rice into their respective colours, one grain at a time.
- Holding a mirror in front of you in an outdoor space, walk backwards using the mirror to see where you're going. Duration: 4 hours each direction.
- Sit on a chair facing the wall. On the wall is a large card of one of the primary colours. Look at the card. Duration: 1 hour each colour.

- Walk around a lake 12 times. Duration: 9 hours. Then walk around the lake once, blindfolded.
- Sit on a chair facing a mirror on the wall. Duration: 1 hour.
- During one day, move around as slowly as possible doing your everyday actions.
- During a workshop, participants are woken up very early with a flashlight and a piece of blank paper with the instructions: write the first word to come in to your mind, then go back to sleep. The next day, make a performance using this word as a basis (Abramović 2003:49-107).

The motivation behind all of her performance training exercises are akin to the purpose of Buddhist meditation: to prepare or train the mind in endurance, concentration, perception, self-control, will power and confrontation with mental and physical limits (2003:48). Through her own performance practice and observations of working with psychophysical energy, Abramović takes direct inspiration from Eastern spiritual practices designed to condition the mind and body towards single-pointed concentration, a necessary ingredient of any durational performance practice. All that matters in performance, according to Abramović, is the state of mind from which the performance is being made, something she wishes to pass on to the next generation of performance artists. With echoes in the Renaissance, methods for preparing an artist for their work are laid out in a similar fashion:

> In the Renaissance, one could read in a book by Cennino Cennini how to prepare the artist to paint the cupola of a church. He said three months before starting work, the artist should stop eating meat, two months before starting work he should stop drinking wine, one month before starting work, the artist should put his right arm into plaster, the day he starts work, he should break the plaster, take a brush and be able to make a perfect circle with a free hand (2003:45).

It is clear that Cennini adhered to a ritual aspect of artistic practice and Abramović is particularly interested in the observation that in more primitive societies art is not art in the Western sense of the word. It is used as a tool for ritual or social cohesion through connection to unseen forces that some would call God or gods.

It is through her art that Abramović tries to deal with two bodies, the human body and the body of the earth. Using the body as a purveyor of energy, she subjects herself to extreme states in order to become more receptive to the senses of perception and what might lie beyond those states in subtle perception, only made possible through either lack of sleep or food in long meditative states. More recently her performances have entailed working with the Buddhist notion of impermanence, a theme that has run through her work from the beginning. In the midst of a performance, she aims to remain in total control while being loose at the same time. Valuing silence as an integral part of the energy of a performance, she quotes an 'unknown monk' in *The Abramović Method* (2012) to communicate the essence of her work:

> The movement in the middle of silence.
> The silence in the middle of a movement.
> At the beginning of my life I travelled a lot.
> I kept making trips.
> I was restless.
> But since I have my temple, the visitors come to see me.
> It is fundamental to be openly inclusive in both phases.
> It is an all-inclusive principle where even the most tiny
> things can enter.
> You can arrive in a state of mind where you can give
> oxygen to the people.
> Or in the case of art to the viewer
> (Unknown in Abramović 2012:5).

Her most recent 'performance' does not involve her physical participation, an alien notion for an audience who do not separate her from her work. Creating an audience participatory installation, 'The Abramović Method' took place in Milan in 2012:

> I would like to give the public the possibility to experience and to reflect upon emptiness, time, space, luminosity and void. I have created an installation of objects for human and spirit use that the public can interact with in three basic positions: standing, sitting and lying down. In doing so, the public become part of the work… During this experience, I

> hope that the observer and the observed will connect with themselves and with the present – the elusive moment of the here and now (2012:19).

Her change of working method came about in 2010 after her MOMA retrospective, *The Artist is Present* where she sat in silence for six hours a day, six days a week for three months simply facing members of the public in a chair opposite. All of her work up until this point focused on herself as *artist body*. In moving forward, she developed the idea of the *public body* that could not only be timeless in its lack of necessity for her presence but as a method of transcending the artist body. The public body only requires members of the public's participation in front of other members of the public who act as spectators. In Milan, Abramović merely set up the conditions for the encounter which included 'power' objects such as minerals, copper and magnets which all act as conductors of energy. This experiment has led her to begin work on the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) in upstate New York, a centre for the preservation of durational performance art of at least six hours in length. The institute is being founded on the principle of the transformative power of performance.

Another contemporary artist working with Buddhist principles is Zhang Huan. Raised in rural China, Huan established himself internationally as a performance artist, painter, sculptor and installation artist. Since his visit to Tibet in 2005, he no longer makes performance art although his visual work continues to incorporate Buddhist themes such as temporality and the expression of religious rites associated with impermanence. Depicting his own experience as a Buddhist practitioner, Huan was first inspired by a Chinese artist who stated that 'painting is not about the object that you're painting but rather about using the object as a vehicle to express your spiritual side or inner thoughts' (Yilmaz, Goldberg & Storr 2009:16). His first performances were focused on expressing visions of life lived under oppression while his later works used elements of Buddhist ritual to symbolize the East/West divide. One such performance in 2001 was *Pilgrimage to Santiago* in which the artist placed himself inside a large round cage which swung around the central square outside the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Linking Buddhism with Christianity, he used his obsession with incense burners as a way to 'cleanse myself of all iniquities and to attain a new body and soul. It will appear as though a Buddha is sitting inside the incense ball of

Christianity' (2009:72). Other works include *Foam* in which old photos of himself as well as members of his family are placed inside his mouth and his face is covered in foam depicting life's ephemerality along with the idea of family and the past as living inside one's body.

Stepping outside the bounds of performance art as one of the pioneers of extended vocal technique, Meredith Monk is a practicing Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition and has developed her own meditative approach to making work for more than forty years. Her performance work can best be described as music theatre works although she has also created visual and installation art. One of her more recent performances in 2008 was *Songs of Ascension* for voice and strings which continues to tour internationally. Monk does not consider this work to be a theatre piece but a ritual offering, a key aspect of Tibetan Buddhist practice. Inspired by a conversation with a Jewish American Zen practitioner, she learned about the Songs of Ascent or psalms that would be sung by the Jews as they ascended a mountain. This led to thinking about the ways in which different faiths share the same action of spiraling and ascending while singing or worshiping, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism where practitioners circumambulate as well as ascend the stupa (a dome-shaped structure containing holy relics, representing the mind of the Buddha). The work brought together both structurally and musically the elements of the spiral. Other works such as *The Politics of Quiet* (1996), *mercy* (2002) and *impermanence* (2008) reflected the element of the transcendent and spiritual as an offering up of direct experience. Working only with sounds as opposed to words, Monk's aim is to 'wake people up' by offering them a transformational experience and is expounded upon by Bonnie Marranca in her article 'Performance and the Spiritual Life: Meredith Monk in Conversation with Bonnie Marranca' (Marranca 2009:30). Monk consistently makes the connection between meditation practice, the breath and singing in which the breath is the foundation for both. Stressing the value of live performance, she is adamant that the level of communication created between spectators and performers is of particular importance in the modern world and lays emphasis on the 'congregation of human beings… in the same moment in the same space' (2009:31). Having once created political works for performance, Monk is now inspired only from her meditation practice and her Buddhist aspiration to be of benefit to other people through her work. 'I am really more a poet; I am not a political or analytical writer like Brecht, for example. I can only offer a perceptual

experience since my work is primarily non-verbal. In this society where we are continually diverted from the moment, where everything is being numbed, I feel like performance can wake you up to the moment. All we actually have is the moment' (2009:34).

In the video installations of American artist Bill Viola, the existential is interrogated through such themes as mind, perception and reality, purpose and meaning in life, consciousness, death and the transcendent. A practitioner and student of both Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Viola's work crosses disciplines through his use of performance which renders some of his work closer to a theatrical experience than one of simply watching a moving painting or a film. Lacking traditional narrative form, his works are circular and durational in that they are displayed as video loops which the spectator can join at any given point. In the gallery, the canvas is replaced by LCD monitor. Viola's own religious trajectory led him to see the links between Eastern spirituality and philosophy with his Western roots in Christianity. Both streams have influenced his work although, as Grotenhuis comments in *The Art of Bill Viola* (2004), 'Viola may appropriate or misappropriate sources, Asian or Western, but, in the end, the sources are obscured or transformed, often beyond recognition, in making an artwork that is uniquely his own' (Grotenhuis in Townsend 2004: 171). An example of this is his epic video work, *The Nantes Triptych* (1992). Modelled after the triptychs of traditional Christian classical art, Buddhist meditations on birth, death and impermanence are depicted across three screens. The first screen shows a woman giving birth to a baby, inspired by the birth of Viola's first child. The third screen is a video of his mother in the final stages of death while the larger screen, in the centre, displays a naked man jumping into water and slowly sinking down and out of shot (the video was taken using an underwater camera). Describing its place within the European cultural tradition, Viola expands on the framework within which *The Nantes Triptych* sits:

> I consider myself to be part of a long tradition of artmaking, a tradition that includes my own cultural background of Europe, as well as the late twentieth century's expanded range of Oriental and ancient Eurasian culture, and even embraces our current nineteenth-century French model of the post-academy avant-garde and its rejection of tradition. I do feel that there are serious problems with the conclusions of a 150-year-long evolution of the rejection of tradition, as necessary as it was in the first place. Especially, our

> connection to Eastern culture should not be undervalued (Viola 1995:244).

In many ways, Viola has developed his own performance practice through the use of non-actors in a purely video-centred medium and owes much to the performance art paradigm as a way of framing his work within established performance traditions. His work also clearly sits within the durational performance matrix, in spite of the fact that the performers do not undergo the physical constraints inherent in live durational works. Instead, the durational aspect plays upon the consciousness of the spectator alone.

E.R. George in *Buddhism as/in Performance* (1999) makes the case for an epistemology of contemporary performance (derived from phenomenology), developing the theory that it is a paradigm that stands in the face of Modernism's text-based framework. He posits the ability of performance to reflect new ways of dealing with time, space, self, knowledge and experience and, therefore, claims it to be a philosophical method of inquiry of its own, 'a model of existential reality' (George 1999:33). This is supported by Marco de Marinis in *The Semiotics of Performance* (1993) who conceptualizes theatre and performance as 'an autonomous primary phenomenon', predicated on ephemerality and unable to be subjected to a singular analytical model. The performance 'event' stands apart from both the text and institution of transmission and requires a framework for accessing its unique epistemology (Marinis 1993:1). These include, as outlined by George:

TEMPORALITY: Since a performance only exists within the confines of time, its life is only lived in the present. Once documented in another form, it is no longer performance.

SINGULARITY: No two performances are ever the same.

PARTICULARITY: 'Performances reverse what language has done to the world: they restore the specificity of experienced phenomena and to that extent every performance is a betrayal of every text – but only because every text is already a betrayal of the primary experience of reality' (George 1999:26). He goes on to present the philosophical implications of this reversal through Hume's position of the interdependence of experiential phenomena (echoing Buddhist philosophy).

DOUBLING: Every performance contains within it latent 'doubles', the possibilities of other choices that could have been made to express meaning either visually, temporally, spatially or auditory and which exist as a basis for comparison.

LIMINALITY: Performance takes place within liminal 'thresholds', between the real and not-real. It is this space that the audience are co-creating witnesses to, a 'Middle Way'.

OTHERINGS: In contrast to traditional theatre whereby the self in a role and as observer are co-existing, the field of performance takes a further step through the analysis of the performing psyche both on stage and in the audience. The self-reflecting 'I' of postmodern performance theory corresponds with the Buddhist phenomenological theory of the *skandhas* or aggregates which constitute sentient beings.

Phenomenology as a philosophy was developed in contrast to a semiotic approach based on dualism (as formulated by Descartes). In line with Buddhist skandha theory, Anna Fenemore introduces Maurice Merleau-Ponty's findings on the 'body-as-a-lived-entity' in *Performance Perspectives: A Critical Introduction* (2011). He elucidated his experience of the external world as being in a continuous state of mediation through the bodily senses and regarded being as arising out of the body through the act of perception (Fenemore in Pitches & Popat 2011:25). Paul Allain's work in *The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki: A Critical Study* (2009) elaborates on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to find that it 'furthered notions of performance as self-encounter and self-revelation before others (Allain 2009:18)' and was taken up by Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki as the primary philosophical approach underpinning his actor training.

Serving as an example of the consequences of developing an ongoing physical and spiritual practice founded on Noh training, Yoshi Oida in *The Invisible Actor* (1997) bridges Eastern and Western performance methodologies through his work with Peter Brook's company in Paris. Responsible for overseeing training, he emphasizes the need to bring the stage alive by fully preparing the body, beginning with cleanliness. Not only must the working space be clean but the way in which it is cleaned must be adhered to as a way of embodying the environment. This is done in

the traditional style of Zen Buddhist monks cleaning the monastery floors: cotton cloth, cold water, V-shaped body position and mindful awareness. In this way, the task fulfills a dual role of respect for the workspace as well as a daily training in concentration. Originally trained in traditional Japanese theatre, he uses Noh philosophy as a basis for training, particularly the concept of *Jo* (beginning/opening), *Ha* (break/development), and *Kyu* (fast/climax). Oida is aware that Western performers use this structure unconsciously whereas the Japanese classical theatre tradition has codified the pattern in order to work with it consciously in all areas of performance from structuring the rhythm of an entire play down to a single gesture. Just as in the martial arts, the purpose of training is 'freedom' and Oida stresses commitment to any kind of training that supports this goal:

> Effort, training, study and work are what you concentrate on. After a long period of slog, a kind of freedom emerges. You no longer think about what you are doing or how you are achieving your effects. The performance simply happens. This freedom is the actor's 'nothingness'. At the highest level it is like being a baby; nothing is planned or consciously constructed, but your thoughts and feelings emerge with vitality and total clarity (Oida 1997: 124).

Drawing from an earlier performance tradition and adding to the specificity of this research, the Mexico City based Theatre Research Workshop focuses on performance and research in culturally specific rites from which its founder, Nicolas Nuñez has developed a philosophy of participatory performance known as *Anthropocosmic Theatre* (1996). As part of his research into traditional theatre rites, Nuñez travelled to Dharamsala, India to observe and train in Tibetan Buddhist dance theatre, most of which is passed on through the oral tradition. The only text available on the subject, the *Rolmoe Tenchoe*, is based on the Indian *Natyasastra*, originally written to provide classical Indian performers with a structure from which to train in the performing arts. Nuñez recognized that the form he was learning, the Dance of the Black Hat, was essentially a meditation in action. He describes the dance as being a mirror of the cosmos with its swirling patterns not unlike the traditional Nahautlan dances of his native country. The essence he draws from the Dance of the Black Hat and which he views as applicable to contemporary performance methodology is threefold: at its finest, performance is a moving meditation created through a 'defined body alphabet' and imbues the

performer with energy; the performer is likened to a warrior in battle whose ultimate aim is freedom; and that the 'battle is essentially internal. The performer is striving to maintain the level of attention in the "here and now", by offering energy to the essences, with energetic resonance in the external world' (Nuñez 1996:12). Finally, Nuñez is not interested in taking on the systems of others but of using them as guides in the discovery of his own experience of his 'psychophysical instrument,' a bodymind that must be explored within the context of a group. *Anthropocosmic Theatre* is not a system or methodology but a process within theatre research which challenges the performer to investigate his entire being in service of a theatre which offers the audience an intercultural dynamic 'because at this stage of evolution we cannot ignore the fact that the vitality and internal spell of any artistic manifestation is no longer the heritage of any particular group or clan, but rests beneath the skin of any human being' (1996: 151).

This philosophy was carried out in the early monastic arts training of Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Highly prescribed and leaving no room for individual expression, he eventually settled in the United States after fleeing Chinese occupied Tibet, having first studied Western cultural arts practices in England. In *True Perception: The Path of Dharma* Art, Trungpa (2008) developed a specifically Buddhist approach to arts practice. He discerned the difference between exhibitionist art and its split from the audience and that which is produced in order to effect and embody the viewer to the same extent as the artist. Worley (2001), a student of the late Trungpa, formulates the particulars of his methodology for the performing arts in *Coming from Nothing: The Sacred Art of Acting*. 'Mudra Space Awareness' is a way for performers to retain synchronicity with themselves and each other under the pressure of performance conditions. In other words, it is a training in 'sensitivity to the interplay of form and space' (Worley 2001:123). An example of an exercise in attention is the following:

> Pay attention to a single object for a long period of time… First, just look. Keep looking. Notice how quickly you get bored with looking. Notice how your sixth consciousness (mind) suggests that it is time to move on. Keep looking (2001:45).

The exercise facilitates training in awareness of the ways in which the habitual mind engages with external sense objects and attempts to contextualize experience

temporally through thinking about the past, manifesting thoughts about the present or wishing for the future. These all hinder our ability to experience the world accurately without recourse to theories and ideas about our experience. The training is about loosening the border between action and openness, enabling the performer to react authentically.

By contrast, the closest secular performance form to use awareness and presence-based practices is improvisation. It allows for an open acceptance of success or failure as an integral component in the exploration of new ideas, without needing any inspiration from Buddhism. Along with meditative enquiry, however, comes another experiential layer of understanding and potential ground for a deeper investigation into the workings of improvisation practice. Although Buddhist-inspired performance methodology is a narrow field of practice and inquiry, the trainings that have been developed offer processes for developing meditative approaches to creating new work that would fall under the heading of Dharma Art. 'Action Theater' was developed by Buddhist performer and teacher Ruth Zaporah as a meditation based approach to performance through improvisation. Using movement, sound and dialogue, Zaporah's training exercises as described in *Action Theatre: The Improvisation of Presence* deconstruct habitual behaviours and thought patterns through explorations within specific frameworks (including aspects of contact improvisation and composition). Working with the framework of the Performance Score, an exercise using autobiography might involve four performers facing the rest of the group and taking turns to speak life stories, beginning with basic background information. The 'monologues' are interrupted by each other and serve as a training in new ways of listening, from both 'inside and outside of the sound… All that's required is to turn attention toward the flow of sound: the mouth and ear experience' (Zaporah 1995:10). It is also an exercise in differentiating the way in which we hear *form* as separate yet connected to the way in which we hear content. As an awareness and performance training, Action Theater is a way of 'remembering and unlearning what stopped us before' (1995:232).

Another training method for the development of awareness and, specifically, as a way to build ensemble quickly, is Viewpoints. Although originally grounded in the work of choreographer Mary Overlie and taken up and developed for actors by Anne Bogart (2005), the Viewpoints are the translation of a philosophy

into a technique for working with 'the natural principles of movement, time and space' and, therefore, cannot be attributed to an originator of the work (Bogart and Landau 2005:7), although the authors have outlined in detail the way to work with Viewpoints in *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* (2005). In this guide, Bogart and Landau also describe techniques for the creation of new works for the stage which come under the heading of Composition. Trained in Tai Chi, Bogart's intentions are expressed in her first publication on the subject, *Viewpoints*, in which she uses a language in tune with Buddhist terminology:

> I want to create theatre that is full of terror, beauty, love and belief in the innate human potential for change. In dreams begin responsibility. How can I begin to work with this spirit? How can I work, not to conquer, but to embrace terror, disorientation and difficulty? (Bogart 1995:8)

Lampe (2001), in Watson's text *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, describes how Bogart joined forces with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki in 1992 to form SITI Company in order to create an international network of theatre artists and, specifically, to promote a new form of actor training in the United States. The performer training they developed combined two seemingly opposing methodologies: Viewpoints, with a focus on external experience and its expression and Suzuki's Method of Actor Training, coming from an internal focus. What is clear is that both methods concentrate the performer in a heightened awareness of both the performative environment as well as the expression of physical and mental aliveness (two byproducts of Buddhist meditation practice). Alongside this aliveness lies a commitment to truth which Suzuki (1986), in *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, not only ties to language and its intimate connection to the body but to the art of performance:

> The art of stage performance cannot be judged by how closely the actors can imitate or recreate ordinary, everyday life… An actor uses his words and gestures to try to convince his audience of something profoundly true. It is this attempt that should be judged (Suzuki 1986:5).

The integration of both mental and physical bodily systems is a core component of Suzuki training. Allain (2002) describes this in *The Theatre Practice of Tadashi*

Suzuki: A Critical Study as the attempt to create a 'body-mind' (Allain 2002:4). He emphasizes the method's Asian philosophical stance and identifies it as linking Eastern traditional and Western contemporary performance methodologies. One aspect of this is Suzuki's use of 'animal energy', borrowed from the depiction of the gods in both the Kabuki and Noh theatres. Forming the ritual aspect of Suzuki's theatre, his 'gods' exist for the spectators' role as partners in a 'shared sacred space' (2002:5), not unlike Grotowski describes in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968). This is the 'total act' in which the actor is expected to reveal the most hidden and unconscious parts of himself to an audience (Grotowski 1968:35).

Jerzy Grotowski dedicated his life to uncovering the realms normally hidden from both the actor and spectator: the uncompromised self undisturbed by pretenses of the personality. As a theatre researcher, he returned to ritual (the 'repetition of an archetypal act') through refinement of the mode of participation of both actor and spectator. This was a similar discovery of Abramovic in her assessment of the *Public Body*. According to Ritchie in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (1997), Grotowski's theatre resembles some of the performance practices of Asia insofar as its ritual aspect is concerned. Where they differ, though, is that 'Grotowski uses ritual to attack and Asia uses it to reassure' (Ritchie in Schechner & Wolford 1997:145). The audience's social mask, as described by McCutcheon in *Awakening the Performing Body* (2008), is forced to be abandoned and states of consciousness buried beneath cultural roles can be achieved by both actor and spectator in a process of self-realization. She highlights Grotowski's preoccupation with performance not as entertainment but as a vehicle for man's inner search in the same way as monks utilize music or liquor making to structure the daily stream of inner spiritual development (McCutcheon 2008:29).

Having worked alongside Grotowski in the early 1960s, Eugenio Barba highlights his influence in *The Paper Canoe* (1995) by outlining Grotowski's model of the theatre laboratory within which the actors conducted their performance experiments. He went on to extensively research the connections between Eastern and Western performance methodologies and used it to focus on process over product. He was most concerned with the ways in which Eastern performance forms are able to project such powerful presences on stage although he insisted that Western performers should not try and reproduce these forms but use them to explore and further their own training methods. He conceived of the two basic

aspects of Eastern forms, described by Phillip Zarilli in *Acting (Re)Considered* (1995), which account for the actors' powerful presence on stage: '…the use of learned body techniques designed to break the performer's automatic daily responses and the codification of principles which dictate the use of energy during performance' (Watson in Zarrilli 1995:133). These 'learned body techniques', also known as 'extra-daily behaviours' are connected in *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (1991), to the idea of pre-expressivity, 'a level of performance which deals with how to render the actor's energy scenically alive…which immediately attracts the spectator's attention' (Barba and Savarese 1991:188). Barba sought to establish a transcultural performance practice based on 'recurring principles', an undertaking which he saw as the overriding responsibility of theatre anthropology. He did not want performers to be burdened or restricted by one methodology but to engage in a fluidity enriched by cross-cultural performance techniques (Barba 1995:15). The way in which these techniques enable performers to emit energy and presence on stage is through the harmonizing of the 'three organs of the body of the theatre' (Meyer-Dinkgrafe 1997:36). In his article 'Barba's Concepts of the Pre-Expressive and the Third Organ of the Body of the Theatre and Theories on Consciousness', Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe defines Barba's organs as consisting of daily body techniques; the 'organ of u-topia' or super-ego which raises the daily technique to 'a social and spiritual dimension'; and an indefinable third organ which cannot be taught, an organ of pure presence (1997:36).

Around the same time as Grotowski and Barba were beginning to experiment, an invitation was extended to A.C. Scott to run the Asian/Experimental Theatre Program at the University of Wisconsin – Madison in 1963. Later run by Philip Zarilli, the program trains performers in 'psychophysical' acting as a further paradigm to be considered alongside the dominant Western psychological approaches. It does not reject the psychological approach but works alongside it through its emphasis on the discipline of the body and the energetic patterns that can be trained towards optimum expression on the stage. Drawing from Eastern spiritual and physical training systems such as t'ai chi ch'uan, yoga and other martial arts, actors undergo an intercultural training 'through which to cultivate the bodymind toward a state of readiness and through which to discover an alternative psychophysiological relationship to the bodymind-in-action' (Zarilli 1995:183).

'Acting is the art of standing still while not standing still,' according to a traditional Chinese treatise on the art of acting and quoted by A.C. Scott for the Asian Theatre Project (Scott in Benedetti 1973:463). After close observation of a performance by an actress from the Beijing Opera, Benedetti reflected on what he considered to be one of the major differences between Western and Eastern actors:

> The Western actor often tends to be at the mercy of his own energy because his technique is incapable of encompassing it fully; he has to 'work himself up' to high energy levels, while the Eastern actor instead carries with him a powerful but balanced energy source which he taps freely as needed. In short, the Western actor makes things happen while the oriental actor allows his energy to flow (1973:464).

When asked about her training, the Beijing Opera actress remarked that she did not prepare so much for a role as develop an ongoing physical and spiritual practice. I highlight this example in order to contextualize some of the perceived cultural differences between East and West that may serve as useful guidelines to the performer wishing to bring Buddhism into their performance practice. I also recognize the potential flaw in seeking to define 'East' and 'West' through the lens of cultural practices. A performance becomes an act of surrender and, it could be said, the act of surrendering the Self is also a form of autobiography.

Developing another embodied approach to performer training, both physical and spiritual, Daniel Mroz works with the principles of martial arts which he learned through his work with Richard Fowler, a Canadian student of Eugenio Barba. In *The Dancing Word: An Embodied Approach to the Preparation of Performers and the Composition of Performances* (2011), Mroz is interested in the synthesis of traditional 'body technologies' and performer training which he views as fertile ground for ontological research in all its manifestations (social, aesthetic, existential and spiritual) as relevant to the performing arts. He highlights the centrality of ontology to both Asian martial and performing arts and uses the term 'unitive experience' to describe those 'moments of self-awareness that are produced by the conscious use of theatre… and martial arts as frameworks for ontological research' (Mroz 2011:21). Less interested in transformative peak experiences, Mroz is concerned with methods that enable performers to uncover their natural state of being or 'original nature', a key component in Marina Abramovic's training methods.

One of the essential Tibetan Buddhist principles he draws inspiration from is that of *View, Path* and *Fruit.* Citing the teachings of Tibetan Buddhist teacher Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, Mroz adds three further concepts: *Flower, Ground* and *Gate* and applies them all to performer training. *Fruition* is the coming together of the qualities of presence in the performer, developed and maintained through training; *Flower* denotes visible performative qualities such as form, action and intention; *Path* includes training of the physical body and the refinement of subtle skills; *Ground* is the bodymind through which the training occurs; and *View* is the recognition that training is not necessarily oriented towards a goal but a development of an awareness of presence. *Gate* is simply an analogy for the state of curiosity, which is necessary to maintain long term if the *fruit* of the training is to arise. Using these principles, Mroz has taken his teacher's goals and made them his own. Quoting Fowler's reasons for wanting to work with the ideas of Grotowski and Barba:

> I wanted to change myself… I began to develop the idea
> of the artist as the instigator or the element of change.
> That the function of an actor could be other than to entertain,
> as it is normally understood; that the actor's function could be
> to change the perception of reality, to open up people's
> perceptions to other levels of reality beyond the daily (2011:40).

In other words, it is the change in consciousness in the form of mindful awareness to actions, sustained through consistent training, which contributes most significantly to a state of active presence on stage. The training techniques developed by Mroz, Abramovic, Barba et al are all significant contributions to my own discovery of methodology that serves as a training for the performing of the self in the genre of autobiographical performance art.

In tracing the dissemination of Buddhism in the West through to its contemporary cultural manifestations in the performing arts, both Western and Eastern theory supports the findings of performance makers in reflecting our own creative responses to queries surrounding selfhood, presence and identity. Through the continued pursuit of training and practice in meditative action as it applies to performance, the act of being in the present while in the company of spectators has the potential to transform the spectator-performer dynamic away from a dualistic relationship to one of unity. Significantly, this is the goal of both presence based

performance and Buddhist practice, a link suggesting the possibility for a true lack of boundary between life and art.

In the next section I will outline the prevailing themes within this project that pertain to autobiography and memory in which *Sutra* finds its grounding. It will also include a more detailed review of the literature relevant to this project in order to build some ground upon which this thesis is built.

Autobiography and Memory

> **Yet men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reach of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves.**
>
> **Augustine of Hippo (5th cen. CE)[21]**

> **The way that memory is valued… has shifted enormously from the idea of it being a storehouse of data… to the notion that it is a key to our emotional understanding of ourselves and the world.**
>
> **Joan Gibbons[22]**

> **Every theory is the fragment of an autobiography.**
>
> **Paul Valery[23]**

The polar shift between the lack of self-consciousness referred to by Augustine of Hippo 1500 years ago to the hyper self-consciousness of contemporary society is particularly apparent in this current age of the 'selfie'. I highlight this phenomenon as a way of foregrounding the genre of autobiography in performance and the challenges of self-representation. The spectrum of self-consciousness that positions a total lack of self-promotion with its polar opposite, narcissism, might suggest that it is a question of the positivity of the former versus the negativity of the latter. However, for the purposes of this project, I posit these extremes in their Buddhist

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[21] Brown, Peter (1967), *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 216

[22] Gibbons, Joan (2007), *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, London: I.B. Tauris, p.4

[23] Gilmore, Leigh (2001), *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma, Testimony, Theory*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 1

contexts in which questions of judgment come down as to whether either position serves as some kind of benefit. In other words, the subjectivity of each is in relation to the overall intention of the artist working with autobiography as a form of therapeutic encounter. This is an important distinction to be made about Buddhism which challenges the Judeo-Christian principle of good vs. evil.[24] Therefore, my motivation for working with autobiography is subject to all of the challenges and accusations lobbied at the genre for which I will attempt to offer a rebuttal throughout this thesis, particularly through my critique of the discourses surrounding trauma and testimony as an archival pursuit.

All five performances utilize autobiographical archival material both as stimuli for the creation of the works but also act as anchors during the performances as tools for stimulating affective responses. This form of performance art is 'always and necessarily bound up with the real space and time of embodied life and the real action and striving of a concrete self in relation to the world' (McEvilley 2010:58). But in the present climate of 'mass-mediated confessional opportunities' (Heddon 2008:17), theatre and performance scholar Deirdre Heddon attempts to establish the place of autobiographical performance within the current performance milieu. In spite of ill-judged accusations of self-indulgence and narcissism due to the presentation of 'self' in a public forum, emphasis is placed on the ability of autobiography to reveal more universal themes to an audience through self-revelation leading the author to dub the genre 'performance[s] of possibility' (2008:2). Tending towards the marginalized, the genre is dominated by women seeking to transcend prescribed socio-political gender roles:

> Located within and arising out of the second-wave feminist movement, autobiographical performance was regarded by women as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self (2008:3).

Forging a relationship with an audience, performers are necessarily informed by the site of the body as place, engendered with personal history and culture as well as the complex layers of selfhood. Conducting the study within an Anglo-American

[24] Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche refers to good and evil as 'of one taste' and, therefore, impossible to analyse in binary terms. See: Campbell, June (2002), *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity, and Tibetan Buddhism*, London: A & C Black, p. 170.

context, Heddon recognizes the inherent limitations and suggests that 'the study of other cultural renderings of autobiographical performance might expose the very extent to which the idea of "identity" and its practice in daily life is a Western rather than a universal concept (2008:12).' The notion of processual politics is also examined in order to raise questions around the ethics and practice of the 'others' who appear in name and/or image in performances (in *Sutra* these are my parents and grandparents as well as my partner's parents, siblings and abuser). Drawing from examples of this ethical uncertainty, it is suggested that performance as a means to create a structure from which the past can be examined or 'exorcised', even if never entirely understood, is enough to warrant the ethical concerns secondary to the performers' right to share their lives in public. The popularity of autobiographical performance 'begs the questions of whether, and how, it can remain politically urgent and useful. When and where is the personal political?' (2008:17) Citing Jill Dolan and her aspirations for her students, using autobiographical performance to 'make the world better' and 'to incite people to profound responses that shake their consciousness of themselves in the world' (Dolan 2001:456) is deemed enough of a reason for the genre to be taken seriously amongst its critics and supporters.

In the field of Buddhist scholarship, the subject of autobiographical memory has received very little attention other than to investigate the remembrance of past lives. Buddhist scholar Janet Gyatso attempts to fill the gap with a collection of essays in her book *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness & Remembrance in Indian & Tibetan Buddhism* (1992) covering the role and meaning of memory in both Buddhist practice and theoretical discourse. Confined to the study of mnemic modes of memory as opposed to some of the distinctions within Western schools of thought (e.g. primary memory, body memory and semantic memory, to name a few), comparisons are nonetheless made due to the challenges of translations from Sanskrit and Pali texts that have never been standardized. According to Buddhist philosophy, different types of memory serve as either positive, negative or neutral, depending on their function. The most beneficial type of memory is deemed to be 'that which engages the ground of primordial awareness' (Gyatso 1992:12), which can be thought of as recognition of one's own enlightened qualities of mind. It is said that other types of memory are simply

distractions. The only source of knowledge that is considered authoritative is 'direct perception', which is not the same as recollection.

> One variety of memory so excluded [from authoritative sources of knowledge] is mundane recognition, which involves the identification of something perceived in the present with something perceived in the past. Since the Buddhists believe that everything is in flux, and therefore different from moment to moment, such an identification must, strictly speaking, be false. In fact, it is precisely the act of ignoring this flux that makes possible the superimposition of an essential, enduring identity such as 'I' onto a 'stream', this in turn leading to misguided emotions such as the 'conceit that I am' (1992:13).

In spite of this perceived misguidance, it becomes the catalyst for the autobiographical encounter in *Sutra*, becoming a representation of the doctrine of No self. The two essays in Gyatso's text that deal most directly with my field of inquiry are Alex Wayman's 'Buddhist Terms for Recollection and Other Types of Memory' and Edward Casey's 'Remembering Resumed: Pursuing Buddhism and Phenomenology in Practice'. Wayman points to Buddhist logic and its main consideration: Can memory be held up as an authority? He distinguishes two types of memory, that of keeping or holding something in mind and that of recollection of prior experience. Traditional Buddhist texts tend to focus on the first type due to the emphasis on memorization and insight meditation (*Vipassana*), involving the holding of an object in mind as a focal point. The author focuses on the second type, however, in order to examine its potential authoritative basis for which he finds a series of debates between early Indian Buddhist scholars (4^{th} – 6^{th} cen. CE) and their respective Tibetan commentaries. He concludes that, according to Buddhist philosophy, the only reliable or authoritative memory is reached through the realization of *samadhi* (the highest stage of meditative concentration). In linking this claim to *Sutra*, I recognize the limitations of performance art to trigger such a high state of meditative absorption and suggest, instead, that the performance art event serves to point the mind towards, at the very least, some level of meditative equipoise. This refers simply to a substantially relaxed nervous system such that the arising of psychophysical disturbances is diminished.

As the only contributor outside the field of Buddhist studies, Casey offers his expertise in phenomenology as an adjunct to the collection's emphasis on remembrance as 'mnemic engagement' (1992:273). In spite of Buddhist

scholarship's refutation of the relevance of classical phenomenology to their domain, the author argues the case for being able to illuminate the Buddhist understanding of memory through phenomenological discourse.[25] Since Buddhist practice concerns attention rather than simply memory, the case is made for an inter-relationship between the two using Husserl's distinction of '…primary memory, the memory of the just-elapsed event *even as it is elapsing'* (ibid., author's emphasis). Therefore, attention depends on memory in order to grasp the experience of an event. Defining primary memory as both memory and perception, Husserl described it as memorial in nature in terms of the effect on a passing event and perceptual in terms of its reliance on intuition in order to grasp the weight of the event. By cross-referencing Buddhist scholarship with phenomenology, Casey makes the case for their convergence: 'Phenomenology illuminates the paradox of Buddhism's immersion in, and yet neglect of, memory' (1992:275). These insights are particularly relevant to this performance project as I attempt to make a case for the use of Self in order to realize No self. My argument is especially bound up with the idea of memory as stimulus for the liberating forces of insight.

In attempting to evaluate the place of memory in phenomenological terms, cultural historian Don Gifford argues against the objectivity of science as the sole path to knowledge and posits the notion of memory as an unstable phenomenon that can only be understood poetically (Gifford 2011:103). Linking consciousness as a function of memory, the development of memory in children is outlined as a circular process involving the learning of language, meaning and memory alongside each other. Three levels of memory are distinguished by psychologists in the young child: 'generic' memory in which familiar places are stored as general forms; 'episodic' memory which is relegated to unusual or special events; and 'autobiographical' memory, that which arises as the child develops language and narrative, beginning around the age of three years old. Later, narrative memory begins to dominate as the child develops empathy and subjectivity, further strengthening 'the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds' (Bruner in Gifford 2011:73). In the adult mind, a fractured past remains due to the fragmented ways in which memories are stored and interpreted. 'As memory grows, the young begin to enter into the "sign-stream" of

[25] Although practiced within other related fields throughout the centuries (e.g. logic, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, etc.) I refer to classical phenomenology as the field developed in the 20th century by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, et al.

our culture' (2011:74), a culture created by personal memories or autobiographies continually defined and re-defined by the individual moving forward through time and contributing to their own culture's collective narrative. With regard to the making of art, Gifford recognizes that memory, as a process, enables its creation due to the fact that without it, 'no voice could be raised in song or story. And without memory, the listener could literally not hear the song or story' (2011:39).

Describing the interdisciplinarity of the field of memory studies, Astrid Erll believes its basis lies in questions from the field of anthropology: 'How do people refer to temporal processes? How do they construct images and narratives of the past in different social, cultural and historical contexts?' (Erll 2011:11) Regarding individual autobiographical memory, Maurice Halbwachs' social frameworks theory is described as the necessity of fellow human beings in the creation of individual memory due to our participation in a 'collective symbolic order [through which] we can discern, interpret and remember past events' (2011:15). Erll also places emphasis on emotions as indistinguishable from memory, a notion backed up by scientific research on the brain (as outlined earlier through the work of Joseph LeDoux).

> With an eye towards autobiographical memory, functional imaging has shown that different regions of the brain are activated during the recall of positive vs. negative experiences, from the more recent vs. more distant past, or of imagined vs. actually experienced events – in other words, that our brain differentiates in reference to affect, time, and facticity of what is being remembered (2011:88).

Concluding that autobiographical memory is the most narrative of all individual systems of memory (and that cultural memory relies on this narrative system), Erll argues that all forms of literary (i.e. cultural) media have a direct influence on human memory systems and 'transmit[s] patterns for encoding experience' (2011:170). This is particularly relevant to the notion of intertextuality.

In making an analysis of autobiography in contemporary art, art historian Joan Gibbons links the self-representation of artists from its foundations in the works of Rembrandt in the seventeenth century through to the present day with the confessional works of Louise Bourgeois, Frida Kahlo and Tracy Emin. Theorists such as Henri Bergson and Pierre Nora are cited as contributing to the understanding of the 'enactments and re-enactments in art as memory practices' (Gibbons 2007:6)

through their expression of memory as the junction between the mind and phenomena as well as the idea of memory as expressed through a site (object, event or place). It is Gibbons's aim to further the public understanding of some of the ways in which contemporary art practices have contributed to the construction of new knowledge and understanding of the workings of memory towards which this thesis aims to contribute. The Freudian theory of *Nachträglichkeit* or 'afterwardness' is introduced as a reflection upon confessional artworks: '[A]n original experience is reconstituted, retranscribed or rearranged in relation to ongoing circumstances – not only to replay the experience but to gather new meaning and endow it with a psychical effectiveness that has been lost by the repression of the experience' (2007:15). It is this notion of hindsight that informs my work within the genre of autobiography and alongside which I position its pedagogical function. Throughout *Sutra* a sense of catharsis or healing is enabled through creating works of art out of painful or traumatic memories. As Bourgeois remarked, 'You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you? If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are seed for sculpture' (Bourgeois in Gibbons 2007:17).

In furthering this review of the literature to include the social sphere in which my performance project positions itself, the strength of an image to reflect on contemporary social issues is illustrated by art historian Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, a scholar of film and photography studies. In *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (2007), the authors analyse the impact of personal and collective trauma as depicted through visual media. Presenting essays in the fields of memory and trauma studies, the theme of 'bearing witness' is used as a focal point for an analysis of video and photo archives which is relevant to my own use of archival material. The authors also make the connection between the act of bearing witness to historical trauma and psychoanalysis due to the process by which the witness begins to narrativise an event as a way of externalizing a memory. In the same way, the agency of the traumatic image provides the secondary witness or audience member with 'a cultural space in which individual processes of working through historical trauma are mediated into collective ones' (Guerin and Hallas 2007:11). Here I make a connection to the argument for the therapeutic encounter between performer and audience. They underpin their analysis with Jacques Derrida's philosophy on the poetics and politics of witnessing, namely that of the

image's inability to prove an event but to contain a 'phenomenological capacity' to convey the past in the present. This is represented by the liveliness of the image as detached from the pressures of documentation as a way of reflecting upon possible truths. Essentially, the complexity inherent in the conception of an image (or, in my case, a performance) depicting trauma involves the intersubjective awareness and engagement of both primary and secondary witness in the co-creation of collective memory. In *Sutra*, this refers to the collective engagement of empathy in realizing that individuals may have more in common through shared suffering than realized.

As a further contribution to the introduction of my thesis, I turn briefly to the origin of art. Telling the tale of the origin of painting from Pliny's *Natural History*, art historian Lisa Saltzman elaborates on the statement, 'All agree that it began with tracing an outline around a shadow' (Saltzman 2006:1). Declaring it a paradigm for the understanding of the interaction of art and memory, commemoration is seen as arising from the impulsive need to remember as a ritual deed. Representational strategies are reflected upon through theorists such as Derrida, arguing the case of the weakness of the artist and the failure for art to achieve anything other than representation.

> In a cultural present that is consumed by the concept, if not always the actual work of memory, Pliny's tale allows us to understand something of how and why memory and visual culture are conjoined in the present, how and why it is through certain types of visual objects that we are able to bear witness, even if only belatedly and obliquely, to the histories that are at once found and confound our identities (2006: 5-6).

In many ways, Saltzman poses the most interesting argument against the ability for performance art to instigate any kind of process of transformation. However, I would argue that Buddhist-influenced performance art, in some ways, operates outside the paradigm of mere representation for the way in which it engages with meditation practice, itself a transformative act. Transformation, in essence, is a living example of change and impermanence and, hence, moves beyond mere representation.

Suite in Four Parts

Sutra: Five Works for Performance is, in essence, a work of living memory in which I use reflections on the past to prompt meditation on self and identity through working with a visual and, sometimes, aural archive. It is worth mentioning that although the contribution of the field of phenomenology is a central concern of PaR, it does not form the central theoretical axis of this thesis other than as a given perspective of subjectivity. I have chosen, instead, to focus my attention on some of the pertinent aspects of literary theory to deal with the central themes of *Sutra*.

In Chapter One, I introduce some of the major contributions by artists in the 20th and 21st centuries working with Buddhist philosophy and/or practice as a primary instigator in their work. The survey contributes to the developing discourse in intertextuality to which this thesis is, in part, a response. Artists include John Cage, Allan Kaprow and the Happenings movement, Fluxus art, Marina Abramović, Meredith Monk and Ann Hamilton. I position their work alongside theories of performance such as those of Hans Thies Lehmann and Erika Fischer-Lichte and the use of autopoiesis in performance. Fundamentally this is useful for my work because they not only demonstrate a contemporary Buddhist aesthetic thread running through the genre but, as pioneers in many ways, they also inspire discourse on the numinous. I also introduce ideas drawn from literary theory to demonstrate the way in which Buddhist-influenced performance art is, essentially, pedagogy-in-action. The most important idea is that of the 'beside' as established by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her contribution to theories of affect. Later in the chapter I draw from the work of Hélène Cixous for her positioning of theory alongside embodiment. The chapter presents an argument for the arts as the 'beside' of cultural production as well highlighting the relationship between learning and doing which is fundamental to any PaR project. Although theory is very useful for helping to articulate the discourse that my performance project is attempting to engage with, more importantly it is working to bridge some of the diverse fields of inquiry that may, at first glance, seem incompatible. After all, neither scientists nor literary theorists set out to illuminate the field of Buddhist-influenced performance art and yet their work speaks to the pedagogical function of the genre.

Chapter Two begins the analysis of the first two performance art works in *Sutra*, staged for the difficulties they create in working with afflictive emotions.

Sedgwick's theory of the 'beside' is used to frame some of the philosophical underpinnings of the two performances, particularly that of emptiness and impermanence. I also introduce the work of American artist Ann Hamilton whose *Meditation Boat* serves as a lens through which the concept of the 'between' is positioned alongside affect theory in analyzing *At Sea: 1980 - 2010*. The chapter also attempts to define the Buddhist epistemological concepts of Self and No self and their place within a discourse of Buddhist-influenced performance art. I argue that autobiography in performance is primarily a philosophical stance and use some of the prevailing explanations of the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness and the role of suffering. The chapter contributes to the development of a methodology for performing philosophy and acts as a foundation to the second half of *Sutra* for the way it attempts to bring testimony and pedagogy into alignment with the therapeutic nature of autobiography. Finally, I introduce the idea of memory as archive and draw from psychotherapy and semiotics to highlight some of the ways in which symbolic codes are used as therapeutic tools to arouse memory. In the analysis of *No(h) Father* I look at the influence of Japanese Noh theatre in the creation of a quasi-exorcism in performance terms.

Chapter Three begins with the story of the historical Buddha, Prince Siddhartha Gautama and his position as 'the world's first performance artist', according to Cage biographer Kay Larson (Baas and Jacob 2004:64). Here the notion of the 'beside' is used to look at the theme of death in the second half of *Sutra*. Jacques Derrida provides an essential perspective on *(whispers)* from his book *The Work of Mourning* (2001) while the idea of 'liberation through long duration' is expounded upon through *Still Life*. This chapter also draws out ideas from trauma theorists Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth for the way in which they contribute to an understanding of trauma as pedagogy. I will then return to Derrida for his work on the archive as I maintain that the impetus for creating autobiography based on my life with my parents arises out of the same quest for origins from which the word 'archive' derives from. I use this in order to make the connection between the archive and the trauma narrative and its transformation through Buddhist practice.

Moving away from the solo performance, Chapter Four positions myself in the role of witness to the trauma testimony of my partner, Nick Bishop, in *Boudhanath*. The performance seeks to explore questions on the nature of public meditation practice while continuing the discourse of how to perform philosophy. I

return to the work of Marina Abramović and one of the many duets she performed with her partner Ulay. As exemplars in relational performance art, their work offers insight into an aspect of Karl Jung's work he called 'the descent into Hades' (Jung 1966/2013:84). I also highlight the symbolic elements of the performance such as the Zen *ensō* or circle as well as the symbolism of the Tibetan stupa from which the performance gets its title. Finally, the chapter highlights the idea of Buddhist performance art as a method of teaching compassion from which I draw from the work of Susan Sontag, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in a further examination of suffering and testimony. The chapter comes to a close with the performance of Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* (2002) and Peggy Phelan's contribution to an understanding of the goal of performance art to transform an audience. I link Buddhist performance art to one of the principles behind Chinese landscape painting: far from trying to reproduce a landscape, the art work tries to capture an essence of the numinous.

The analyses of the five performances that make up *Sutra* attempt to create a bridge between the themes of trauma, autobiography and Buddhism as framed by the field of performance art. Suggesting the 'transdisciplinarity' of the field of mindfulness and performance, Deborah Middleton and her colleagues at the Centre for Psychophysical Performance Research at the University of Huddersfield argue for the 'embodied experience of consciousness in action' (Adame and Middleton 2016). She uses the term transdisciplinarity as opposed to multi- or interdisciplinarity for the way in which equal status is given to the various streams of discourse and for the way in which the field works 'between, through and beyond disciplines… Our consciousness expands [and] limits of our biological, physical, social and spiritual conditions are exceeded. We emerge as subjects born again' (2016). Taking this insight as a directive, having completed the work for *Sutra*, the very least I can say is that I have become a 'subject born again' with the anger eliminated from my bones.

PATH

I. Orient/ations

> **I don't think you learn dharma art, you discover it; and you do not teach dharma art, but you set up an environment so it can be discovered.**
>
> **Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche [1]**

The history of Buddhism is a history of movement and synthesis of theories and practices within the prevailing cultures to which it has been established and is entirely predicated upon the *Buddhadharma* or teachings of the Buddha.[2] Tibetan Buddhist logic of *ground*, *path* and *fruition* is used as a tool for presenting the entire body of teachings as a systematic approach and is particularly appropriate for the field of practice-based research in the performing arts. Translator Tony Duff's description lays the foundations for the approach I am taking with this project:

> Ground, path and fruition is a type of logic used to understand a whole subject clearly. It can be applied to anything at all. When you use it, you look for the basic situation that exists and that is called the ground. You then look for the means to work with that ground, and that is called the path. The result that comes from using the method in relation to the ground is called the fruition. In Tibetan Buddhist teachings, ground, path and fruition logic is the tool used to present the theory of a body of teaching so that the practitioners can comprehend the whole teaching properly (Duff 2010:x).

By approaching this project using this example of Buddhist logic, I gained a clear understanding through practice how the teachings are illuminated through the path of experience while the study of performance artists engaged in Buddhist art

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[1] Trungpa Rinpoche (1940-1987) coined the term 'dharma art' to refer to 'art [that] has the power to awaken and liberate' (Trungpa Rinpoche 1994:2). See: Trungpa Rinpoche (2008), *True Perception: The Path of Dharma Art*, Boston: Shambhala Publications

[2] The term *dharma* is used within classical Indian traditions including the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh religions. The term derives from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ*, which translates as 'to hold, maintain or keep'. From the earlier Vedic Sanskrit stem *dharman-* or 'support, bearer'. Although there is no direct English translation, it is associated with the word 'teachings'. The term *Buddhadharma* distinguishes Buddhist from worldly or other religious teachings.

contributes to an understanding of the ground upon which the genre has been shaped.

The art forms that have arisen out of Buddhism, regardless of culture, are reflective of its pedagogic function, containing symbolic references pointing toward the fundamental principles of its philosophy as remedies to the entire spectrum of human suffering. The intersection of artists engaged with Buddhist practice and philosophy reflects the compatibility of a 2,500-year-old religion with art as a means of self-knowledge.[3] As much as art history and scholarly discourse have brought to the field of performance art, the insight gained through practice-based inquiries cannot be underestimated for their phenomenological validity.[4] The Buddhist perspective referred to by Baas is grounded in action or, as theatre and performance scholar Barbara Bolt refers to it, '[t]he magic is in handling' (Bolt in Barrett & Bolt 2007:27). This is also Heidegger's observation in *Being and Time* (1966) in which he argues that there are certain types of knowledge that are contingent upon the direct handling of material and non-material processes (Heidegger 1962:95). To theorise about meditation is to know nothing about its process and, as a result, it risks losing its pedagogical potential. In bringing this perspective to performance art, a variety of methodologies and modes of expression have been developed, drawing directly and indirectly from all of the fundamental principles of the philosophy including the notion of emptiness or interdependence, impermanence, non-intention and altruism. It is the element of everyday life that continues to inspire Buddhist art for as long as problems continue to arise that demand a creative pedagogical response.

Up until the 20th century, Buddhist art retained its traditional forms as seen in the thanka painting tradition of Tibet, the Noh theatre of Japan and the ink brush paintings of the Japanese Zen tradition, amongst others. Buddhism eventually made its influence known in Western cultural production after its initial infiltration of Western culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through the work of the American transcendentalists and the Theosophist movement. In art its influence can be seen through artists such as Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh, both of whom took an interest in Buddhism. Art historian and philosopher Arthur Danto's statement that 'perhaps the most one culture can do for another is to give it

[3] The influence of Buddhism in contemporary art can be seen as much in the work of secular artists such as Abramović as those who consider themselves to be practicing Buddhists such as Monk.

[4] Although there are differences between practice-based scholarly research and arts practice outside of the academy, I am using the term 'practice-based enquiry' in the broader sense of arts practice as philosophical enquiry.

something it can creatively misunderstand and make its own' (Danto in Townsend 2004:171) is a strong rebuttal to the argument that interprets this as cultural homogenization. This is where the work of the artists outlined in this study takes on so much resonance and for which theories of performance serve to illuminate.

Despite a proliferation of Buddhist-inspired performance art from the 1950s to the present, the interface of Buddhism and performance art has not been widely explored within the field of performance scholarship outside of specific studies on the field of contemporary Buddhist art and in some specialized research on individual artists. Monographs on Marina Abramović, Bill Viola, Zhang Huan, Tehching Hsieh, Yoko Ono, John Cage, Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Nam June Paik, Kimsooja and Yves Klein have all been published within the last fifty years and although there have been two publications by art historian Jacquelynn Baas dealing with the wider field of Buddhism and the arts, scholarship has been confined to the Buddhist influence on contemporary art in general as well as on American artists of the 20th century.[5] More recently, further research has been made through the Mindfulness and Performance Project (MAP) by Deborah Middleton and Franc Chamberlin at the Centre for Psychophysical Performance at the University of Huddersfield along with their colleagues in the field who contribute to further understanding of the interface between performance and mindfulness. Researchers and practitioners associated with the project include Nicolas Nuñez of the Taller de Investigación Teatral (Theatre Research Workshop) in Mexico City and Daniel Plà from the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria in Brazil as well as Lee Worley at Naropa University in Colorado. The study of mindfulness in the context of theatre and performance draws from a variety of Buddhist streams and is not confined to any one tradition.

Reflecting the diversity of Buddhist cultures within their traditional performing art forms such as the Tibetan masked lama dances or the *wai khruu* ritual found in Thai Buddhist culture, contemporary forms of performance have grown alongside and out of already established categories within the performing

[5] See: Baas, J. and Jacob, M.J. (2004), *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles: University of California Press; Baas, J. (2005), *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*, Los Angeles: University of California Press; Larson, Kay (2012), *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism and the Inner Life of Artists,* New York: Penguin Press; and Perlman, Ellen (2012), *Nothing and Everything: The Influence of Buddhism on the American Avant-Garde 1942 – 1962,* Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

arts.[6] The aim of this chapter is to illuminate a branch of performance art that defines itself solely through its adherence to philosophical debates and practices that fall within the doctrinal tenets of Buddhism and serve as pedagogical tools for both performer and spectator. My purpose here is to investigate the range of pedagogical considerations of contemporary artists working with Buddhist practice as a way of examining the diversity of approaches within the field. I am also using these artists to highlight some of the differences between work produced in the 1950s and 60s that utilized more external signifiers of Buddhist philosophy to contemporary case studies in which a more subtle and internal approach is used. The practitioners highlighted in this study include John Cage, Marina Abramović and Meredith Monk as well as examples from the Happenings and Fluxus movements chosen for the specific ways in which their work represents creative approaches to Buddhist mind training (Tib. *Lojong*). These methods are echoed within my own performance art works and will be referred to in the proceeding chapters for the ways in which meditation and presence-based practices can be applied to the genre of autobiography as another step towards self-knowledge. Further case studies will be cited in later chapters as points of reference to specific aspects of my own performance work.

The significance of Buddhist epistemology is conceptualized against current theories of performance art which are fundamentally knowledge producing endeavours. I also posit the methodology of performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte alongside literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to offer a new understanding of pedagogy predicated upon the role of Buddhist philosophy in the construction of meaning. In so doing, I bring practice and theory together to show how these two modes work in tangent. Beginning with a brief history of the genre, this chapter highlights pedagogy through these artists to illuminate the ways in which presence and mindfulness practices translate as performance methodology. At the same time, the artworks offer an expression of the mind's ability to know or to cognize and suggest an alternative mode of performance making – one that is not predicated upon producing outcomes but on embodying the notion of No Self

[6] The *wai khruu* forms a part of the ceremonial rite before public performances of music and dance transferring the perceived power of the teacher or master of the art form to the performers (the rite is also connected to other traditional Thai practices such as martial arts and astrology); Performed annually before the start of the Tibetan New Year in February, the creation of the lama dance is attributed to Padmasambhava, the Indian pandit who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century CE. Its ritual purpose is to remove obstacles to the flourishing of Buddhist teachings in the world; This includes theatre and opera, dance, music and performance art.

through a process-oriented performance practice. The act of mental cognition forms the foundations of the Buddhist worldview and is fundamental to the understanding of Buddhist performance art. The definition of cognition reveals its relevance: 'the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge through thought, experience and the senses' (OED 1999). The term 'cognizance' displays its outcome: 'knowledge or awareness' (1999). Put simply, I demonstrate that Buddhist performance art is predicated upon the practice of cognition.

In order to further my study, this chapter utilizes discourses in affect theory and pedagogy in the development of a theoretical framework from which Buddhist philosophy and performance art work together towards the creation of a singular Buddhist performance methodology from which I draw inspiration in my own practice-based research. Although the works in this chapter are not obvious examples of autobiography, they reflect the importance of Buddhist mind training in forming the foundations of my autobiographical performance practice which forms the main content of the thesis. In many ways, Buddhist-inspired performance art represents a return to the artistic philosophy of the pre-iconic phase of Buddhist art in which the Buddha was only referenced through the symbolism of absence. [7] At the heart of these artists' works, there is nothing to be found because not only is nothing left behind but, as Buddhism posits, there was nothing there in the first place. Cage, Abramović and Monk all share the common theoretical ground of John Cage's 1949 'Lecture on Nothing': 'I am here and there is nothing to say' (Cage 2009: 109). It sums up both the aim of their work and the aim of Buddhism as practiced in order 'to sober and quiet the mind so that it is in accord with what happens.' (Cage in Baas 2005:166) Inspired by my predecessors to bring the art-life paradigm into my own work, I position myself amongst them in so far as they exemplify the degree to which performance art is able to theorize about the human condition beyond mere representation. The works under scrutiny exemplify the process of attempting to bring the audience into the practice of presence-awareness or mindfulness, therefore fulfilling its pedagogical promise to contribute to the development of the full human being or Buddha.[8] This pedagogical promise is connected to the doctrinal

[7] Art historians and archaeologists divide Buddhist art into pre-iconic (5th century – 2nd century BCE) and iconic phases (2nd century BCE – present). The pre-iconic phase consisted of depictions of the absence of the Buddha: his footprints carved in stone; an umbrella with nobody beneath it; an empty seat. Contemporary Buddhist inspired performance art reflects a similar adherence to the philosophical stance of No self.

[8] In both Pali and Sanskrit the term *Buddha* translates as awakened or enlightened.

teachings of the *Mahāyāna* (Skt.) or Great Vehicle that places emphasis on compassionate action although Buddhist scholar Richard Gombrich, in his analysis of the *Tevijja Sutta* (in the *Dīgha Nikāya* or Long Discourses of the Buddha), asserts the Buddha's claim that 'the attainment of total love, compassion, empathetic joy or equanimity [equates to] "liberation of the mind"'(Gombrich 2009:83) is also extant in the earlier Pali sources.[9] According to Buddhism, the 'full human being' is someone in whom the mind has been liberated from all of its obscurations, attachments and aversions. This type of mind is considered the mind of everything and nothing, a challenge to Western philosophical discourse in which the conception of 'nothing' requires the negation of something else. The Buddhist worldview posits that 'the experience of nothing…reveals the meaning of everything' (Gullette 1976:2). Out of this conception the works of Cage, Abramović and Monk begin to reveal their pedagogic function.

From East to West: The Meeting of Buddhism and Performance Art

> **What I do, I do not wish blamed on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen… I doubt whether I would have done what I have done.**
>
> **John Cage** [10]

One of the central arguments of this thesis is that pedagogy asserts itself wherever the subject of Buddhism is brought into play, a stance that is encoded in the term itself, derived from the Sanskrit noun *budhi.* The closest translation of the term is 'awakening' - thus Buddhism is a philosophy of awakening. The meaning gives rise to the question of how to go about the process of awakening for which the historical Buddha set about teaching various methods leading to enlightenment or total knowledge of the way in which phenomena exist in relation to the mind. As Buddhism continued to spread throughout Western culture in the twentieth century, the end of the Second World War prompted its widespread dissemination through the American art scene of the early 1950s due to the arrival of the Japanese Zen Buddhist scholar and teacher Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, without whom the

[9] Buddhism expresses itself through three main paths: *Theravāda* (Pali: Doctrine of the Elders, also known as the Skt. *Hinayana* or lesser/small vehicle), *Mahāyāna* (Great Vehicle) and *Vajrayana* (Diamond Vehicle).

[10] See: Cage, John (1961), *Silence: Lectures and Writings,* New York: Marion Boyers, p. xi.

writers of the Beat generation and the so-called grandfather of contemporary performance art, John Cage, would not have had access to some of the more detailed knowledge of a philosophy of awakening from the East. [11] The prevailing atmosphere of post-war revel and disillusionment created a fertile ground for people seeking answers to the nature of suffering. Religious scholar Stephen Prothero positions the Beats and their contemporaries as 'transitional figures constructing a "middle way" between the early era of armchair Buddhism and contemporary Buddhist practice, which usually involves a formal setting and study with a teacher' (Prothero in Tonkinson 1995:4). The artists highlighted in this chapter and beyond can also be considered transitional figures, occupying an in-between state that serves to join the 'armchair Buddhist' with methods of awakening to presence-awareness.

When pianist David Tudor took to the stage at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York on August 29th 1952 and sat down at the piano, the audience expected to hear what is conventionally considered to be music, containing tonal sounds and rhythm, at the very least.[12] Although Tudor opened the lid of the piano as if to play, he instead looked at a stopwatch. To mark the beginning of each subsequent movement of the three-part work, he raised and lowered the lid in silence. During this time he also turned the pages of a score. At precisely 4'33", the name for which the piece has become known, Tudor closed the lid for the final time and stood up to the applause of the audience who stayed and the empty seats of those who walked out.

John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) signifies the beginning of what would come to be recognized as an exemplar of Buddhist performance art as well as a marker of its foundations within contemporary culture (Baas 2005: 165). Although Cage composed over 300 compositions in his lifetime, he cited *4'33"* in which silence was 'performed' for four minutes and thirty-three seconds as his most significant work, the one that would influence all the others. Through the simple act of doing nothing, Cage sought to provide the audience with an experience rather than a performance, embodying the principles of transcendental phenomenology in which the subject (in this case the audience) is favored over the object (the musical score). This reflected

[11] The Beat Generation of American writers came together around 1944 to the early 1960s and played a central role in the development of Buddhism in Western culture. Writers include Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Anne Waldman and Joanne Kyger, amongst others.

[12] The Oxford English Dictionary defines music as: 'Vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion' (OED 1999).

his departure from modernist musical forms such as Schoenberg's tonal experiments, focusing instead on the primacy of the listeners and their willingness to give themselves over to the experience of listening.[13] It also marked his espousal of chance operations and indeterminacy, two principles that would go on to define his life's work. Without a single instruction on *how* to listen, the experience served as a teaching on presence and mindfulness and provided the audience with an opportunity to hear the sounds of their own thoughts against the backdrop of a silence that wasn't actually silent. After all, presence can only be experienced as any discourse on the subject is theoretical and fails to convey the essence of a reality devoid of the dualities of likes and dislikes, past and future, or, as Tibetan teacher Chime Rinpoche calls it, the human being's innate hankering after 'this and that' (Chime Rinpoche 2015). I contend that Cage's framing of the presence-experience as a piano performance gave rise to the full pedagogical potential of *4'33"* and the future of Buddhist performance art as a teaching ground. I also seek to do this in the six hours of silence and stillness in *Still Life*. In *John Cage and Buddhist Ecopoetics* (2013), scholar Peter Jaeger considers Cage's stance on silence alongside a thirteenth century Chinese Zen master's *kōan*:

> A philosopher asks the Buddha, 'Without the wordless, will you tell me the truth?' The Buddha keeps silent until the philosopher bows and thanks him, saying: 'With your loving kindness, I have cleared away all my delusions and entered the true path.' When the Buddha's senior disciple Ananda asks his teacher what the philosopher had attained, the Buddha replies: 'A good horse runs even at the shadow of the whip' (Jaeger 2013:10-11).

Far from silence as an absence of noise, critical discourse in the field of linguistics considers silence as another form of communication, reflecting the teaching of the above *kōan*: '[I]n the study of communication, speech and silence should be treated as equally valid and complementary categories' (Jaworski 1997:215). All things being equal, Cage's experiment with silence in *4'33"* puts this claim into action.

Having expected the concert to carry on with a solo piano recital, the audience was exposed to the sounds of the concert hall. According to Cage's description, this included '…the wind stirring outside during the first movement.

[13] Cage describes this departure as a foreshadowing of electronically produced sound: '[I]n the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate furture, between noise and so-called musical sounds.' (Cage 1939/2009:4)

During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out' (Cage in Gann 2010:4). In essence, the work was a marriage between Buddhist practice and performance art, exemplifying everything Cage was trying to convey in his prolific output of writings and lectures to which he credited Zen Buddhism and his Buddhist teacher Suzuki. [14] He would go on to influence a new wave of artists seeking to bridge the existential chasm between Self and No-self, prompting art historian Jacquelynn Baas to credit Cage with having the greatest international impact on the arts out of any other artist of the 20th century (Baas 2005: 165).

Performance artists of the late 1950s and early '60s echoed much of what Cage brought to the genre of performance art from Buddhism: a confidence in being nobody, going nowhere. In other words, a commitment to process-oriented art. The first wave of contemporary performance art began in both the Happenings and Fluxus movements, developed through students attending classes on experimental composition taught by Cage at the New School for Social Research between 1957 and 1959. Cage's performance art work *Theater Piece No. 1*, presented at Black Mountain College in 1952, is considered the origin of the Happening. [15] Comprised of a variety of simultaneous performances, Cage created the work using his system of chance operations, derived from the Chinese divination system, the I Ching.[16] Known at Black Mountain as 'The Event', its multimedia incorporated a dancing Merce Cunningham being chased by a dog; recordings of Edith Piaf songs; poetry readings atop ladders; slide projections and film; as well as Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951) hanging from the ceiling. Meanwhile, Cage stood on a ladder giving lectures on Buddhist philosophy as white-clad servers passed coffee around the audience and David Tudor improvised notes on a prepared piano.[17] The events

[14] Japanese Zen Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki was a visiting professor at Columbia University in 1951, giving a series of lectures for the public that were attended by John Cage.

[15] At the centre of the surge in Buddhist interest amongst artists of the 1950s was Black Mountain College in Ashville, North Carolina. Opened in 1933 as a liberal arts college, the institution came to be known for its radical embracing of experimentation and attracted artists seeking an environment in which philosophical enquiry and creative arts practice were given equal value.

[16] An ancient Chinese divination system involving the throwing of yarrow sticks or coins. Cage used the system as a way of devising lists of numbers from which he would compose musical scores from these chance operations.

[17] A prepared piano is one in which objects are placed on or between the strings to enable the player to use it as a percussion instrument. Although its invention has been linked to John Cage, examples can be found in the early 20th century music of French composer Maurice Delage (1879-1961). Cage cites American composer Henry Cowell (1897-1965) as his chief inspiration for his prepared piano works who, although he did not use objects, explored the percussive elements of string plucking and

within the work were both freely improvised as well as guided by adherence to specific time intervals. Performed the same year as *4'33"*, the work was the antithesis to silence while continuing to explore the theme of indeterminacy. In the case of *4'33"*, its content was determined by chance and left no room for any controlled narrative. In the same way, *Theater Piece No. 1* was made up of certain pre-determined elements (including the divination of numbers with the I Ching which gave the piece its time frame). Both works were experiments in form that attempted to embody a sense of absolute freedom of expression. They have also been criticized for their perceived limitations:

> [Cage] discouraged all extreme expressions of emotion and physical display; his conception of theatre erased the possibility of actors inhabiting their characters, causing them to become – instead – disembodied, asexual puppets; he never felt a performer's intuition could add anything meaningful to music; and he remained dubious that taste alone could serve as a source for new music (Haskins 2012:153).

It is interesting to note Haskins' use of terms such as 'disembodied' and 'asexual', words that suggest an art of anti-feeling. In some ways Cage's approach foreshadows Frederic Jameson's notion of the 'waning of affect' in contemporary society which itself references the same philosophical stance as the Buddhist theory of No Self. Jameson writes, 'As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centred subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, *since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling'* (Jameson 1991:10, emphasis mine). Linking back to the tension between Western and Eastern philosophical discourse, it is clearly impossible to arrive at an objective viewpoint of Cage's work in this context and the inherent problem of presenting Buddhist infused performance to a mainly Western audience. Outside of critiques such as Jameson's, there is little in the way of an equivalent concept of No Self within Western theoretical discourse let alone general parlance. As a result, the element of pedagogy is pivotal to the question of whether an audience can be taught a worldview that is in complete opposition to everything they are familiar with in Western culture, including how to read a text in the form of live performance. One person's disembodied, asexual performer is another person's wholly present and

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thumping and other such experiments. See: Cage, John (1993), *Composition in Retrospect*, Cambridge: Exact Change

mindful performer. Ultimately, it has to be accepted that audience reception is also based on indeterminacy and that Buddhist performance art must have the capacity to address this aspect as one of the pedagogical challenges of the genre taken up by Cage and addressed by the artists he has influenced This is particularly evident in the work of Marina Abramović and her development of a performance methodology for the general public, which will be dealt with later in this chapter.

In spite of such experiments in form, a tension appears to exist in the genre between detachment from emotion (such as in *Still Life*) and work that is devoid of emotion (as in *No(h) Father*), a difference that is decidedly marked throughout its development. The stark contrast of Zen's seeming lack of emotional engagement distinguishes it from the Tibetan Buddhist approach of using emotions as tools for spiritual awakening. In the case of Cage, he carried his suspicion of music's ability to communicate emotion into all areas of his creative output, including performance art. With the infusion of Buddhism into the American avant-garde art scene of the 1950s (a precursor to the burgeoning performance art scene of the 1970s), Cage's contribution to the field inspired a new generation of artists to create everything from pop art, Happenings, Fluxus and performance art to installation art, Process art and Minimalism (Larson 2012:xiii). Described as 'the inventor of the ephemeral and transitory poetics of the here and now' as well as 'the river that dozens of avant-garde tributaries flowed into and from' (2012:xiii), the Zen Buddhist expression of John Cage revealed a new face of freedom that the post-war generation was ripe to develop.

The first Happening took place in 1959, created by the founder of the movement, Allan Kaprow. *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was an interrogation of some common Buddhist themes such as time, emptiness, presence, mindfulness and impermanence and included elements of fragmentation and dislocation of space. Every object used in the performance such as newspaper, string and sticky tape was destroyed. Kaprow believed in an art that defied permanence and could be 'renewed in different forms, like fine cooking or seasonal changes… a constant metamorphosis' (Pearlman 2012:83). In his book, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993), Kaprow details the philosophical underpinning of the Happening as a form of doing life consciously, echoing Cage's art-life paradigm and Buddhism's presence-based mindfulness practice:

> Since the substance of the Happenings was events in real time, as in theater and opera, the job, logically, was to bypass all theatrical conventions… Instead of making an objective image or occurance to be seen by someone else, it was a matter of doing something to experience it yourself… Doing life, consciously, was a compelling notion to me (Kaprow 1993:195).

The notion of 'doing something to experience it yourself' brings the role of the performer into the territory of the spectator, not only in terms of developing tools of observation (e.g. listening, seeing and interpreting) but by turning the observer in on himself. Becoming, as it were, a self-observing consciousness with the experience of the performance providing the pedagogical framework or means for developing insight. The experience remains constantly in flux, mirroring the mind of meditation. Almost twenty years later Kaprow would move to a California Zen monastery and begin to refer to his life's work not as Happenings but as 'Activities.' For Kaprow, an activity is 'a moment picked out of the stream of activity [that] serves as a poetic kernel of a work of art' (2012:84). By adopting aspects of Buddhist philosophy and translating them in symbolic performance terms, the Happening embodied the pedagogical function of Buddhism that served as another route towards dissemination of the philosophy and practice amongst the general public.

Fig. 1 ***The Piano Activities*** **(1962)** © Philip Corner

A 1962 Fluxus work in Germany entitled *The Piano Activities* by Philip Corner (Fig. 1) illustrates the combination of artistic experimentation in the movement with Buddhist philosophy.[18] The piece, as described by the artists

[18] The work was created by Philip Corner and performed at the International Festival of the Newest Music in Wiesbaden, Germany in 1962. The performers included Fluxus founder George Maciunas,

involved, associated a classical Buddhist meditation tool, the *kōan*, with the performance. Found primarily within Chan (China) and Zen (Japan) Buddhism, the *kōan* can take the form of a question, statement or dialogue by which the student is tested through doubt as a tool towards awakening to the empty nature of the mind. A classic example is: 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' In many ways, *The Piano Activities* draws the audience's attention to question what the nature of the performance and the performance tools (the piano and other objects) actually are with respect to the mind, cognition and sensory perception. Like the *kōan*, the performance attempts to lead the spectator (along with the performers) to a state of recognition or experience of *anatman* or No Self. To illustrate this, a grand piano is rolled onstage only to have a brick thrown at the exposed strings along with teakettles, sticks and a feather duster. The keys are smashed with a hammer, after which the piano is rolled offstage and down a hallway marked *Notausgang*, or 'emergency exit'. The *kōan* can be translated in performance terms and become a pedagogical tool, as Alison Knowles, one of the Fluxus founders and original performers of *The Piano Activities,* argues: [19]

> I was thinking of the Zen encounter of the *kōan* and the breakthrough a person makes through their own understanding of it. It is a metaphor of the piano destruction event, of breaking through into a new kind of music though it involved a destructive act… it was strongly flavoured with Eastern philosophy (Knowles in Pearlman 2012:71).

Since the traditional use of the *kōan* is in order to induce great doubt in the mind of the student of Zen, the performance can be seen to be a provocation of doubt as to whether it is a performance at all and, therefore, what role the audience have in witnessing the destruction of a piano. Given the cultural significance of the classical piano in Germany, the work was considered a scandal and introduced on German television with the headline, 'The lunatics have escaped!' (Kellein 2007:65) *The Piano Activities* exemplifies the spirit of the genre of Buddhist-inspired performance

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Emmett Williams, Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Benjamin Patterson, and Alison Knowles. The festival was promoted on German television, the original of which can be viewed at: http://piano-activities.de/englindex.html (scroll down for video).

[19] Alison Knowles was one of the founding artists in the Fluxus movement and continues to make performance art, event scores, sound installations and other media such as paper and printmaking. In 1969 she published the book *Notations* with John Cage, a work about experimental composition. In 2012 she took part in a re-performance of the work at the Museum Wiesbaden for the Fluxus 50 festival which can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThIexgXllyo

art and the proliferation of challenges to theories of representation, perception and function. If a piano can be used to create something other than music and violence can be performed on an object of perceived cultural value, then the fundamental questions posed by Buddhist philosophy on the mind and its functions and the ways in which sense objects become infused with meaning (where, perhaps, there is no ultimate meaning to be found, hence suffering or dissatisfaction arises), then performance art might be the ideal medium to teach the *Buddhadharma* to a secular public wary of the dogma of religious institutions.

The reference to escaping lunatics is, in many ways, well informed and reflects the nature of a Buddhist practice founded upon the sufferings of *saṃsāra*.[20] Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche refers to this approach as 'crazy wisdom':

> In [this] approach to spirituality, we are not looking for a kick, for inspiration, or bliss. Instead, we are digging into life's irritations, diving into the irritations and making a home out of that. If we are able to make a home out of those irritations, then irritations become a source of great joy, transcendental joy… This kind of joy is no longer related with pain or contrasted with pain at all. The whole thing becomes precise and sharp and understandable, and we are able to relate with it (Trungpa 1991:43).

The Piano Activities forces the spectator to confront the experience of irritation and aggression one step removed from the irritations connected to everyday life, leaving the potential for awakening to a realization, even if only momentary, that the irritation exists in the mind as opposed to the outside world where blame is usually directed.

The antics of the Fluxus artists and other Buddhist influenced performance art works echo what literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as 'affectively steeped pedagogical relations'. Western Buddhism (of which Buddhist art forms a part) is not, according to Sedgwick, solely based upon the scholarly model of adaptation. In recognition of its function, Sedgwick argues for the drawing out from 'the great treasury of Buddhist epistemologies of learning and teaching. What if… an equally canonical topos such as *recognition/realization* describes some dynamics of Western Buddhist popularization better than does the one-directional

[20] *Saṃsāra* (Skt.) refers to the notion of an endless cycle of rebirths for the unenlightened sentient being and is an important aspect of the Buddhist worldview. It is defined as clinging to false concepts of the self, resulting in dissatisfaction and suffering. The term is found in other Asian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism.

topos of adaptation?' (Sedgwick 2003:156) For Sedgwick, pedagogy is both 'topic and relation (ibid.).' The 'breakthrough' to liberation or enlightenment referred to by Alison Knowles in speaking about *The Piano Activities* allows for a pedagogical reading of the performance as text through the symbolic acts it embodies. It is precisely through the symbolic codes pertaining to Buddhist philosophy that not only is Buddhism performed but it is teaching through unconventional and indirect means. In destroying a piano as a way of pointing to the destruction of deluded mind states, the afflictive emotions in the minds of the spectators have the potential for, at the very least, recognition. If this is the case, the performance will have fulfilled its pedagogical function.

Buddhist practice is about fundamentally changing the habitual dualistic way in which an individual views the self and the world in order to reduce the suffering and dissatisfaction inherent in human embodied experience (Powers 2008:19). In terms of its compatibility with performance art as a means of practice and dissemination, the indefinability of the genre provides a logical schema. In seeking to define performance art, 'a practice premised on the undefinable [sic] as an overt resistance to categorization' (Heddon 1999:38), its historical development alongside conceptual art displays the art form's capacity to accommodate theories of an ontological nature. In a similar way, Buddhism's flexibility displays 'a unique quality of [its teachings]… they can be expressed through existing cultural norms, making use of them rather than destroying or replacing them' (Prebish and Baumann 2002:146). As a result, a truly Buddhist-inspired performance art practice is predicated upon the intention of the artist to create a performative pedagogy that aims towards transformation of previously held deluded mind states. [21] Just as the piano is liberated from its meaning and form, the audience might be liberated from *saṃsāra.* According to the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, '[d]elusions are states of mind which, when they arise within our mental continuum, leave us disturbed, confused and unhappy. Therefore, those states of mind which delude or afflict us are called "delusions" or "afflictive emotions"' (Brantmeier et al 2010:120).

From the perspective of the Buddhist performance artist, it is the delusions that give rise to artistic expression as a vehicle for mind-training. One of

[21] In this case, delusion refers to a fundamental ignorance of the nature of reality as being empty of inherent existence. Referred to in Buddhist epistemology as 'unwholesome factors' (Skt. *mūlakleśa*) or deluded mind states which include: attachment (*raga*); anger (*pratigha*); ignorance (*avidya*); pride or conceit (*māna*); doubt (*vicikitsa*); and wrong view (*dristi*).

the problems, however, lies in the tension between theory (in this case, Buddhist philosophy) and practice, which is one of the main considerations in my own performance practice. In seeking liberation from afflictive emotions, the practitioner perpetuates the delusion that seeking leads to freedom. According to Buddhism, it is only by abandoning desire that freedom or liberation is discovered. As if to make things more complicated, Buddhism posits the radical claim that it was always there to begin with, it simply went unrealized due to the presence of afflictive emotions. Rei Terada makes the case in *Feeling in Theory* (2001) that '[a] living system is self-differential… The idea of emotion is as compelling as it is because in the honest moments of philosophy it has served as the name of that experience' (Terada 2001:156). His next remark then mirrors the Buddhist approach to emotions: 'On some level everyone knows that rationality may be where we want to be, but emotion is where we are. *So when we want to get from where we are to where we want to be, emotion has got to come along*' (ibid., my emphasis). What Terada is offering is a way of understanding the art of pedagogy; a way of learning through doing or, more precisely, through *being*, starting with affect, feeling and emotion in order to reach a level of rationality or detachment. This came into play particularly at the start of *At Sea: 1980 - 2010* when I became overcome with emotion upon seeing and hearing my parents. Over time I was able to keep my emotions in check and use them as objects of meditation practice.

In practical terms, John Cage's summation serves as a singular directive for the Buddhist performance artist: 'You can feel an emotion, just don't think that it's so important… Take it in a way that you can then let it drop! Don't belabor it!' (Cage in Baas 2005:162) Although this would seem difficult to convey to an audience, it is perhaps the most important aspect of Buddhist performance methodology to gain grounding in and one that served me well throughout *Sutra*. Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* is a case in point in that the simultaneity of so many activities happening in the performance space, many of them improvised, does not leave room for emotional indulgence which, according to Buddhism, leads to delusion and afflictions. But in spite of the limitations of the union of Buddhist philosophy and the performance event, it serves as a point of radical inspiration towards the merging of art and daily life.

Performing Pedagogy

Performance art is predicated upon bodies in space. This is not to say that non-embodied art such as painting or sculpture is less able to convey the essence of Buddhist philosophy, but that performance art stands alone in being able to communicate through shared experience, a core principle of Engaged Buddhism. A term coined in the 1960s by Vietnamese Buddhist monk and activist Thich Nhat Hanh, he regards Buddhist practice as inseparable from communal engagement. Recognizing Western culture's increasing dependence upon indirect forms of communication (apps, social media and web based video streaming are prime examples), theatre and performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte believes that 'performance art, in response to this development, seems to create and reactivate some of the last residues in contemporary culture that make it possible to communicate directly in public and to act as a member of a community' (Fischer-Lichte 1997:232-233). In her theories on theatre and performance art, I want to show that Fischer-Lichte makes no reference to Buddhist philosophy or practice yet offers highly relevant observations on the subject that work alongside the essential principles of Buddhism, suggesting that performance philosophy is more universal in scope than previously realized. As mentioned earlier, she utilizes the term autopoiesis for talking about live performance, an idea originally developed out of the biological sciences to explain the ways in which living systems operate as both producers and products, 'circular systems that survive by self-generation' (Fischer-Lichte 2008:7).[22] Fischer-Lichte posits performer and spectator as the two sides of the circular system and uses this relationship to demonstrate how live performance forms an essential function within social culture. Within the frame of Buddhist performance art, this communal function serves an entirely pedagogical function: the genre goes beyond mere representation through a specific relationship between pedagogy and culture. It serves as a means as opposed to an end, highlighting its processes in, through and alongside Buddhist symbolic, philosophical and meditation practices. This is suggestive of the formulaic nature of Buddhist pedagogy, a methodology that is contested in contemporary theories of education: 'Because it is processual, learning is unrepresentable: its means and ends emerge in

[22] Coined by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, the principle of autopoiesis is also used within the fields of sociology, psychotherapy and anthropology, amongst others.

the flow of activity. And this means there is no basis or regularity on which education's effects and affects can be staked' (Ellsworth 2015:67). The value of phenomenological knowledge is called into question here and challenges the role of Buddhist performance art as knowledge producing, let alone possessing the ability to transform either performer or spectator in any significant way.

Educational theorist David Kolb, the founder of the experiential learning styles model, argues that a student cannot think and feel at the same time, nor does he believe that learning can occur without engaging in a four-fold process (Kolb 2015:32). His model of effective learning claims that knowledge is founded upon completion of four stages of learning: concrete experience (feeling); reflective observation (watching); abstract conceptualization (thinking); and active experimentation (doing). In the case of a pedagogical practice such as Buddhist performance art, however, thinking and feeling can be thought of as one activity: thinking-feeling or feeling-thinking. This is, in some ways, reflected by psychologist Silvan Tomkins' argument: 'Out of the marriage of reason with affect there issues clarity with passion. Reason without affect would be impotent, affect without reason would be blind. The combination of affect and reason guarantees man's high degree of freedom' (Tomkins 1995:37). According to Tomkins, without affect as a motivating factor, the human race would not survive (ibid.). I argue that this necessitates a meditation practice that uses the affect system to be liberated from it (changing the relationship to emotions rather than trying to stop them altogether). George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999) supports the idea of the 'marriage of reason with affect' through the claim that 'reason is fundamentally embodied' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:17). Affect and embodiment go hand in hand, as evidenced in my experience of performing the opening section of *At Sea* and throughout *(whispers)* with my mother's words as stimuli. As an experiential process, the practice of performing and responding in real time to the present awareness of a spectating public necessitates the total integration of affect and emotions and the mind that thinks and feels and is aware of thinking and feeling. Buddhism refers to this state of mind as knowledge and its antithesis as ignorance or delusion. This is also known as meditation in action or mindfulness.

The findings of one of the first studies of Buddhist meditation and brain activity offer a compelling case for the understanding of the role of meditation and

its place alongside performance art practices. Tracing the brain wave patterns of a group of advanced Zen Buddhists, two scientists from Tokyo University's Department of Neuro-Psychiatry published the results of a ten-year study on the effect of meditation on the brain in 1963. Their findings demonstrated the meditators' ability to produce alpha wave patterns with the resultant slowing of the heart rate and calming of the central nervous system. Significantly, the researchers also discovered that the Zen masters' evaluation of their students' progress correlated to the findings of the EEG (electroencephalographic) tracking (Ratnayaka 2012). Similar studies since that time using fMRI scans of the meditating brain have produced equivalent results. A 2004 study of the brain activity of Tibetan monks during meditation measured large increases in gamma waves far above the brain activity of novice meditators. The study was significant for its findings on post-meditation brain states in advanced meditators due to the increased gamma wave activity in resting states, suggesting the benefits of meditation for long-term alterations in brain activity (Beauregard 2012:81). A 2008 study by New York University research scientist Dr. Zoran Josipovic highlights the benefits of meditation for the cultivation of attention: 'One thing that meditation does for those who practise it a lot is that it cultivates attentional skills.[23] Meditation research, particularly in the last ten years or so, has shown to be very promising because it points to an ability of the brain to change and optimise in a way we didn't know previously was possible' (BBC 2008). Where there has been a history of resistance in the scientific community towards the idea of consciousness as 'no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules' (Crick 1994:3), the burgeoning field of science and consciousness has begun to attract funding due to the greater sophistication in brainwave technology and the embedding of mindfulness training within mainstream hospital culture thanks in part to the pioneering work of American Buddhist and Professor of Medicine Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn who founded the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979 (Tugend 2013).

[23] See: Josipovic, Zoran (2010), 'Duality and Nonduality in Meditation Research, *Consciousness and Cognition*, doi: 10.1016/j.concog.2010.03.016. For further details on the study: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12661646

The scientific research on Buddhist meditation offers an important context for Buddhist art within contemporary culture and highlights the central concern of Buddhist performance art. In terms of pedagogy, it is important to consider the methodical nature of meditation practice as a phenomenological endeavor that leads to a gradual recognition of the nature of mind or, as Sedgwick points out, the practitioner is simply learning what she already knows: 'In Buddhist pedagogical thought… the apparent tautology of learning what you already know does not seem to constitute a paradox, nor an impasse, nor a scandal. It is not even a problem. If anything, it is a deliberate and defining practice' (Sedgwick 2003:166). If this statement were to be applied to Cage's *4'33"*, the performance could be valued purely in terms of what it lacked (conventional notions of music). The seeming lack of sound provoked attention to actual sound and the art of listening, something the concert audience already knew how to do and yet were faced with doing in unexpected ways. After all, they bought tickets to hear a piano concert and were denied one for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. The act of listening reveals the inherent delusion of expectation. As with Cage, the 'learning what you already know' applies as much to the spectator as to the performer of Buddhist performance art, the development of which has been taken up by Marina Abramović.

By way of illustration, the work of Abramović offers a compelling example of the use of pedagogy in performance. The disruptive gaze as a symbolic teaching tool can be seen in her work *The Artist is Present* (2010) which took place at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Spectators queued for hours and, once inside the museum, they were never absent from the action taking place in the extremely intimate encounter of the gaze between Abramović and the person sitting in the chair opposite. The work contained a single directive: the spectators were invited to sit in a chair facing the artist and gaze into her eyes with no time limit. Although in this case the gaze was not centred on the spectators at large as in some of her previous work, it was the simple gaze between the two figures that captured audiences along with Abramović s ability to sit in stillness for a total of 750 hours, the longest work of performance art in the history of the genre. [24] In spite of a total lack of clear narrative on which the spectator can follow an individual's personal history, the video documentation of the performance reveals a subtle type of

[24] *The Artist is Present* attracted the second highest attendance of the work of a living artist in MOMA history, bringing in over 850,000 spectators over a three month period.

autobiographical encounter revealed through the individual expressions on the faces of Abramović's gazing partners. The spectrum of reactions includes laughing, smiling, frowning, crying and neutral expressions, all of which reveal highly individual responses to the simple gaze of another individual (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 ***The Artist is Present*** **(2010)**
© Marco Anelli

The fact that the one-to-one encounter takes place in the public gaze directly effects the experience of the encounter. Abramović notes, 'I gazed into the eyes of many people who were carrying such pain inside that I could immediately see and feel it… I become a mirror for their emotions. One big Hell's Angel with tattoos everywhere stared at me fiercely, but after ten minutes was collapsing into tears and weeping like a baby' (Guardian 2010). Notwithstanding the cult of fame surrounding Marina Abramović (which is beyond the scope of this research project), it is fair to say that the simple act of sitting and being present in public, such as in my own performance art work *Still Life* (2014), entails a certain element of pedagogy of which Buddhist practice and philosophy seek to engender and codify. It is this paradigm that

Abramović draws from in all of her work, although it began to establish itself more firmly post-1981 when she encountered Tibetan Buddhist culture.

The Artist is Present and other Buddhist inspired performance art works depend upon the affective encounter if they are to succeed as models of pedagogy. As meditation teacher Rolf Gates describes, 'Taking my seat is a shift from thinking to feeling' (Gates 2015:8). In terms of discourse, the word 'Buddhism', I would argue, should be thought of as a verb. Notwithstanding its value as a school of complex philosophical thought, the entire nature of its discourse is that of 'doing' or, more precisely, 'not doing'. It is defined through pedagogy. At the end of his life, according to the scriptures, the Buddha instructed his disciples to take refuge in the teachings alone and to avoid reifying him as an exalted human being worthy of worship after his death. [25] Contemporary Buddhist performance art is an attempt at adherence to this instruction and serves as a modern manifestation of the pedagogical function of both its philosophical discourse and the art form. The significance of the case studies presented in this chapter point to the genre as the antithesis of religious art based on worship and although there are differences between the creative expressions of the 1950s and early 60s compared to later works, I base my argument on the foundational tenets of the Pali sources that reify the *Buddhadharma* above all other considerations of the faith. I contend that a looser interpretation of the function of Buddhist performance art would weaken its place within the wider cultural framework of religious art. While contemporary expressions of Buddhism may have ventured far from the realms of traditional iconography, they nevertheless seek to communicate what Buddhist icons (i.e. statues of the Buddha and other key figures as well as symbols of the faith) seek to emulate, that is, methods for practicing presence and mindfulness. Religion scholar Aaron Rosen, who specializes in the field of sacred traditions and the arts, highlights the changing strategies within religious studies as it seeks to define religious practice:

> [W]hile we may agree that religion wields significant power in the contemporary world, it remains difficult to agree on a definition of religion… Over the past couple of decades, however, emphasis has shifted away from taxonomy, seeking to establish what makes religion distinct from other phenomena, to thinking about it as a lived experience,

[25] *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN) II 100. See**:** Walshe, Maurice, trans. (1987). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

> inextricable – and sometimes indistinguishable – from other cultural practices. What this emphasis on cultural studies loses in specificity, it makes up for in breadth, allowing us to encompass areas such as visual culture, which in the past got defined as unrelated or orthogonal to religious studies… Instead of proceeding from or towards a single definition of religion, we will look instead for key areas in which contemporary art poses questions for and about religion (Rosen 2015:19).

Rosen's statement reflects the history of Buddhism's dissemination from its ancient Indian roots, taking on the cultural expressions of the specific regions into which it spread. This phenomena is as true of modern Western culture as it is of more established Asian counterparts. This is reflected strongly in the case studies presented in this project, none of which resemble traditional Buddhist art, particularly in the work of Marina Abramović.

Another of Abramović's more recent works attempts to take the pedagogical encounter a step further.[26] In *512 Hours* (2014) at London's Serpentine Gallery, the public entered three gallery spaces in which there was nothing to be conceived as an art object and no art on which monetary value could be placed (the chairs and cots were entirely functional and provided places of rest). The performance took place over the summer of 2014 for eight hours a day, six days a week and covered the period of time in its title.[27] From its inception, Abramović challenged every strategy she had used in the past by knowing nothing about what would happen in the performance space. Her only directive was that she would be in the space, engaging or not engaging with the public, with no rehearsal such as in Kaprow's Happenings and the Fluxus experiments. Eye masks and noise silencing headphones were made available although there was no requirement to use them (Fig. 3). The only rules were that mobile phones, watches and bags were to be left in the lockers provided outside the gallery and that silence must be maintained at all times. There was no time limit on how long the public could remain but if someone left the space they would need to join the queue again to enter. Reviews of the work were far from favourable and yet its public reception through social media reflected

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[26] Since 2015, Abramović has focused on lectures and workshops in Brazil, Australia and Greece. In 2015, *Terra Communal* took place at the Sesc Pompeia, São Paulo and combined performances by eight visiting artists, installations, lectures and workshops. In Sydney, The Kaldor Public Arts Project took over a large waterside pier for a twelve day residency programme, *Marina Abramović: In Residence*. Featuring work by twelve Australian artists, the programme combined mentorship with public workshops. In 2016, the exhibit *As One* took place over seven weeks at the Benaki Museum in Athens and featured new works by 29 Greek performance artists alongside workshops and lectures by Abramović.

[27] The work was commissioned by The Serpentine Gallery and ran between June 11th – August 25th 2014.

a communal need for the kind of meditative experience the work provided. Particularly curious is this reflection from Richard Dorment in his review for The Telegraph. Dorment interweaves a performance review with his own personal development:

> I hated every second I spent in this show. I longed to escape and can't tell you what relief I felt on emerging from it into a world of light and air where people walked and talked normally, where they checked their iPhone, raced for the bus and had deadlines to meet. Yet even as my mind raced with all these thoughts I was perfectly aware that of all the people who visited that show I was the one who most needed to be there. The important thing about Abramović's work is not what your reaction to it is, but that you react to it at all. (Dorment in *The Telegraph* 2014).

Fig. 3 ***512 Hours*** **(2014)** **© Marina Abramović**

As damning as Dorment's review is, the fact that he acknowledges the value in the work reflects how far Buddhism and its practices have permeated the mainstream social sphere of the 21st century. It is revealing of a culture that recognizes the role of personal development in the creation of a more self-reflective and mindful society as well as registering the cultural environment to which critical theory has responded through the 'affective turn.'

Although the turn to affect in cultural and critical theory began to reveal itself in the mid-1990s, dramatic theory as first presented in Aristotle's *Poetics* uses the medical metaphor of *catharsis* as a means of purgation or purification of the emotions, a wholly affective strategy for transformation of what literary scholar F.L.

Lucas referred to as 'excessive passions' (Lucas 1957:24). Sedgwick goes so far as to claim that,

> [T]he turn to affect… could lead cultural criticism from the 'paranoid strong' theorizing of deconstructive approaches, while making it possible to reverse the effects of trauma. It would do so because affect… is "freer" than the drives as theorized in psychoanalysis, and therefore affect is more amenable to change (Gregg and Seigworth 2010:219).

Sedgwick's claim is supported by Silvan Tomkins' analysis of the human affect system as providing the essential motivation for taking action: 'The combination of affect and reason guarantees man's high degree of freedom' (Tomkins 1995:37). Following Tomkins' logic, access to freedom can therefore be said to reside in the body, the prime biological residence of affects. It is the body that has been the primary focus for contemporary performance artists and Abramović's more recent performances are indicative of her desire to raise the energy in the body in order to transform and make contact with her audience who, more and more, are becoming performance artists at least for the duration of an Abramović work.

In stark contrast to her self-destructive phase of the 1970s, *512 Hours* contains all of the philosophical foundations of work produced after 1979 when she had her first encounter with the Australian Aborigine and Tibetan Buddhist cultures. These encounters caused a profound shift in emphasis from purely body to body-mind centred performance experiments.[28] Performance art, according to Abramović, is all about presence and energy and the way in which the artist affects the consciousness of the audience in order to 'extend eternity' and go beyond past and future to the present moment (Abramović and Biesenbach 2010:211). Buddhist-influenced performance art challenges the idea of the performing body as centralized subject, both in art and life, to acknowledge the subject as a unified bodymind capable of thinking feeling as opposed to merely thinking about feeling. By extension, if a bodymind can think feeling, it follows that it can feel being, another way of describing the process of meditation. In this way, the performer is

[28] To illustrate the contrast, *Lips of Thomas* (1975) is considered her most extreme work due to the amount of self-harm she enacts in a single performance. An autobiographical act of exorcism, Abramović gorges herself on wine and honey, cuts a star onto her belly with a razor blade, lies on blocks of ice under an electric heater and then whips herself, repeating each 'gesture' over the course of several hours The original performance was to take place over a period of several hours. However, after lying on the ice blocks for 30 minutes, the distressed audience took action and removed her from the gallery, ending the performance. It was repeated in 1993 on an American and European tour and in 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum, NY where it lasted for seven hours.

able to feel her way into learning how to be present. This was my experience in all five performances of *Sutra*.

Committed to the development of performer training for both artists and the general public, Abramović's view of performance art recognizes its universal pedagogical foundations.[29] When asked what she thought the task of the artist was in society, she replied: 'The answer is very subjective and differs depending on each artist. Joseph Beuys saw his role in society as a shaman, Mondrian referred to his task being to present a true reality and Marcel Duchamp wanted to change the way society thinks. As for myself, my task is to be a bridge between the Western and Eastern worlds… it is almost autobiographical in a way' (Abramović 2003:15). In each case, the suggestion of the pedagogical encounter between art and life is paramount.

Abramović's work in the 21st century responds to the growing interest in Buddhist philosophy and practice as translated for a secular audience and demonstrates the universality of certain mindfulness practices such as sitting, standing and walking meditation and their effects on the nervous system. The Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life estimated the global Buddhist population to be approximately 487,760,000 in 2010 and rising to 506,990,000 by 2020 (although these numbers are also indicative of world population growth). The growing trend in popular books on mindfulness, for all of its benevolent principles, is also indicative of the market driven commodity that Buddhism has become. At a 2015 Buddhist Society conference in London, 'Mindfulness: Secular, Religious, Both or Neither?, social psychologist Steven Stanley from Cardiff University shared the following statistics with the delegates: more than 500 scientific papers on mindfulness are published per year, more than twenty universities in the UK offer courses on the subject and corporations such as JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs and American Express offer mindfulness instruction to employees (Sherwood 2015).

With the growth of secular Buddhism mindfulness can be seen to be entering every area of the social sphere, including the arts. An all-party group of MPs, however, have campaigned for the government to fund 1,200 places on mindfulness teacher training courses through to 2020 in order to meet the needs of

[29] Abramović's has created a systematic training methodology called 'The Abramović Method' (originally referred to as 'Cleaning the House'). It utilizes a variety of real and invented meditation tools to heighten awareness, raise energy and develop endurance. Many of her exercises take between 1 – 3 hours to complete. Details of many of her exercises can be found in: Abramović, Marina (2003), *Student Body*, Milan: Charta.

the growing cases of depression nationwide. In a 2015 article for the *Guardian*, published to coincide with the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group's study *Mindful Nation UK,* Jon Kabat-Zinn cautions that there are fears amongst practicing Buddhists that a 'sort of superficial "McMindfulness" is taking over, which ignores the ethical foundations of the meditative practices and traditions from which mindfulness has emerged, and divorces it from its profoundly transformative potential' (Kabat-Zinn 2015). Citing Kabat-Zinn's concerns, philosophy Professor Terry Hyland provides an analysis of the phenomenon in a 2016 interview for the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies:

> On the current model, the capitalization of mindfulness has produced an ideal consumer product with a handy dual purpose which, on the one hand, promises to reduce stress in employees – often in organizations whose ruthless and draconian working conditions have caused such stress in the first place and, on the other, a commodity with infinite sales potential in a spiritually impoverished culture shot through with attention deficit disorder and late-capitalist angst (Hyland in Pellisier 2016).

In the context of performance art, however, I suggest that it is the transformative potential of presence and mindfulness that becomes pedagogy to the extent that participants are willing to forego any pre-conceived conceptions about learning, whether or not they are able to practice meditation beyond a basic level. This is supported by the work of vipassana teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein in their explanation that 'the function of meditation is to shine the light of awareness on our thinking' (Salzberg and Goldstein 2001:48). They go on to explore the implications of such a pedagogy:

> The practice of bare attention opens up the claustrophobic world of our conditioning, revealing an array of options. Once we can see clearly what's going on in our minds, we can choose whether and how to act on what we're seeing. The faculty used to make those choices is called discriminating wisdom… the ability to know skilful actions from unskilful actions (ibid.).

This also takes into account that any given audience may perceive a work of performance art as a commodity which does not, however, negate its potential for affecting the spectator's experience of presence. As Hyland contends, 'It is not a question of preserving some notion of doctrinal purity but – in order to protect

vulnerable people who may be attracted by the superficial appeal of McMindfulness self-help gimmicks – of clearly distinguishing what is from what is not mindfulness in the interests of transforming human suffering and fostering more harmonious, just and moral communities' (ibid.).

Performing Presence

In the final chapter of *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Sedgwick asks whether the only way to learn is when we know we are being taught (Sedgwick 2003:153). In performance terms, there is a case to be made that the pedagogical exchange begins for the spectator through what Fischer-Lichte refers to as engagement in an 'aesthetics of disruption' through the act of the 'freely wandering' gaze: 'Reception is thus completed as the various subjective disruption of the space-time continuum' (1997:109). This is the starting point of the autopoietic loop that Fischer-Lichte regards as a specific type of phenomenology inherent in the self-reflective affective nature of live performance. She proposes a 'radical concept of presence' (Fischer-Lichte 2008:99) linked intrinsically to embodiment that counters the mind-body dualistic tendency of Western philosophical discourse. Presence, according to Fischer-Lichte, manifests through the spectator as she encounters herself and the performer as 'embodied mind in a constant state of becoming' (ibid.). Whether or not Fischer-Lichte is aware of her theoretical connection to Buddhism is not clear but her recognition of a mind-state of shared embodiment during the performative encounter offers an insight into some of the shared principles of performance art, Buddhist philosophy and their affective foundations. Presence and its development, therefore, become the primary tools of Buddhist performance pedagogy, as illustrated in the work of Cage and Abramović as well as through my own work. Without the development of presence-based awareness, it is impossible to engage with Buddhist practice and its training in mental quiescence. Sedgwick recognizes this pedagogical assumption as 'relationality.'

Referring to the way in which Tibetan teacher Sogyal Rinpoche writes in detail about his relationship with his master while making no reference to Buddhist teachings in the introduction to his book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1993), Sedgwick states: 'In this world it is as though relation could only be

pedagogical – and for that reason, radically transindividual' (Sedgwick 2003:160). If this assumption were to be applied to the Buddhist performance art event, it involves an aspect of collective participation, even if it appears to be passive. Attendance alone implies acceptance of the possibility of transformation from one mind state to another and out of this acceptance comes freedom or liberation. For is liberation not the hook that draws Western seekers of self-knowledge into a relationship with Buddhist philosophy? Whether they stay in the relationship is another matter but for as long as they engage with it through its various means of dissemination they are engaging with pedagogy.[30] Sedgwick goes on to highlight the fact that the '[Buddhist] teaching situation, evidently, thrives on personality and intimate emotional relation. At the same time, it functions as a mysteriously powerful solvent of individual identity' (2003:160). In many ways, this is the key to understanding the extent to which Buddhist performance art succeeds in transmitting its philosophical basis. In practice, the dissolution of self-identity is contingent upon the recognition of a sense of self-identity. This is, perhaps, where Cage's work shows its limitations because although he recognized an audience's propensity towards emotional engagement, his work demonstrated a significant lack thereof, perhaps echoing his understanding of Zen as emotionally detached. As referenced earlier and worth emphasizing here, this highlights one of the differences between the Zen and Tibetan forms: Tibetan Buddhism uses the energy of the emotions in order to liberate the mind from them whereas Zen emphasizes sitting meditation practice as a tool for disengaging with them.

Before proceeding further, it is important that affects, emotions and feelings are understood as neither the same nor independent but interdependent terms and not to be confused with each other. Social theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi differentiates between the terms, explaining:

> [Affect does not] denote a personal feeling. *L 'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus)* is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:xvii).

The 'pre-personal' refers to 'a non-conscious experience of intensity… Affect cannot be fully realized in language… because affect is always prior to and/or outside

[30] This includes books, articles, lectures, films, plays, conversations and Buddhist art.

consciousness' (Shouse 2005). Cultural critic Eric Shouse goes on to define feelings as:

> [P]ersonal and biographical, emotions are social and affects are prepersonal… A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled… An emotion is the projection/display of a feeling… An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential (Shouse 2005).

Antonio Damasio offers a poetic response: 'Emotions play out in the theatre of the body. Feelings are the language of the mind' (Damasio in Abramović et al. 2003:158). Tomkins' Basic Emotions theory (developed in the 1950s and 60s) has been contested by more current research in the field. Nevertheless, it offers a definition of the term congruent with Massumi and others, describing affect as the 'primary motivational system in human beings' (Tomkins 1995:34).[31] It is interesting to note that Sedgwick's theoretical inspiration grew out of her research into the topic of shame about which Tomkins' Basic Emotions theory had much to say, and although it may no longer answer all of the complicated questions surrounding affect, it nevertheless offers a succinct approach to questions surrounding self, subjectivity and human freedom.

As a theoretical approach to Buddhist-influenced performance art, affect theory and its associated explanations of feelings and emotions are useful towards an understanding of the workings of meditation, both conceptually and in practical terms. It also contributes to a critique of consumers of so-called 'spiritual' art. Given the secular nature of contemporary audiences of performance art, the main point is that the performer is mindful of any perceived affective needs of the spectator in order to try to bring her in to a pedagogical relationship. For my purposes, the pedagogical relationship translates as the affective spectator-performance loop and reveals the underlying pedagogical roots of performance art practices, whether or not they are classed as Buddhist art.

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[31] Amonsgt the critics of Tomkins' theory are psychologists Alan Fridlund, James A. Russell and José-Miguel Fernandez-Dols who have demonstrated that the results of Tomkins' methodology were flawed and that more research on emotions was needed in spite of Tomkins' paradigm continuing to dominate the field. See: Fridlund, Alan (1994), *Human Facial Expression: An Evolutionary View*, San Diego: Academic Press; Russell, James A. (1994), 'Is There Universal Recognition of Emotion from Facial Expression? A Review of the Cross-Cultural Studies', *Psychological Bulletin 115*, January, pp. 102-141; Russell, J.A. and Fernandez-Dols, José-Miguel, eds. (1997), *The Psychology of Facial Expressions*, New York: Cambridge University Press; Barrett, Lisa Feldman (2006), 'Are Emotions Natural Kinds?', *Perspectives on Psychological Science 1*, March, pp. 28-58.

Just as with Cage and Abramović, I want to shift now to the spectator-performer relationship as it forms the foundation of a work by American performance artist and composer Meredith Monk. A Buddhist practitioner since the mid-1980s, Monk considers her commitment to Buddhist practice has not changed her process considerably: [32]

> [A]s a young artist my sensibility was actually dealing with a lot of things that are talked about in the Buddhist practice. The basis of my vocal work was always silence. I was usually working from a very quiet place, no matter how much it sounded like I was screaming at the top of my lungs… What I have tried to do in my work these last years is to offer a place where people can actually have some time to let go of the narrator or the discursive mind for a while and experience in a very direct way fundamental human energies for which we don't have words… The voice – the original instrument – can delineate feelings and states of being so that the music can be experienced directly by anyone. In that way, it is transcultural and it has a sense of timelessness, which I would say is characteristic of a spiritual way of thinking about things (Monk in Knowles et al 2002:23).

Monk's statement is reflective of the silent nature of meditation practice and offers an example of the way in which Buddhist-inspired performance art can become a learning environment for the audience. Less interactive than inter-relational, the following performance art work will be explored as a visual-sonic encounter with the sublime.

Given that Monk's access point is the voice, it follows that she would be attracted to the form of prayer-singing, found in all of the major world religions as a way of feeling closer to a sense of God or to enter meditative states. In 2008 she embarked on a project that began through a meeting with Norman Fischer, former abbot of the Zen Center of San Francisco. He was working on a translation of some of the psalms from the Old Testament known as 'Songs of Ascent'. Thinking they were called 'Songs of Ascension', it inspired her to begin thinking about the symbolism surrounding the idea of an upwardly moving spiritual ascension:

> ['Songs of Ascent'] are psalms from the 120th to the 134th. People from all around an area would come to a mountain, they would bring their best harvest, and they would recite or sing these songs going up the

[32] Monk's initial encounter with Buddhism took place in the mid-1970's through the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of the Tibetan Shambhala lineage in which Monk has since taken refuge vows with the American author and nun Ven. Pema Chödron.

> mountain…Apparently, at each of the steps one of these psalms was sung. Now I didn't know all of the details of it but something intrigued me, and I was thinking – isn't it interesting, first of all, that so many cultures go up to worship? Why is it better than going down? I was intrigued to know what those songs would have sounded like – and that idea of walking up and singing… In Buddhism there are stupas that you go up as well as the circumambulation aspect of going around them (Monk in Marranca 2009:17).

Fig. 4 **Ann Hamilton's *Tower***
© Ann Hamilton

Fig. 5 ***Songs of Ascension* (2008)**
© Meredith Monk/House Foundation

The Songs of Ascent inspired the notion of circular prayer and, as demonstrated in the performances inside installation artist Ann Hamilton's *Tower*, is also indicative of the circularity of the autopoietic loop between performers and spectators. In this way, prayer translates as a teaching on how to work with the discursive mind through an environment that stimulates silence and reverence. Having worked with Hamilton on *mercy*, she was invited to perform inside an 80' x 40' concrete turret built on a ranch in northern California (Fig. 4).[33] The inside of the tower consists of a double-helix staircase which opens to the sky at the top reflected in a pool of water at the bottom (Fig. 5). In this way, the audience are intertwined with the performers at all times.

[33] Although not a Buddhist practitioner, Ann Hamilton's installation and sculptural works contain many of the themes of Buddhist aesthetics and inquiry such as the presence and absence contained in minimalism; The foundations of *mercy* arose out of the news of the killing in cold blood of a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy on 31st September, 2000 by Israeli soldiers in Gaza. Although the work makes no reference to the killing, it attempts to reveal the humanity behind the mercy that the boy and his father were denied.

Although it is clearly not a Buddhist *stupa*, Monk's desire to set *Songs of Ascension* (2008) inside the tower mirrors its symbolism. According to Tibetan Buddhism, the *stupa* is a physical representation of the mind of enlightenment and is directly linked to the notion of accumulating merit to assist in the attainment of positive rebirths in future lives (Fig. 6). The building and circumambulating of a stupa is considered a purification practice for the elimination of afflictive emotions.[34] The aspect of circling mirrors that which is found in nature from the spiral patterns of DNA, fingerprints, nautilus shells, ferns, hair whorls, whirlpools, tornadoes and galaxies and is reflected throughout the world's religious traditions and archaeological histories.[35] The circling or spiraling motif has its cultural correlations in human history and, in some ways, reflects the development of the self or psyche. If the development of the human psyche is in the nature of change and impermanence, then the circling of the *stupa* becomes a physical manifestation of this progression. The interesting element of Hamilton's *Tower* is that its double helix staircase invites people both up towards the sky or enlightenment/liberation (Buddhahood) or down towards the water of the earth, the place in which to cleanse the mind of mental afflictions, enabling the ascension process, another expression of interdependence. In the case of the *stupa* this symbolic act of purification is achieved through circumambulation, which I will return to in more depth in Chapter Four. In both cases, the *Tower* and the *stupa* are tools of mindfulness, a mind state analogous to purity (in the final work in my performance cycle, *Boudhanath*, the symbolic elements of the *stupa* are further elucidated in performance practice, echoing Monk's own discoveries in the ascension process).[36]

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[34] *Stupas* are a representation of the enlightened mind just as Buddhist statues represent the enlightened form of the Buddha and texts are viewed as enlightened speech.

[35] The spiral has been discovered to date back as far as the Neolithic period (c.10,000 BCE – 2000 BCE).

[36] The Theravada tradition outlines seven stages of purity or *Visuddhi*. These include Purity of Mind (*Pali: citta-visuddhi*) or mindfulness, which is comprised of eight attainments or levels of meditative absorption (see: Mitirigala Nissaraṇa Vanaya (1993), *The Seven Stages of Purification and The Insight Knowledges*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society) It is important to make the distinction between the Buddhist conception of purity and the Christian one. The Judeo-Christian worldview posits good and evil in moral opposition. Buddhist philosophy, on the other hand, positions the concepts of good and evil as of 'one taste'. In other words, good and evil can only exist in opposition through a dualistic framework whereas the concept of enlightenment transcends categorization.

Fig. 6 ***Stupa*** **at Ruvanvelisaya Dagoba, Sri Lanka**
© Peter Harvey

The debut of *Songs of Ascension* was in concert form at Dartington College, England with a theatrical version at the Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis before going on to create the site-specific version in Hamilton's *Tower*.[37] In keeping with the symbolist style that is her preferred mode of theatrical vision, every aspect of the site-specificity alludes to her underlying conviction in continuing to make work for the public as a means to transform consciousness. Her work ethic demonstrates the efficacy of Fischer-Lichte's view of the body as a singular material unlike any other and therefore suggests the need for a loosening of theoretical values. Rather than a body that 'makes' and 'does' and 'is' something or someone, the liveness of it is in a continuous state of becoming and never arriving; a state of 'permanent transformation' (Fischer-Lichte 2008:92). In Buddhist terms, this is a constant state of change or impermanence. Buddhist scholar John Powers identifies its fictional quality: 'The only conclusion that can legitimately be reached is that the self is a fiction, a mere label… a concept created and reified by the mind but lacking any substantial reality' (Powers 2008:49). Monk utilizes the fiction of identity as a teaching tool which is integrated with her meta-approach of creating the circumstances for silent encounters with discursive thinking. When asked if she strives for the transcendent in her work, Monk replied, 'Yes I am, but I am also trying to wake people up. I am striving for theatre as a transformational experience and also an offering… Why do we make a separation between art and spiritual

[37] *Songs of Ascension* can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3mSVR3xtfU

practice? We don't think of art anymore as offering. There are so many cultures where it's totally integrated within daily life' (Monk in Marranca 2009: 91-92). Monk's statement suggests one of the fundamental contextual differences between Western performance art practices and religious ritual and calls into question the relationship between monetary and cultural value with body-centred knowledge production. French feminist critic Hélène Cixous maps this trajectory by highlighting the link between embodiment and materialism: 'This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they're nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Capitalist Siphoning would collapse' (Cixous in Heddon and Klein 2012:1).

Encompassing a broadly Buddhist topic regarding the labeling of phenomena, Cixous regards affective experience as the more trustworthy source of knowledge. [38] This stance is not without problems, however, as affects are not cognitive but embodied states and appear as responses to either external or internal stimuli. For the body to teach, as Cixous would have it, cognition must surely be engaged, even at a later stage, in order to learn something from the feelings and emotions arising as a result of an affective state. Pedagogy entails a threefold process of affect, feeling and emotion, all of which are embodied. All of Monk's prolific body of work echoes this sentiment primarily through the unique musical form she has developed that espouses invented language. Through its lack of linguistic signification, her work is able to settle into embodied forms of knowledge production based on feeling and intention and, finally, interpretation. It is '… no wonder then that performance practices become privileged means to investigate processes where history and body create unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realms, alternative modes for life to be lived' (Lepicki and Banes 2007:1). This suggests that a performer can feel her way into presence, a method utilizing mindfulness meditation techniques that move beyond mere theories of presence. What is most useful in this regard from Cixous' writing is the refusal to reify theory above embodiment. As she clarifies in the most Buddhist of terms:

> All that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted…
> all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken,

[38] Like Fischer-Lichte, Cixous is not writing from a Buddhist perspective and yet her insights are philosophically Buddhist in nature.

> caged, is *less* true… There is continuity in the living; whereas theory entails a discontinuity, a cut, which is altogether the opposite of life. I am not anathematizing all theory. It is indispensable, at times, to make progress, but alone it is false (Calle-Gruber and Cixous 1997:4).

In cultivating theories of presence, it is difficult not to heed Cixous' warning when pitting the two terms alongside each other, *theory* and *presence*, for fear of cancelling each other out. As a result, the PaR project is able to find its place alongside the theoretical discourse surrounding performance art.

Since the 1960s, performance art practices have privileged the body over the mind and extended the movement of conceptual art into quasi-theatrical terms (this is not surprising, given that the human form is typically the first point of contact for the spectator as well as being intrinsic to the experimentation on the limits of the body).[39] Monks's *Songs of Ascension* and my own work, *Sutra*, are examples of one of the ways in which live performance transcends theory, referring back to the pedagogical function of Buddhist performance art. The tension that exists between theory and presence is tangible through the 'doing' of Buddhism. Aiming to provide her audiences with a space wherein the theorising mind might have the opportunity of rest, *Songs of Ascension* contains slow-moving melodies with harmonies associated with medieval plainchant, evoking the ritual of a temple. Elsewhere, string sections are galvanized to pick up the pace, giving the impression of swiftly moving bodies spiraling in all directions. In either case, the tension created between alternating tempos creates the effect of an eternal present, an element found in traditional sacred music. The entire composition has the feel of being highly stylized and meticulously planned which belies the actual process Monk undertakes in all her work. In sound she seeks the developmental course towards a quality or richness that enables the listener to be transported through the tension created between sound and silence; and in terms of the visual sphere, the work relies on the symbolism of the performers spiraling between heaven and earth, alluding to the Buddhist conception of different realms of existence which includes the mediation of heavenly and earthly realms by way of the human being.

Throughout the performance, an eternal 'presence' is manifested through

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[39] In the 1970s performance art began to see an expansion of practices that included the term 'Body Art', coined by American artist Vito Acconci. He recognized the body as being the material of the art form because the body is the source of the action. Art historian Amelia Jones links the lack of body-centred art before the 1960s as predicated upon patriarchy and Modernism's suppression of the social context on which performance art is founded (Jones in Warr 2000:20).

the evocation of the numinous in the harmonics of the music. Theatre and performance theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann's definition of presence in live performance comes close to reflecting the nature of Monk's work:

> This present is not a reified point of time but, as a perpetual disappearing of this point, it is already a transition and simultaneously a caesura between the past and the future. *The present is necessarily the erosion and slippage of presence.* It denotes an event that empties the now and in this emptiness itself lets memory and anticipation flash up. The present cannot be grasped conceptually but only as a perpetual self-division of the now into ever new splinters of 'just now' and 'in an instant' (Lehmann 2006:144, author's emphasis).

Lehmann might as well be talking about the practice of meditation given the similarity of the language of presence in performance terms. But as he states, the 'present cannot be grasped', just as Buddhism states the impossibility of realizing emptiness or interdependence through the intellect. It is through the performance of presence that Monk's sense of transcendence and self-transformation is achieved, or at least hinted at, in *Songs of Ascension* as well as by the end of *At Sea.* Lehmann emphasizes the nature of performance art as a striving toward 'self-transformation' as opposed to the transformation of external reality such as the processes of conventional theatre practices, placing Monk at the apex of her field.

As a result of her Buddhist approach to making work, the social function of the performing arts as cultural commodity is turned into a pedagogy of presence: '…you've done this piece, that piece… and then you go to your grave. And what do you think you have – a piece of paper that tells you all the pieces you've done? So what?… What it gets down to is: how do you want to spend your time on earth?' (Monk in Jowitt 1997:192) As a Buddhist, her point of focus always comes back to motivation, considering it her duty to share her philosophical and musical discoveries with the public. Her work continues to be grounded in the process-oriented minimalism brought to contemporary performance art culture by John Cage, whom Monk credits with having a direct influence on her work: 'Perhaps the most direct influence… was that *4'33"* encouraged composers to forget about conventional expressivity and submit themselves to objective processes (Gann 2010:200).' Working only with sounds as opposed to words, Monk's aim is to 'wake people up' by offering them a transformational experience (Marranca 2009:30). She

is always making the connection between meditation practice, the breath and singing in which the breath is the foundation for both. Stressing the value of live performance, she is adamant that the level of communication created between spectators and performers is of particular importance in the modern world and lays emphasis on the 'congregation of human beings… in the same moment in the same space' (2009:31). Having once created political works for performance, Monk is now inspired only from her meditation practice and her Buddhist aspiration to be of benefit to other people through her work. 'I am really more a poet; I am not a political or analytical writer like Brecht, for example. I can only offer a perceptual experience since my work is primarily non-verbal. In this society where we are continually diverted from the moment, where everything is being numbed, I feel like performance can wake you up to the moment. All we actually have is the moment' (2009:34).

For the Buddhist-influenced performance artist, objective presence-based processes are indistinguishable from the task of the meditator and educator. As 19th century Tibetan teacher Jamgön Kongtrül observed:

> Why chase after thoughts, which are superficial ripples of presence awareness? Rather look directly into the naked, empty nature of thoughts; then there is no duality, no observer, and nothing observed. Simply rest in this transparent, nondual presence awareness. Make yourself at home in the natural state of pure presence, just being, not doing anything in particular (Jamgon Kongtrul in Yam 2016).[40]

Thought of as an objective process, presence awareness engages Buddhist concepts to reach beyond concepts. In this way, Buddhist performance art circles in on itself, perpetually inclined towards ontology.

The analysis of Buddhist-influenced performance art in this chapter recognizes the genre's movement away from purely body-centred practices to incorporate a more holistic vision of the subject as a bodymind. As Buddhist performance art developed out of the initial influence of the more emotionally detached form of Japanese Zen, artists began to work with emotion not only in terms of meditation practice but as a way to try and draw the audience ever closer to an understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence, the key theory underpinning

[40] Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé (1813–1899) was an eminent Tibetan Buddhist teacher and meditation master who founded the non-sectarian Rimé movement in the 19th century.

Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism and its relationship to the doctrine of Self and No self.[41] In the following chapter I will extend the conception of Sedgwick's 'beside' to the analysis of this project's performance art cycle, *Sutra: Five Works for Performance.*

[41] Examples can be seen through the work of Meredith Monk and Marina Abramović.

FRUITION

II. The Bardo of Affect: Between Testimony and Pedagogy

walking

Train yourself in such a way that there is only seeing in what is seen, there is only hearing in what is heard, there is only sensing in what is sensed, there is only cognizing in what is cognized… That will be the end of suffering.

from the *Bodhivagga*, the chapter about awakening in the *Khuddaka Nikaya* [1]

No dharma has ever been taught by a buddha to anyone, anywhere.

Nagarjuna [2]

In the last chapter I traced some of the historical precedents set for Buddhist-inspired performance art as it established itself in Western culture after the Second World War alongside some of their pedagogical considerations. Just as Buddhism teaches a path towards liberation, I argued that Buddhist-influenced performance art is a critical pedagogy for the public and performer. Its function as an educational practice, however, puts the performer in a position of perceived power that might contradict the benevolent intention of the artwork. Søren Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith' can be likened to the Buddhist artist-practitioner and serves as a directive against the potential sullying of the art form:

[1] See: Kalupahana, D.J. and Weeraratne, W.G. eds. (1987), 'Sense Experience of the Liberated Being as Reflected in Early Buddhism', Lily de Silva, trans., *Buddhist Philosophy and Culture*, p.17.

[2] Loy, David (2010), *The World is Made of Stories*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p.7. Also in Pali sutra MK XXV: 24 S (p. 107*, Derrida on the Mend* by R.R. Magliola)

> The knight of faith cannot believe that he (or she) is making a general point, delivering a direct, univocal teaching or setting an example: '[He] feels no vain desire to show others the way… The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher' (Mooney 1991:83).[3]

What Kierkegaard leaves out of his equation, however, is that spiritual practice is fundamentally a teaching practice. Sedgwick argues that '[a]dmittedly, easy to make the case that pedagogical relation is substantively central to Vajrayana Buddhism… based on the exceptional prominence given to the lama/guru as initiatory teacher. Not only Vajrayana but the whole of Mahayana Buddhism, however, is radically self-defined in pedagogical terms' (Sedgwick 2003: 160). I notice that she leaves Theravada Buddhism out of her formulation, relegating its practitioners to being 'students or autodidacts only, who achieve nirvana for their own sake alone (ibid.).' However, what she is missing is the pedagogical nature of spiritual practice as a whole, and that pedagogy is not confined to self-other relations but includes the autodidact. This has been one of the principal investigations of this project, put into practice through performance art.

I have also begun to situate Buddhist performance art within a discourse of pedagogy and affect theory as a means of highlighting the relationship between learning and doing that is at the heart of practice-based performance research and specifically within the context of Buddhism. Its influence takes this process one step further through the emphasis on the reciprocity of teaching and learning that occurs through the autopoietic loop. In analyzing the relationship between testimony (the foundation of autobiography) and pedagogy (the foundation of Buddhism), theories of affect offer a bridge between the two as they provide the necessary impulse for Buddhist practice. Without it, there would be no Dharma. In other words, the desire to be liberated from suffering and dissatisfaction is what leads the practitioner to the meditation cushion in the first place. In the case of the first two performances in *Sutra* (*At Sea: 1980 – 2010* and *No(h) Father*), the relationship between testimony and pedagogy is explored through an exegesis on Self and No self, movement and transmigration as they pertain to my performance art cycle.

One of the problems with terminology of a spiritual nature is its

[3] Kierkegaard created the principle of the 'knight of faith' in a series of theological fictional works including *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, both published in 1843. A knight of faith refers to a person of action who is able to live free of the influences of worldly life, in communion with the divine.

propensity towards the insubstantial or seeming lack of intellectual rigour. In writing about Buddhist performance art praxis, however, the spiritual is inseparable from the practical and requires close exegesis of the topic in order to avoid some of the perceived vagaries of spiritual language. In the same way that Kierkegaard's revolt against Christianity was a defiance of the over-intellectualizing of the faith 'recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual' (Kierkegaard 1846/1941:291), Buddhist performance art is rooted in a spiritual affective realm, grounded in the active pursuit of meditation as a mode of enquiry into the nature of a mind under the influence of affects and their effects (feelings and emotions) and, therefore, poses a challenge to theoretical discourse. The Buddhist definition of mind brings together the three aspects integral to its unity: 'Mind is the coming together of three things: an outer object, an intermediary sense power, and a mental consciousness' (Duff 2010:81).

Buddhist arts praxis challenges the traditional Cartesian viewpoint prevalent since the European Enlightenment, the separation of body and mind within theoretical discourse. In the analysis of a performance methodology founded on Eastern philosophical principles, it should be noted that the unity of body and mind, here referred to as 'presence', is presupposed in Eastern philosophical thought and that Western theoretical discourse has yet to develop a framework with which to approach this presumption. That being said, existential phenomenology and psychoanalysis have begun to approach the threshold of mind-body unity although, according to Japanese theorist Yuasa Yasuo's analysis, they fall short due to the limitations in their respective methodological frameworks (Yasua 1987:2). Given the theoretical challenges to the field, the body-mind enquiry has been taken up within creative culture. In seeking answers to the perennial questions of ontology, Buddhist-influenced performance artists work outside the parameters of theory as a method of 'pointing out.' In the Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen traditions of Tibetan Buddhism the practice of pointing out the nature of mind is carried out by the teacher as a direct method of introducing the student to pure, unfabricated presence-awareness, free from likes and dislikes and every type of dualistic fixation. This is also in accord with the pedagogic function of Buddhist art which acts as a catalyst towards, at the very least, the recognition of a path that can lead to insight and quietitude.

If the performer's inner aspect is expressed through his or her capacity to practice meditation in situ, the outer aspect incorporates the visual expression of Buddhist philosophy that may or may not adhere to any pre-conceived notions of Buddhist art but inhabits the site of critical pedagogy. On the contrary, Baas emphasizes

> content over style and even, at times, over subject matter. A Western form of artistic expression that has been influenced by Buddhism may not 'look' Buddhist, in terms of either its subject matter or its style. The criteria will include whether the artist had the possibility of contact with Buddhism through texts, artistic expression or other information, and whether the content or effect of the work is in keeping with the psychological and philosophical perspectives of the Buddha (Baas 2005:9).[4]

There is a distinction to be made, however, between Buddhist art and Dharma art. Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's theory of Dharma art lies in direct opposition to Buddhist scholar Richard Gombrich's thesis that there is no general Buddhist aesthetic theory in that he redefines beauty as intrinsic to experience as well as transcending ordinary perception which is the business of aesthetic theory in general.[5] As Trungpa writes, 'Fundamentally, art is the expression of unconditional beauty which transcends the ordinary beauty of good and bad' (Trungpa 1994:151).[6] Referring to an innate unconditionality of presence, Trungpa discerns the difference between exhibitionist art and its split from the audience and that which is produced in order to effect and engage the viewer to the same extent as the artist.[7] This relies, however, on an accessible symbolic framework from which a spectator unversed in Buddhist philosophy might draw inspiration.

In direct opposition to traditional Buddhist iconography, contemporary Buddhist symbolic codes are evident within performance art precisely through the absence of an object-based iconography. Marina Abramović utilizes the symbolism

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[4] There are debates within the field of art history that deny the existence of Buddhist art altogether, claiming that Indian, Japanese, Korean art, etc. are the only possibilities open to study. See: Gombrich, Richard (2013), 'Buddhist Aesthetics?', Spalding Symposium, Oxford University, April 2011

[5] Its place within the culture of early Buddhism (5th to 1st centuries BCE) cannot be found and Gombrich's final thesis with regard to tradition is that there is no general Buddhist aesthetic theory, since it would require an approach to understanding the appreciation and creation of beauty along with its requisite judgments.

[6] This philosophy was carried out in Trungpa's early monastic arts training which was highly prescribed and left no room for individual expression.

[7] In *True Perception: The Path of Dharma* Art (2008), Trungpa outlines a specifically Buddhist approach to arts practice.

of the act of meditating bodies (as I also do in *Still Life*) while Meredith Monk draws upon the minimalist stylings of contemporary acapella music and staging. In each case, the Buddhist-influenced performance artist goes in search of an iconography of freedom, reflective of the non-discursive mind-states of meditative equipoise. The ultimate prevailing iconography is only fully discernable through the live pedagogical encounter as opposed to even the best kept documentation. After all, in a state of mind-body unity, according to Buddhist epistemology, the environment is transformed into a 'Pure Land' or 'Buddha-field'. In other words, any prior experience of suffering is negated through reaching the highest mind-states possible (Skt. *samadhi*). For my purposes and from my current position, these states are purely theoretical but worthy of recognition by way of reference to the ultimate goal of meditation in action. In terms of a performance methodology, the Pure Land framework is always in the background of the practitioner's awareness of the mind's full potential.

The function of the discourses outlined in this chapter serve to contextualize Buddhist-influenced performance art as entirely pedagogical in nature. The notion of Buddhist philosophy as a phenomenological pursuit is forever discovering its foundations through the lived experiences of its practitioners. This suggests the idea of Buddhism *as* a performing art for '…it is not only our bodies which enter the world of performance; it is even more significantly our minds which step from one set of assumptions about one kind of reality through a threshold into another' (George 1999:8). Through the use of affective performance practices involving relational exchanges between performer and spectator, the art form has found its grounding precisely through Buddhist meditation practices as translated for the art of live performance.

As performance art continues to build upon existing theoretical frameworks, there is still a lack of a singular ontology of performance through which emergent practices might be situated. In some ways this provides a fertile environment for the exegesis of a field that is still in the burgeoning stages of theoretical discourse. At the same time, it is like scrambling in the dark trying to theorize a subject that transcends theory. Given the affective nature of the genre, I am hopeful that a fundamental discourse of Buddhist influenced performance art will emerge out of the prevailing practices, my own included. To borrow from Roland Barthes : '…the way of the affect: discourse comes to the [genre] by means of

the affect' that suggests a pedagogy of performance art based on embodied experience.[8] This is particularly the case for autobiography in the genre due to the fact that it entails pure subjectivity and that the body becomes the site of knowledge. In the five performance art works for *Sutra* that I developed as the practice-based methodology for pursuing this project, my reliance on embodied knowledge (collected over a period of almost twenty years of Buddhist practice) presupposed any knowledge of theoretical discourse. Over time, however, theory began to come into sharp focus as an equal partner in the pursuit of knowledge, particularly regarding pedagogy.

Beginning with the performance of *At Sea: 1980 – 2010*, my focus was on the Tibetan teaching on how to view adversaries as one's highest teachers. At the start of the video documentation, footage of my parents introduces the viewer to their images and overlapping voices which dominated the entire performance. The internal struggle was in transforming my memories and vision of them from obstacles to teachings on compassion and ego-dissolution. This theme was taken up in the subsequent performances in *Sutra* and became the dominant pedagogical influence in my performance methodology. I allowed the reality of the autobiographical encounter to teach me everything I needed to know about presence. Lee Worley, a student of the late Trungpa Rinpoche and Professor of Performance at Naropa University in Colorado, formulates the particulars of the approach I took in my own work based on Tibetan Buddhist meditation practice.[9] Meditation training is a way for performers to retain synchronicity with themselves and each other under the pressure of performance conditions. In other words, it is a training in 'sensitivity to the interplay of form and space' (Worley 2001:123). An example of an exercise in attention is the following:

> Pay attention to a single object for a long period of time… First, just look. Keep looking. Notice how quickly you get bored with looking. Notice how your sixth consciousness (mind) suggests that it is time to move on. Keep looking (2001:45).

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[8] The actual quote refers to Barthes' writing on the Neuter within language: '…the way of the affect: discourse comes to the neutral by means of the affect' (Barthes 2005:190).

[9] See Worley, Lee (2001), *Coming from Nothing: The Sacred Art of Acting*, Boulder: Turquoise Dragon Press

The exercise facilitates training in presence and awareness of the ways in which the habitual mind engages with external sense objects and attempts to contextualize experience temporally through thinking about the past, theorising about the present or projecting onto the future. These all hinder the ability to experience the world accurately without recourse to theories and ideas about our experience. Buddhist performer training is about loosening the border between action and openness, enabling the performer to react authentically. As a critical pedagogy, its heart lies in emancipation. As educational theorist David Kirk recognized, the onus is upon teachers to engage in self-reflection in order to contribute to the very pedagogy upon which the field may be developed (Kirk 1986). In the same way, the Buddhist performance artist teaches through the very act of self-reflection in both performance and training. This is the 'doing' of Buddhist philosophy.

By way of example, I would now like to draw attention to a work of art by Ann Hamilton that brings forward the idea of the 'beside' that Sedgwick introduced into critical theory in 2003 and that, I argue, serves as a major consideration in the development of critical discourse in the field of Buddhist performance art:

> I have tried… to explore some ways around the topos of depth or hiddenness, typically followed by a drama of exposure, that has been such a staple of critical work of the past four decades. *Beneath* and *behind* are hard enough to let go of; what has been even more difficult is to get a little distance from *beyond*, in particular the bossy gesture of 'calling for' an imminently perfected or revolutionary practice that one can oneself only adumbrate. Instead, …the most salient preposition… is probably *beside* (Sedgwick 2003:8).

The notion of the 'beside' posits a useful approach to the elusive and often strange territory of Buddhist-inspired performance art. The dictionary definition is rather straightforward: **beside** • *prep.* 1. At the side of; next to. > compared with. 2. In addition to; apart from. – PHRASES **beside oneself** distraught (OED 1999:128). It suggests, in many ways, a philosophical position as well as an affective one. Sedgwick's use of a spatially situated term is credited to '[s]patializing disciplines such as geography and anthropology [which] have the advantage of permitting ecological or systems approaches to such issues as identity and performance (Sedgwick 2003:8).' It also offers a critical lens through which Buddhist-inspired

performance art can be viewed from multiple angles because it does not sit easily within a singular frame.

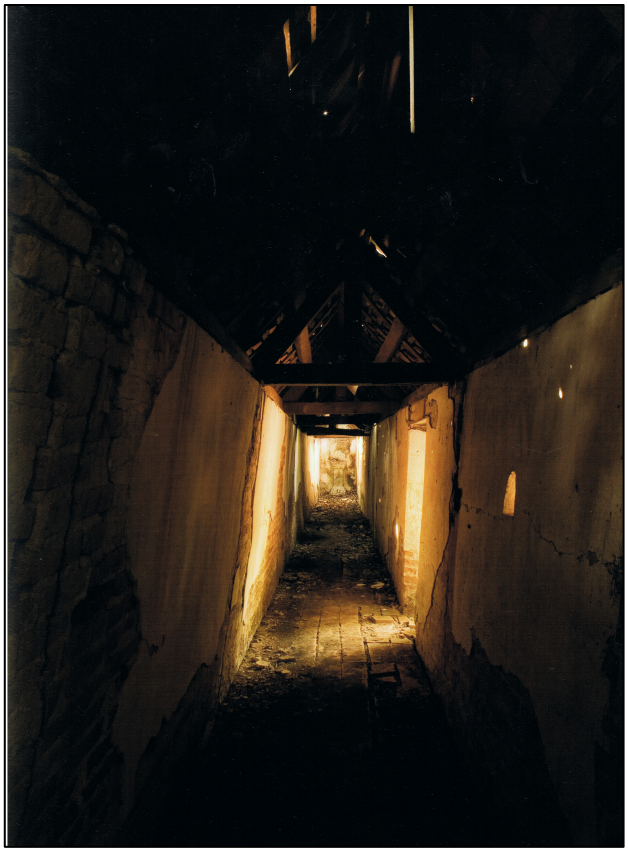

Fig. 7 **Walking meditation hall at Vat Had Sieo (2009)** **© Thibault Jeanson**

Meditation Boat

Luang Prebang, Laos. Amongst the Buddhist monasteries surrounding the Mekong River sit a number of walking meditation halls, four to be exact (Fig. 7). They are in various states of disrepair and are no longer in use. According to the local monks, many more were once in existence but disappeared as the practice of meditation waned, largely due to the American bombing of the region during the period of the Vietnam War. In 2004, art historian France Morin curated a four-year long project with fourteen artists for *The Quiet in the Land: Art, Spirituality and Everyday Life.*[10] The artworks consisted of responses to the cultural expression of Buddhism in

[10] The project took place in Luang Prebang, Laos between 2004 – 2008 and resulted in the publication of a book of the same name. See: Morin, F. and Farmer, J.A. eds. (2009), *The Quiet in the Land*, New York: The Quiet in the Land, Inc.

Luang Prebang through drawing, photography, film, sculpture and performance-based installations. One such contribution was a wooden meditation boat (Fig. 8 & 9) designed by American artist Ann Hamilton inspired by the narrow walking meditation halls of the local temples.[11] The boat became a performance site for use by the local monks and nuns as well as lay practitioners. As Hamilton describes it in her project proposal, 'Its presence on the water will be a reminder of the need to cultivate attention and compassion, in a place of travel and during a time of transition and change' (Hamilton in Ly 2012:277). Morin says of the Lao project:

> The objective… is to illuminate the space between the artists and the communities. The nature of this space in-between can be understood by invoking the Japanese concept of *ma* – the interval of space or time between phenomena, such as a room (the space between walls) or a pause in music (the time between notes). This space is not just a void, but a vessel to be filled… As the religious studies scholar Richard B. Pilgrim has observed, '*ma* is not a mere emptiness or opening; through and in it shines a light, and the function of this *ma* becomes precisely to let that light shine through' (Morin and Farmer 2009:13).

As well as an expression of space, *ma* has also been used to describe 'the complex network of relationships between people and objects' (de Kerckhove 2005:157). Lacking an English language equivalent, designer Alan Fletcher views the word as 'this interval which gives shape to the whole. In the West we have neither word nor term. A serious omission' (Fletcher 2001:370). Given the variety of usages, *ma* can also be likened to Jacques Derrida's use of the French term for 'between', or *entre*, which he links inextricably with the term *hymen* (derived from the Greek *humēn* or 'membrane'). For Derrida, the hymen reveals both separation and close proximity as well as 'a "between" of temporal places of action and cognition' (Roden 2012). He states that 'it is the "between", whether it names fusion or separation, that thus carries all the force of the operation' (Derrida 1981:220). In examining the pedagogical nature of Buddhist performance art, I argue that pedagogy, whether by way of the performer or the spectator, takes place in the between states: the *entre*; the *ma*; the *bardo*. In other words, it is not a singular moment or symbolic utterance that incites transformation but the collective force of the complex sign system that

[11] Ann Hamilton was also responsible for *Tower* in the performance of Meredith Monk's *Songs of Ascension* as referenced in Chapter 2.

makes up the performance art event. As Pilgrim states in the above quote, 'through and in it shines a light, and the function of this *ma* becomes precisely to let that light shine through' (Morin and Farmer 2009:13).

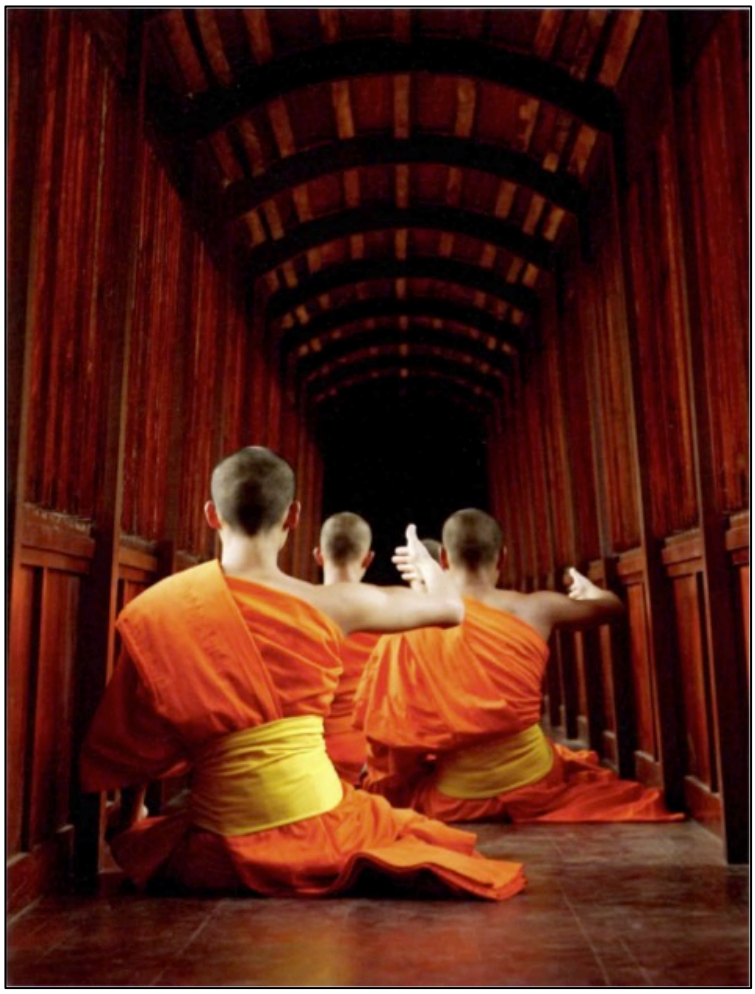

Fig. 8 **Inside the Meditation Boat (2009)**
© Thibault Jeanson

Fig. 9 On the Mekong River (2009) © Thibault Jeanson

In Tibetan Buddhist epistemology, the time between one lifetime and the next is referred to as the *bardo* (Tib.) or, literally, the 'intermediate state' and is considered a journey through the mind after consciousness has been separated from the physical body at the time of death. Francesca Freemantle extends the meaning of the *bardo* to include the affective experience of living:

> [I]t can also be interpreted as any transitional experience, any state that lies between two other states. Its original meaning, the experience of being between death and rebirth, is the prototype of the bardo experience… By refining even further the understanding of the essence of bardo, it can then be applied to every moment of existence. The present moment, the now, is a continual bardo, always suspended between the past and the future (Freemantle 2001:53-54).

If the present moment is conceived as a *bardo* state then I assert that affect, which psychologist Silvan Tomkins first theorized as biological phenomena in *Affect/Imagery/Consciousness* (1962), can be thought of as a type of *bardo* between an initial biochemical response to emotional stimuli and emotion itself. [12] The five performances in *Sutra* also use the idea of the *bardo* state as a focal point for the transition stage as I experienced it after the death of my mother and as my partner faced the impending death of his mother.

[12] Psychiatrist Donald L. Nathanson describes the relationship between affect and emotion as, 'Whereas affect is biology, emotion is biography' (Nathanson 1992:50).

The nature of the autobiographical performance artworks for *Sutra* rests on the idea of the *bardo* in that I use them as bridges between myself as the performer and the assembled community of spectators as well as a kind of interval giving shape to the whole of my life's narrative. It also represents the separation and perceived proximity between myself and my parents, subject and object. In the case of *At Sea: 1980 – 2010* this is embodied through long durational walking whereas in *(whispers)* this is embodied through long durational reading. In all cases, *bardo* becomes a pedagogical tool. Morin's description of the 'vessel to be filled' accurately embodies each performance event as a kind of vessel to be filled with fragments of a life: my own and, in the case of *Boudhanath*, the life of my partner. It also describes the in-between space I refer to as the 'bardo of affect' since the means by which my performances enact pedagogy are fundamentally affective in nature for it is precisely the stimulating of affect and, thus, emotional states that leads to Buddhist meditation practice and, eventually, liberation from the destructive forces of ego-clinging.

Self and No Self in Autobiography

> **Autobiographical performance… [is] a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self.**
>
> **Deirdre Heddon[13]**

> **To say that phenomena are impermanent… is to say that at every moment, everything is changing… Because of these kinds of change, all identity over time, from a Buddhist point of view, is a fiction, albeit often a very useful fiction.**
>
> **Jay L. Garfield[14]**

> **The need for memory is a need for history.**
>
> **Pierre Nora[15]**

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[13] Heddon, Deirdre (2008), *Autobiography and Performance,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.3

[14] Garfield, Jay L. (2015). *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy,* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 41

[15] Nora, Pierre (1984) *Les Lieux de Memoire*, In: Farr, Ian (ed). *Memory: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, p. 62

Due to the estrangement of my father, the death of my mother, and the coming to terms with my identity as no longer a daughter but a woman of a certain age in desperate need of parenting, the performance art event presented itself as the ideal medium for the exploration and exorcism of memory and identity. The affective nature of the medium of performance art dictated the methodological framework, positioning the live performance event at the heart of this project. Testimony allows me to be 'someone' so that I can begin to break down the illusion of Self through the act of witnessing my mind as it reacts to external memory-provoking stimuli such as my parents' voices or images. The post-performance analysis enables the development of a discourse of pedagogy predicated upon a 'doing' of theory in order to understand its place within the genre of Buddhist performance art. It also opens out affective reading strategies to try and reveal something about the impossibility of capturing or realizing any definitive truth statements that might be made about what constitutes a work of Buddhist art. As Meredith Monk observes, 'How do I make work about something you can't make work about?' (Midgette 2013)

When the American Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg was invited to participate in the 4th Mind and Life conference in Dharamsala, India, in 1990, she was eager to find out the Dalai Lama's thoughts on the topic of self-loathing, a prevalent mental state in Western culture.[16] As the conference theme was 'Emotions and Health', this seemed like a logical question to bring into the discussion. 'What do you think about self-hatred?' she asked publicly. She describes the Dalai Lama as looking puzzled as he asked his translator to explain the question more clearly. He then looked at her and said, 'Self-hatred? What is that?' Throughout the ensuing discussion, he pressed for clarification on the matter, asking, 'Is that some kind of nervous disorder? Are people like that very violent?' His final thoughts on this seeming anomaly of human emotion were characteristically humble: 'I thought I had a very good acquaintance with the mind, but now I feel quite ignorant. I find this very, very strange' (Salzberg 2011). Perhaps the difficulty in this exchange is a question of translation. After all, the very concept of self-hatred is a particularly Western one, even if the mind state could be deemed universal. The problem is

[16] Initially conceived as small gatherings in 1987 between Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama and a group of scholars and scientists interested in exploring the relationship between mind, consciousness and science, the Mind and Life Dialogues have grown into annual public conferences covering topics as diverse as physics, neuroplasticity, economics, education and ethics, amongst others. More information on the conferences can be found on the Mind and Life Institute website: https://www.mindandlife.org/dalai-lama-dialogues/

conceptual and, in the context of the Judeo-Christian paradigm, a lot easier to grasp against the theory of Original Sin. In Eastern thought, however, the core of being is conceived of as an essentially pure, enlightened state hidden from consciousness by a myriad of mental afflictions. Therefore, the Dalai Lama in all his perceived wisdom could not understand what it might be like to be self-hating.

To speak of my own history of self-hatred is to expose myself to the problems of self-representation that, in their theatrical-performative guises, stand up to a different kind of scrutiny but which, nonetheless, risk accusations of self-indulgence. Writing about the solo autobiographical performance art work, John Howell observes the genre's mixed reception:

> Like all fashions, monologue and solo performance offers mixed benefits. In fact, it is as often an ego show as a revelation; the virus of the I-Did-It-My-Way/I-Gotta-Be-Me strain afflicts the larger number of such acts, particularly in the performance art area which presents amateurish staging techniques and mini-personalities as often as original methods and subjects. That solo talk as performance is a unique and increasingly prevalent style, but not a completely privileged one, is the point to remember… speaking to others by talking to ourselves (Howell 1979:158).

By the nature of its methodology, Buddhist-inspired autobiography attempts to circumvent these platitudes through the undercurrent of its philosophical aesthetic. In the case of *Sutra* in which Buddhism and testimony fuse together to present a hybrid of the genre of performance art, I use the Self or ego as a way of the 'beside': No self. Where Howell makes reference to 'the virus of the I-Did-It-My-Way/I-Gotta-Be-Me strain', that same strain, according to Buddhism, becomes the antidote to ego-clinging. Deirdre Heddon goes so far as to refer to autobiography as an 'intervention' (Heddon 2008:5) both in the lives of the performer and the audience.
Apart from illuminating some of the basic themes of Buddhist thought, however, the Buddhist-inspired autobiography also extends out of the paradigm of altruism and, hence, it could be regarded as an intervention of a stream of suffering consciousness. When I presented some of my research on *At Sea: 1980 – 2010* at the Performance and Mindfulness Symposium in Huddersfield in June 2016, a member of the audience told me that my work inspired her to move forward with her own autobiographical performance project that, up until then, she struggled to

actualize.[17] She said that my performance gave her permission to self-reflect in a way that she had felt inhibited from doing for fear of judgment about any potential public display of emotional subjectivity. In a conversation that extended beyond the symposium, we were in agreement that the joining of performance and mindfulness invites a conscious recognition that, beyond the surface of the ego's desire for recognition and solidification lies an instinct for communion with fellow sufferers of the human condition. As the American performance artist Lisa Kron says, 'the goal of autobiographical work should not be to tell stories about yourself but, instead, to use details of your own life to illuminate or explore something more universal (Kron 2001:xi).' In this way, the conception of a 'self' becomes a 'very useful fiction' (Garfield 2015:41).

In order to begin a discussion of Self (*ātman*) and No self (*anātman*) in the context of Buddhism and performance art and its pedagogical implications, it is helpful to know how the self has been defined outside of this context (specifically regarding the Western philosophical tradition) as it bears a burden of responsibility for some of the prevailing misunderstandings of the topic in its Buddhist context. Early stirrings within ancient Greek culture include the aphorism γνῶθι σεαυτόν or 'know thyself';[18] the later Cartesian maxim 'I think, therefore I am' arose out of Descartes' quest for knowledge of the self: 'I know I exist; the question is, what is this 'I' that I know?' (Descartes in Gallagher and Shear 1999:1); the empiricist epistemology of David Hume suggested that the self was comprised of a chain of perceptions but that no independent self could be found outside of the causal links of momentary impressions;[19] the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl described the self as: 'The ego is existent for itself by continuously constituting itself as existing: it transcendentally constitutes itself' (Kockelmans 1994:261); Sigmund Freud's development of psychoanalysis posited the self as existing in layers (the *id* or seat of our desires; the *ego* or self regulator; and the *superego* or seeker of perfection);

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[17] The Performance and Mindfulness Symposium was presented by the Centre for Psychophysical Performance Research at the University of Huddersfield, 2nd – 5th June 2016.

[18] The Greek travel writer Pausanias (c.110 – 180 CE) describes this as one of the maxims inscribed inside the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The phrase is also employed by Plato in a number of his Socratic dialogues including *Charmides* (164D), *Protagoras* (343B), *Phaedrus* (343B), *Philebus* (48C), *Laws* (II.923A) and *Alcibiades I* (124A, 129A and 132C). See: Plato (1892/2013). *The Dialogues of Plato.* Translated into English by Benjamin Jowett in Five Volumes. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[19] See: Hume, David (1739/1985). *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.* London: Penguin Classics

while Carl Jung argued for a holistic vision of the self as an archetype of the whole human being (the unification of conscious and unconscious desires). Amongst these diverse views that have all been incorporated into the Western philosophical and psychological traditions, David Hume's view comes closest to that of the Buddhist epistemological model of Self and No self.[20]

In stark contrast to the positing of a self-experiencing 'I' is the Buddhist view of No self although it has been pointed out that the correct translation of *anātman* is closer to 'non-self', an important consideration in order to avoid misunderstanding what the Buddha is purported to have taught on the subject:[21]

> We should carefully heed the two reasons that the Buddha does not declare, 'There is no self': not because he recognizes a transcendent self of some kind (as some interpreters allege), or because he is concerned only with delineating 'a strategy of perception' devoid of ontological implications (as others hold), but (i) because such a mode of expression was used by the annihilationists, and the Buddha wanted to avoid aligning his teaching with theirs; and (ii) because he wished to avoid causing confusion in those already attached to the idea of self. The Buddha declares that 'all phenomena are nonself'', which means that if one seeks a self anywhere one will not find one. Since 'all phenomena' includes both the conditioned and the unconditioned, this precludes an utterly transcendent, ineffable self (Bikkhu Bodhi 2000:1457).

If what the Buddha taught is true, then how does this position fit within the genre of autobiography since it is predicated upon self-promotion and agency? In a similar vein to John Howell's cautionary 'I-Did-It-My-Way/I-Gotta-Be-Me strain', Heddon's *Autobiography and Performance* (2008) offers an important clue in the argument that, 'The fact that a "self" appears to lie at the centre of autobiography too easily raises the spectre of self-indulgence for many critics' (Heddon 2008:4). 'Self-indulgence' translates easily into the Buddhist terminology of 'clinging to self' and 'the self-cherishing "I"'. Autobiography need not be predicated on one position or

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[20] A scholar in both psychology and philosophy, Alison Gopnik argues that Hume may, in fact, have been influenced by Buddhism through his interaction with the Jesuit scholars of the Royal College of La Flèche, France. See: Gopnik, Alison (2009), 'Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism? Charles François Dolu, the Royal College of La Flèche, and the Global Jesuit Intellectual Network, *Hume Studies*, 35 (1&2), pp. 5-28.

[21] For the purposes of this thesis I use the common term of No self throughout. Buddhist doctrinal origins include the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, *Ratnagotravibhāga* (also known as *Uttaratantra*) and the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* amongst others.

the other, however; either a performance in which the reification of the self is paramount nor one in which the self is fundamentally deconstructed to the point of a loss of identity altogether. On the contrary, the Buddhist autobiography holds both states to be co-existent, as revealed through the Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths.

The doctrine of the Two Truths holds that phenomena exist as both relative (or conventional) and ultimate truth. Relatively speaking, I can posit that I am 'Pema'; I am a mother; I am a teacher. Ultimately, however, I am none of these things because, according to Buddhism, I do not exist in the way I think I do. As the Dalai Lama explains, the doctrine of the fundamental teachings on the Four Noble Truths can only be comprehended through familiarity with the doctrine of the Two Truths: [22]

> So how can we develop a personal understanding of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths? By coming to know our everyday world of lived experience, we appreciate what is known as *saṁvṛiti-satya*, the world of conventional reality, where the causal principle operates. If we accept the reality of this world as conventional, then we can accept the empty nature of this world which, according to Buddhism, is the ultimate truth, the *paramārtha satya*… The world of appearance is used not so much as a contrast or an opposite to the world of ultimate truth, but rather as the evidence, the very basis on which the ultimate nature of reality is established (Dalai Lama 1997:19).

To break this concept down further, if I look for a self there is none to be found. The only semblance of 'I' exists as an amalgam of opinions, habits and associations agreed upon over time about a middle-aged woman who can be recognized by myself and others as 'Pema'. In the two performances in question in this chapter, *At Sea: 1980 – 2010* and *No(h) Father,* I make no attempt to present anything other than a relative narrative of myself in relation to my parents while holding within my awareness the idea that something exists beyond my own self-identification. It is perhaps the act of self-identification that reveals the direction Buddhism is taking in the West: the necessity to identify with a relative sense of self before penetrating its

[22] The Four Noble Truths are considered the first teachings of the Buddha after he reached enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. They are: (1) Life is *dukkha* (suffering or dissatisfaction); (2) The origin of suffering is craving; (3) Cessation of suffering arises through the renunciation of craving; (4) Renunciation of craving arises through the practice of the eightfold path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

nature further. The problem lies in the challenge of representation and the limits of autobiography in conveying such a pedagogy.

The paradox of Self and No self is difficult to grasp conceptually as it does not lend itself to easy solutions to the fundamental questions of ontology posed by Buddhist performance art. In the Diamond Sutra (Skt. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) the Buddha teaches the doctrine of the Middle Way as a path towards the avoidance of extreme mind states that lead to suffering and dissatisfaction. Buddhist scholar Jin Y. Park identifies the existential dilemma that forms the foundations of Buddhist performance methodology:

> To the Buddha, the position of viewing things from the perspective of 'being' ('everything exists') and that of 'non-being' ('everything does not exist') are both extremes. Unlike the moderate lifestyle that can be conceived of as a middle point between hedonism and asceticism, a medium between existence and nonexistence is not easy to grasp. What does exist between existence and non-existence? How do we find a middle path between being and non-being? (Park 2006:9)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick posits this middle path as the 'beside'. However, the middle way between being and non-being is further complicated in autobiographical performance art due to the shifting nature of identity. In coming to the performance encounter in an unenlightened state or, to put it bluntly, my 'every-day self', the likelihood of being able to convey the pedagogy of non-being is contingent upon my skills as a meditator. This, in turn, forms the foundations for the long-durational performance in which repetition and boredom become catalysts for a potential Middle Way experience.

I contend that the primary question of autobiography is a philosophical one. It asks: Here I am; here are some fragmented musings from my life, all with a view to trying to find the answer to a question that cannot be answered: Who am I? The promise of autobiography is problematic because for all the claims engendered by the form, it can never deliver. It can never offer a true, real subject. It is more like a reflection on water. Disturb the water and the image dissolves, only to be reinstated with each viewing as the water settles back down again. Buddhist scholar David Loy uses the metaphor of water to reflect the conventional world of experience:

> The limits of my stories are the limits of my world… Like the proverbial fish that cannot see the water they swim in, we do

> not notice the medium we dwell within. Unaware that our stories are stories, we experience them as the world. But we can change the water. When our accounts of the world become different, the world becomes different (Loy 2010:5).

So perhaps this means that autobiography needs stillness to be able to even come close to its subject. In autobiography, are we not seeking to surpass the mere personal, to touch on something that transcends the individual and speaks to the human condition? The category of Buddhist art renders the autobiography as a vehicle for teaching on the themes of suffering, its causes and solutions.

The autobiographical form could be said to be a kind of act of translation. How can I translate the memory-archive which is dependent upon those memories that dominate a daily personal narrative stream and which, whether I like it or not, surface in a repetitive fashion? So it becomes a poetics of translation, filtered through a particular aesthetic, both visual and sonic. In *Sutra*, my parents' archive presents the form. In the case of *At Sea: 1980 - 2010*, it was the mirror-like quality of the two interviews themselves which suggested the overlapping of voices and the juxtaposition of two opposing screens (ass seen in the video). This, in turn, suggested a reflection of my memory of my parents and the ambivalence I often felt towards them throughout our lives together. The fact of their present states – a dead mother and an estranged father – suggested burial, both literally and figuratively. Whichever parent remained living would be the one I symbolically un-buried, in this case my father. So perhaps it can be said that I did not create the performance work, I merely made a translation based on the materials available to me. The fact of my Buddhist faith and its centrality to my life over the past eighteen years dictated the performance methodology in the question: how do I work with every thought and emotion that arises as I walk back and forth between my parents' representations on the screens? So the entire process lies somewhere between objectivity and subjectivity. It is a grey area, a *bardo*, a *ma*; like Derrida's *entre*. There is no answer to arrive at, no single interpretation other than the insight provided through the lens of the 'beside'.

Fig. 10 ***At Sea: 1980-2010*** **© Paul Craig**

AT SEA: 1980 - 2010

1980

When I was ten years old I had no idea that my family's move to California would summon in the next thirty years at sea.

2010

My mother dies.

The sea drift ends.

The point at which I became conscious of myself and my perceived lack of agency was in 1980 when my family moved to California from New York City. I was ten years old. This was when a sense of invisibility began. The motivation for Sutra: Five Works for Performance *began as an adjunct to therapy, which I felt had outstayed its welcome. Parents are the primary mirrors for so many people – the difficulty is when those mirrors are cracked or broken and the child thinks logically, looking in the reflection,*

'then I must be broken.' Buddhist practice teaches me how to sit with the feeling of brokenness and discover that nothing was broken to begin with.

If a need for memory amounts to a need for history, then it could also be said that with this need comes a willingness to confront suffering, if indeed it forms part of one's history and identity. In creating the autobiographical performance art works for this project, the starting point was the present as it appeared to me in 2013. My mother had been dead for three years and I had not seen my father since he showed up unannounced and unwelcome at my mother's funeral. I have not seen him since. While Pierre Nora's statement referring to the need for memory and history may be an appropriate response to the recognition of the past and its place within the human psyche, it doesn't leave much room for the readiness of this confrontation.

It is time to start walking.

Thus have I heard. *I am standing in wait for the audience to come in. The voices of my parents, so familiar they cut to the bone and overlap each other; sounds that bring a feeling like stone in the pit of my stomach. I turn on the video screens and press the play button. I did not expect to be shocked to see my parents in a room together again after fourteen years, facing each other through plasma screens. After 32 years of marriage and an acrimonious divorce, this video archive reveals more to me about their relationship than any of my own memories. The last and only time I have seen these videos was the week after my mother's funeral in Connecticut in 2010. I have not heard my mother in a while, only when I search for her on the internet. Even then it is not her real voice. Her real voice talks to me, alone with her in a room or down the telephone. Her real voice tells me she is getting sicker, the tumours now in the lining of her brain. Six months later she dies. The voice I hear before the audience come in is her public voice. The voice for the camera, the voice for the BBC. My father's voice is different. I have not heard his voice since he showed up in Connecticut and tried to get in to my mother's funeral. He didn't get in. The next day I went to see him and heard his voice as I always heard it. Devoid of real emotion. Now I hear the same voice but from the distant past. There is no emotion then, either. The collision of my parents' voices begins to disturb me as I start the long walk. I am aware of a surreal quality to the event as it is the first time I am putting my life on show to the public. What is real? The*

videos are not my parents, they are 45 year old moving images of my parents. How can I convey the explosion of emotions running through my body if I am not speaking? I carry on walking with the first stone in my hand. The door opens and a group of people enter and sit down on the floor or lean against the wall. It is their entrance which brings tears to my eyes. What is it about the witness I find so moving and forces my past into the present in a way that the pain cannot be avoided?

I begin the performance on my father's side by turning over an hourglass and picking up the first of the 108 stones which I carry slowly towards my mother, maintaining focus on her and the words she speaks until I reach her 'grave' on which I place the first stone. It feels like I am burying her all over again only this time there are none of the familiar family faces around me. I stand and watch her for a moment in her sweet, childlike demeanor. As I walk back towards my father to unbury him by a second stone I find it hard to maintain the contact with his face, his voice or his presence. Memories of my childhood come flooding back to me, accompanied by an anger I haven't felt towards him for many years since his estrangement. He is dead to me. It is at this moment that I am no longer present with the experience and the people in the room but clinging onto old reference points, finding ways to justify my anger and my ego enhancing response to a forty-five year old video archive. The tears that began when the audience first arrived are now streaming down my face. I attempt to gather myself as if to prove what a 'good' Buddhist is meant to look like: compassionately detached. I fail miserably and allow myself to give way to emotion in the quietest way possible.

My mother's voice is soft and young. She is twenty-four years old and it hasn't yet transformed into the crisp cadenced actor's voice it would become in later years. She is visibly pregnant with my older brother and she sounds vulnerable as she tries to answer the sharp-toned questions of her interviewer. On the other side of the room my father in his tie and suit sits back at ease in his chair, spending far too long on one question to which he clearly doesn't know how to respond. To my purely subjective ears his answers sound false, arrogant and over-confident. This is the father I always knew and always doubted. To hear his voice again invites an anger that could compel me to throw the stone in my hands at the video screen. The Buddhist in me simply observes the thought and keeps walking. My mother needs a grave.

As I continue to walk and move the stones I am aware of so many different types of thoughts and emotions and as time moves slowly by and people continue to leave and enter the room, I take myself in hand in order to reconnect to the original impulse for this piece of work. I walk and meditate and as each thought arises I invite it into my perception without clinging to it. It is not unlike standing at the edge of the shore watching the waves lap the sand over and over.

Thus have I heard. *I am still walking. Twice have I turned the hourglass and my shoulders are hurting, my ribs collapsing. I am still walking. My mother's grave is a pile of stones growing bigger and my father's grave is diminishing. I am still walking. The anger has subsided and the pity is making its turn to compassion. I am still walking. Memories from childhood have paid me a lot of visits and I have wiped the tears from my cheeks at least an hour ago. I am still walking. The stone piles have a beauty about them and I notice some new people in the audience. Others have left. I am still walking. When I kneel down to place a stone before my mother it is painful to stand. The sad pain I had on the inside of me is now a solid pain in my knees, my legs, my back. I walk and I walk and I walk and I continue to face my father and my mother in all their glory. The distinction between love and hate gets thinner. My eyes are tired. The audience is present and my mother is getting a grave.*

Thus have I heard. *My father's grave is almost gone. The people are leaving as the day is through and a woman comes in to indicate to me that I can end the performance. The hourglass has been turned three times and the sand is still falling. I kneel down in front of my father and pick up the remaining stones, throwing them across the space to my mother's grave. They make a fine clacking as they land. At the end of the performance, this is what I know: I am nobody going nowhere. My parents are not my parents. I am free and only sometimes I know this to be true. If my father is anywhere, he is inside my head, making a lot of noise when I let him. My mother is gone, her echo still sounding within the confines of my ribcage. I don't mind if she comes to visit me sometimes. I keep her an empty space.*

I am walking. I am walking.

Inspired by Butoh and Buddhist meditation practice, *At Sea: 1980 – 2010* is a durational memorial to my parents in which they are buried and unburied, both figuratively and metaphorically. Using original video source material of BBC television interviews from the 1960s with my late mother and my estranged father, I use repetition in the form of walking and moving stones between their 'graves', in complete silence. The only sound during the entire performance is my parents' voices speaking simultaneously on a sonic loop. The graves are represented by two video screens on opposite sides of the performance space, attracting and repelling me with each walk. Through this process I test the limitations of my own physical, mental and emotional capacities over a period of more than three hours of non-stop walking and stone removal in confined space and without escape from the presence of my parents.

Building on the methodology is an analysis of the performance that takes into account both its aesthetic qualities as well as its corresponding Buddhist practices such as walking meditation, *tudong*, the construction of a *chörten* and the making of prostrations.[23] While meditation can be done during almost any activity, the most beneficial type for the bodymind to achieve stability is done sitting, standing, lying or walking. In developing a Buddhist performance methodology and responding to the themes arising within the genre of the autobiography, questions arose regarding the aesthetic aspects of my work that continue to return to silence as the basis upon which the performance manifested. If the concept of emptiness or *shunyata* (Skt.) is at the core of Buddhist philosophy, then I would argue that silence is its corresponding performative element. In leaving my own voice out of the sonic field, I was able to use the time as an opportunity to meditate, in public, such as when I pick up a stone from my father's side of the room and transport it via walking meditation practice to my mother's side in order to build her 'grave'. I had only watched my parents' interviews once, in the week after my mother died in

[23] According to the passages on meditation in the *Digha Nikaya* (Collection of Long Discourses) and the *Majjhima Nikaya* (Collection of Middle Length Discourses), the Buddha taught on the importance of the development of mindfulness in relation to the four principle body postures of sitting, standing, lying down and walking; Mainly practiced in the Theravada tradition, *tudong* refers to the nomadic wandering of monks during the dry season with no fixed abode. The Buddha gives instructions on the practice in the *Vinaya*, the manual for monastic training; Literally meaning a 'heap', the *chörten* originated from the stone burial mounds created to cover the ashes of the historical Buddha. Ranging in design from simple cairns of stones to the elaborate stupas as found in Java and Nepal, they are created as a symbol of the mind of the Buddha; In Tibetan Buddhism, prostrations are made to the enlightened teachers of the tradition as well as to images of the Buddha as a way of showing respect and conquering pride.

2010. They had brought up so many conflicting emotions that I had not viewed them since. In preparing for the performance, I chose not to watch them again until I was in front of an audience. The first hour was a traumatic experience for me and I was grateful for my imposed silence. It allowed me to remain present with every emotion as it arose and to use meditation as the primary technique for dealing with anger, grief, fear, loneliness, boredom, excitement, love, hate and gratitude. These feeling states formed the foundations for mindfulness practice, one of many approaches to working with the mind according to Buddhism.

During the time of the historical Buddha, a variety of practices developed in direct response to the conditions the monks were living in, depending on the season. One of those practices was *tudong* and took place during the dry months when it was possible to live a nomadic lifestyle. *Tudong* derives from the Pali word *dhutanga* which means 'that which shakes off'. Buddhist monk Ajahn Sucitto describes this as shaking off '*...*the protective skin of your normality, because whatever is habitual becomes dead tissue, dressed up as "me" or "myself"' (Sucitto:1982). Buddhist performance art requires surrender to authenticity in order to begin the process of transformation of consciousness. By utilizing video documentation of my parents to create the work, I was forced to confront a habitual 'self', recognizable as the person I felt myself to be in the presence of my parents.

The use of video archive was a way to bring my mother and father into the present in order to engage with the liveness of the performance while at the same time recognizing them as living in the past through the obvious stylistic echoes from the 1960s which acts as an alienating effect. This includes the clothes they wear as well as the type of language used in answering the questions of the interviewer. In analyzing outward representation, however, the only aspect that represents a specific point in time is the videos. It was important that I represented myself as being somehow outside of a specific historiography although my face shows me to be of a certain age in the present time. To add to the dominance of time as a theme I placed an hourglass next to the 'grave' of my father showing that he is still alive. This was turned whenever the sand ran out. It begs the question: who keeps whom alive in memory? Not only did the hourglass show the passing of time but connected me to the present as well as the past as that is the only place in which my father lives in my mind due to his estrangement. As I turned the hourglass after each hour, I began to experience the fruit of the walking meditation practice which can only arise out of

working within a temporal sphere. Marina Abramović's response to duration is that, 'If we have to have such a fast life then we have to have a long art to understand here and now, how we can really live in the present. And for performance, living in the present is everything' (Abramović 2011). The durational aspect allowed me to free myself from the confines of time-specificity. In other words, the video looping had the effect not only of repetition of time and memory but a loosening from the past that is achieved through the meditative approach of mind-training in Tibetan Buddhist practice. What is the effect of long durational work? After exhausting every possible mind trick, there is nowhere left to go; no one left to be. The Self can drop its games of self-aggrandizement and be in the present (one step closer to No self).

The experiential dimension of the work is depicted as much by what isn't there as by what is shown. I do not comment upon the past other than through the semiotic resonances of the acts of 'burying' and 'un-burying' nor do I attempt to show or tell the spectator anything concrete about my childhood. The purpose of the burial mound in conjunction with video footage of my parents is in order to activate memory in search of resolution. In some ways, it could be said that the only aim of the work is resolution. This is difficult to show the audience but is a necessary endeavor on my part as the performer in order to complete the action over an extended period of time. If durational performance has anything to say about endurance on a psychophysical level, it is that repetition forces an energy enhancement akin to the perceived endurance required to survive the traumatic effect of prolonged shame. From my point of view, it is not necessary to speak of personal trauma in order to transcend it. It is far more productive to use that energy towards a creative solution to reexamining unforgotten histories. It is these unforgotten histories that form the foundations for a documentary performance art that makes public universal issues of conflicted self and identity and raises questions about the efficacy of Buddhist practice in confronting familial trauma. In order to represent the passing of years, Richard Schechner's notion of *Symbolic Time* is enacted through the long durational performance; a forty-five year life span is condensed into twenty or thirty minutes, three and a half hours, five or six hours, depending on the requirements of the narrative. Schechner refers to Symbolic Time as 'Zen's goal of the everpresent' (Schechner 2003:3).

Aesthetic Choices and Form in *At Sea: 1980 – 2010*

> **Art is not merely a duplication of life. To assimilate art in life, is different from art duplicating life.**
>
> **Yoko Ono**[24]

Having made the decision to work with performance art as a structure for exploring Buddhism through autobiography, the nature of the first performance was inspired from an experience I had in a Butoh workshop in London in 2013. Having been instructed in the two basic forms of walking, I spent a long time walking back and forth in the studio simply experiencing the sensations in the body of settling into a slow and rhythmic movement through space. This took me out of the everyday habit of unconscious walking and into a focused intentional sense of moving meditation. After some time we were instructed to pick up the stone we were asked to bring to the workshop and carry it back and forth along the path. At no point was any storyline imposed upon us nor any other instruction other than to simply walk. It was during this exercise that the idea for *At Sea* arose. As I walked through space I began to think about my mother's death three years before and the weight of the stone in my hands as somehow connected to a death ritual. It is here that the symbol of the stone began to work on my mind and the sense of walking towards death and my mother and away from life and my father. Without intending to come up with a plan for my first performance before attending the workshop, I left with a complete outline, including the multi-media elements. It was the stimulus of the stone and the ritual walking practice that inspired the symbolic resonances that make up the aesthetic values of *At Sea*.

My expectation of some of the ways in which the aesthetic elements of the performance might work upon the audience are both overt and subtle, as outlined in the following list of key features:

1. Walking: At any given point of the performance the audience are subjected to a lone woman walking slowly back and forth between the video screens of her parents (made evident by their resemblance). The pace of the walk does not change and provides a steady rhythm or pulse to the work. There is a quiet

[24] Munroe, A. and Hendricks, J. (1966), *Yes: Yoko Ono*, New York: Japan Society, p. 291

stillness to the movement, which is contained and meditative in form. My intention was for it to have a calming effect on the viewer, enabling any internal agitation or stress to diminish through the slow and rhythmic effort involved in carrying out my objective to give my mother a 'grave'. I also wanted the viewer to make the connection to the duration of a lifetime lived under the watchful eyes of parents as well as the oscillation between each parent as their approval is sought or in the ways in which they are played off against one another. There is also the extent to which the title is reflected in the walking across the sand coloured cloth suggesting the environment surrounding the ocean: the sense of my being figuratively 'lost at sea' for thirty years as well as the Buddhist metaphor of the mind as being like an ocean.

2. Stone graves: The changing cairn of stones that begins with the entire pile in front of my father's screen and slowly diminishes as I begin to build a 'grave' for my mother, one stone at a time. There is a certain power to the symbol of the grave and an individual's personal sense of mortality. Whether conscious of its presence or not, death is always looming in the background of every living being and I wanted to use the 'graves' as reminders for the audience of the preciousness of life and how easily it can be lost. I also wanted to use the symbolic 'unburying' of my father as a metaphor for the ways in which painful memories are buried within human consciousness and that it is only through a willingness to confront or unbury the past that any potential for healing and integration can take place. In this way I was seeking to model behaviour for the viewer.

3. Parents: My parents are ever-present in the form of video interviews on opposing screens. The videos play on a loop and their voices overlap, answering the same questions posed by the interviewer whose voice is off-screen. The choice to overlap my parents' voices arose out of the idea of having a continual sense of my parents voices in my head, as if they could see every thought and action of my daily life. My intention was to be able to show this externally through the videos as a universal symbol for the ways in which adult children carry an awareness of their parents' approval or disapproval throughout life. Given that parents are often our first teachers, I also wanted to demonstrate this

through the words of 'advice' that are spoken in the interviews, such as when they are asked for their views on child-rearing or religion.

4. Prostrations: At random intervals based on impulse, I prostrate to my father before picking up the next stone in the sequence. This was never planned but intended as a spontaneous response to the anger engendered by my interaction with my father's image and voice. By taking the Tibetan Buddhist view of seeing our 'enemies' as our highest teachers, the prostrations serve as a reminder of this teaching.

5. Hourglass: An hourglass sits on the ground next to my father's cairn of stones. I turn the hourglass it over whenever it runs empty as a symbol for the viewer of passing time as well as to suggest that my father is still alive.

6. Shaved head and white dress: My head is shaved like that of a Buddhist renunciate. Although I am not wearing traditional nun's robes, I deliberately chose to wear white as a symbol of purity (in the sense of 'pure intention').

In combination, these six key elements were intended to work upon the viewers' perception of the span of an individual human life in condensed form (3 ½ hours at the London performance and 4 hours in Norwich). Over time, I wanted the performance to have a calming effect on the audience through the repetitive dramaturgy of slow, still and careful movement as well as the endless drone of my parents' voices. There was nothing overtly frenetic nor disturbing about the work in spite of some of the turbulence of my mind states in response to my own memories of childhood. These were deliberately left out of the performance as, from my point of view, the details of my past were not worth exploring at the expense of working with those mind states that arose in response to the external stimuli of my parents' interviews. This is where symbolism is so useful as a healing paradigm as it enables a concentration of the most essential elements and serves to loosen the mind from its natural aversion to suffering.

At the end of the performance, I tossed any left over stones from my father's pile onto my mother's nearly completed 'grave'. I then stood in front of my mother's screen, bowed once and switched off the monitor before doing the same on

my father's side. Then I exited the space. Any spectators remaining were privy to these final moments of closure during which I intended for them to bear witness to my own acceptance of my mother's death and the closing down of my connection to my estranged father. As before, these actions were carried out slowly and methodically without any hint of bitterness in my expression. I hoped to leave the viewer in a calmer and more reflective state of mind than the one they began with before engaging with the performance. I also wanted others to be inspired to reflect upon their own relationship with their parents.

Trauma and the Archive of Memory

> **Whoever bears witness does not bring a proof; he is someone whose experience, in principle singular and irreplaceable (even if it can be cross-checked with others to become proof, to become conclusive in a process of verification) comes to attest, precisely, that some 'thing' has been present to him.**
>
> **Jacques Derrida[25]**

Less than two months after the end of WWII, my father John Clark became a household name when he starred in the BBC radio series *Just William*, based on the celebrated children's books by Richmal Crompton.[26] As 'bad boy' William, he could act out his rebellion behind the mask of fiction. The BBC has preserved the radio broadcasts in their extensive archive, enabling me to appropriate his voice as well as my own voice from childhood audio cassettes in a twenty minute performance entitled *No(h) Father*, performed at the University of East Anglia and Warwick Arts Centre in 2014.

If the foundations of autobiography begin with memory, it stands to reason that memory itself is a form of archive, albeit a particularly unstable one. The type of memory associated with autobiography comes under the heading of long-term memory and includes episodic memory (experiences and events) and semantic memory (concepts and facts), both of which are termed *explicit memory*. Memory

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[25] Derrida, Jacques (2000), '"A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text"': Poetics and Politics of Witnessing', in *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark, Berkeley: University of California Press

[26] Clark featured in 35 radio broadcasts of the original BBC series between October 1945 – August 1947 from the ages of 12 – 14.

associated with trauma also comes under the heading of long-term memory but is termed *implicit* or unconscious memory. All five works within this project's performance cycle seek to engender both explicit and implicit memory in order to render them as vehicles of transformation, which is the fundamental paradigm underlying all works of Buddhist art, both traditional and contemporary. However, in order to interrogate the wider implications of memory as archive, an important consideration is the way in which archival records such as audio and video recordings, photographs and life-writing contribute to the emancipation of memory in the formation of autobiographical performance art works which, in my case, demand a Buddhist response (both aesthetic and methodological) to trauma.

To begin, it is important to outline a framework for which to talk about trauma as it connotes a variety of definitions. Trauma can be thought of as existing on a spectrum, its effects contingent upon the meeting of psychophysical and external stimuli. Traditional psychotherapeutic approaches to trauma attempt to integrate memories which have been previously disjointed and caused, in its most acute form, reactions in the autonomic nervous system that range from anxiety and depression to tremors and suicidal tendencies amongst a wide array of symptomologies. The 'talking cure' in Freudian-based analysis posits that language enables the individual to integrate the trauma through narrativizing previously repressed memories, thereby freeing the individual from the body-felt experience of imbalance and returning them to a state of homeostasis. This is, however, problematic and, perhaps, an oversimplified approach that doesn't deal with trauma so much as a psychophysical experience but as a mainly psychological disorder. As Henke argues:

> If one accepts the basic premise of Freud's talking cure – a psychoanalytic working-through of repressed memories brought to the surface and abreacted through the use of language and free-association – then an intriguing question arises concerning the role of the analyst. Is he or she truly necessary? Might the therapeutic power of psychoanalysis reside more in the experience of 'rememory' and reenactment than in the scene of transference posited by Freud? In other words, as James Pennebaker asks, 'is talking necessary for the talking cure to cure?' (Henke 1998: xi)

Each of my performance art works developed directly out of my experience of psychotherapy and my inability to recognize what could be conceived of as a 'cure'.

This word is questionable in the realm of mental health for it implies the ceasing of symptoms which have in the past caused a significant amount of incongruity or destabilization and that these symptoms are no longer present. However, in the case of trauma, any number of triggers can be traumatogenic long after a seeming 'cure'. Freud disagreed with this view, claiming that recollection of traumatic memories through hypnosis, for example, prompted a state of catharsis which prompted the declaration, 'Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' (Freud & Breuer in Storr 1989:20). In this regard, his findings are still supported by modern psychotherapy, however, research suggests that the idea of a 'cure' for trauma sufferers is improbable as there is no universally identifiable cause of the trauma response in patients. [27] In this regard, perhaps the idea of a 'cure' has limited use in the field of mental health. According to my own psychotherapist, when asked whether a day would come when I would no longer feel the sadness and rage from the memories of my childhood, he responded that the painful memories would always be there, I would simply learn to integrate them.[28]

The relationship between therapy and autobiographical performance art is a complex one given that both maintain specific types of acts of testimony yet focus on somewhat different outcomes. Both, however, are deeply enmeshed in questions of identity and self-representation. As psychologist James Hillman observes, 'If psychotherapy is to understand the dreaming soul from within, it had best turn to "theatrical logic"' (Hillman 1989:82). He describes the nature of mind very differently to the Buddhist conception, at the same time his explanation is perfectly in keeping with the Buddhist understanding of relativity and dualistic thinking: [29]

> The nature of mind as it presents itself most immediately has a specific form: Dionysian form…In psychology this language speaks not genetically, not biochemically in the information of DNA codes but directly in Dionysus's own art form, theatrical poetics… Our lives are the enactment of our dreams; our case histories are from the very beginning, archetypally, dramas (ibid.).

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[27] For a detailed survey of historical and modern treatments for trauma, see Korn, Leslie E. (2013), *Rhythms of Recovery:Trauma, Nature and the Body*, Abingdon: Routledge

[28] 2013 therapy session, Norwich, UK.

[29] Centred upon the doctrine of No self (Skt. *anatman)*, Buddhism posits that the nature of mind is 'Luminous…And it is defiled by incoming defilements (Harvey 1995:56).' In this case, one of the defilements would be the conception of an inherently existing Self.

It is precisely this Dionysian paradigm to which autobiographical performance art (particularly work by women), has conformed to the most since its inception in the early 1970's with artists such as Laurie Anderson, Rebecca Horn and Hannah Wilke.[30] Their work is amplified against the backdrop of the prevailing second-wave feminist movement of the era and draws from the wider implications of the phrase, 'the personal is the political.' [31] It is precisely these identity politics that form the foundations of autobiographical performance works (both in theatre and performance art) as 'a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self' (Heddon 2008:3). This begs the question as to what type of personal transformation is possible through performance art that is less attainable through traditional psychotherapeutic routes and why trauma is particularly suited to the genre.

My choice in turning to performance art as the primary vehicle towards the integration of my own traumatic memories grew out of my conviction that the specifics of my trauma experiences should remain secret, particularly in light of my family's very public profile. As so much has been written about my family in both the mainstream and tabloid press, I have a particular aversion to speaking publically about them. Not only do I feel a duty towards the maintaining of privacy but, as far as religious practice is concerned, I consider any details of my family background to come under the category of gossip.[32] For this reason, performance art offers the ideal mode of transmission due to its ability to contain and communicate through symbolic aesthetic codes. Marco de Martinis, an Italian semiotician whose research deals specifically with the semiotics of theatre and performance, defines the performance code as follows: 'A performance code is the convention in performance which permits the association of particular contents with particular elements in one or more systems of expression' (Martinis 1993:98). All five works in my

[30] For more details on the autobiographical turn within the genre, see Goldberg, RoseLee (1979), *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, London: Thames & Hudson, pp. 172-177

[31] The phrase came into common parlance amongst feminists through the publication of an essay, 'The Personal is Political' by Carol Hanisch (1969), although the author does not claim to have coined the phrase.

[32] According to the Four Noble Truths as taught by the Buddha after his initial enlightenment experience, refraining from gossip comes under the heading of Right Speech, one of the three aspects of moral discipline of the Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

performance cycle make reference through the use of codes to Buddhism (both aesthetically and philosophically) in direct relation to the parent-child relationship. Codes relating to trauma, on the other hand, are made explicit in three of the works – *No(h) Father*, *Still Life* and *Boudhanath*. Martinis points out that, as far the audience are concerned, the performance text demands more than simply de-coding due to the interpretive nature of the human mind in making connections between the various codes and aspects that may or may not be relevant to their own lives.[33] In terms of the inner experience of these codes from a performer's point of view, it is the external archive material as codes which give rise to the memory as archive and, hence, the way in which I respond emotionally and behaviourally throughout each performance.

NO(H) FATHER

> **You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you? If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are seed for sculpture.**
>
> **Louise Bourgeois [34]**

September 2016, Norwich

Dad. I can't pretend to miss you and yet I feel compelled to conjure you up from time to time. Phantom-like. I want to know if I have it in me to forgive. I think I have it in me to forgive one day but not now. So I will let my ghost walk through you, over you and in you as if she could cleanse you of the bitterness of your life. I am not bitter now that the anger has turned to frustration. What next? Maybe patience. Maybe understanding. Maybe even, one day, the sweet taste of forgiveness giving rise to generosity. Then I will give you what it is I think you want: absolution. Until then, I keep walking.

§§

No(h) Father did not arise out of any type of sequential or logical sequence but relied entirely on an internal symbolic response to the memory of my estranged

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[33] In this context, the text refers to the individual performance art work in its entirety as opposed to the written text of conventional scripted theatre.

[34] Louise Bourgeois in: Gibbons, Joan (2007), *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection & Remembrance*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., pg. 17

father whom I have not seen since 2010, although the estrangement began in 1999. Whether my performance is a direct unconscious response to the circumstances of our last meeting is unclear. What is evident, however, is that it is a response that I could apply to any number of circumstances in which my father wielded power over me. It left me wondering: What would my ghost do?

Aesthetic Choices and Form in *No(h) Father*

The impetus for the creation of *No(h) Father* arose out of the sudden arising of the title during my initial research into Japanese Noh theatre. Having begun the performance cycle with both of my parents as subjects, I decided to follow with an exploration of my relationship with my father. As my history with him engenders a certain amount of bitterness and resentment, the word 'No' sums up my general attitude towards him throughout my childhood. With that in mind, *No(h) Father* was born. My intentions for the piece were to create a dramatic and expressionistic fantasy in which the viewer would be offered a window into my internal world through the symbols of a perceived after-life.

Departing from the long-durational form of the first performance in which the viewer may or may not have been present for its entirety, the audience for *No(h) Father* remained throughout which was an important consideration in order to experience the full effects of its dramaturgy. The work is a fictional construct of my father's *bardo* or in-between state, depicted through the use of the traditional Noh female demon or *Hannya*. The performance is set in this other-world, my father's presence only made known through his photograph which is strewn across the stage in multiple copies.[35] Other than that, the stage is bare (Fig 11), as seen at the start of the video documentation. I wanted the viewer to have the sense that, in my mind at least, my father was everywhere, dominating my life in an oppressive way.

[35] The *Bardo* (Tib.) refers to the stage between the end of one life and the beginning of the next according to the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism. Records from earlier Indian Buddhist schools refer to this stage as the *antarabhāva* (Skt.)

Fig. 11 ***No(h) Father*** **stage, UEA**

The soundscape begins with the sound of wind, after which I appear on stage, my naked body painted white, my breasts streaked red. I hold a wooden *Hannya* or female demon mask in front of my face and begin the slow walk across the stage, eventually stepping on my father as I carry time in the form of an hourglass. Here I wanted the audience to have an experience of the bitterness I once felt for him through my trampling over his image. In terms of costume, I drag stuffed toys from my childhood behind me on a cloth tied around my waist (Fig 12), although these are not possible to make out from the video due to the use of a single camera to document the performance. The live audience were given a symbolic impression of the way in which childhood is carried along throughout an individual's life.

Fig. 12 The *Hannya* crosses the stage

When I reach the mid-point of the stage, I slowly bring the mask down, revealing a white and red face unable to see or speak. My eyes and mouth are covered by white gauze pulling tightly across my head (Fig. 13). Halfway through the twenty-minute performance, the shift from mask to face is accentuated by the reversal of the soundscape which plays backwards from this point in time. In reverse, the voices sound similar to foreign languages, adding a further layer of meaning and conjecture into the work.[36] I wanted the viewer to feel a sense of distorted time and space, symbolic of my own distorted sense of time as I was growing up. In traditional Noh, time is not necessarily linear and the narrative can often reflect numerous shifts in time.

[36] The voices sound akin to Danish, which ties into my family history because my paternal grandmother came from Denmark.

Fig. 13 The mask beneath the mask, holding time

The soundscape is derived from a mix of audio clips from *Just William* (as heard at the beginning of the video) along with my own voice talking to my father as if he were in the room. A third narrative is made up of recordings of my father's and my own voice as a young child in New York in 1976 transposed from audio cassettes originally made as a gift to my father's parents back in England. These three narrative streams are framed within a simple musical sequence containing percussive as well as melodic elements that serve to bridge the various oral histories together as well as make reference to Zen Buddhism through the use of the gong near the midpoint of the performance, universally recognized as a sound particular to Japanese ceremonial music. My intention was that the audience would feel themselves to be witness to a ritual in which a personal exorcism is taking place before their eyes.

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In every culture into which Buddhism has spread, the arts have developed out of an infusion of Buddhist philosophy into all areas of social life. Unlike Tibetan Buddhism where the performing arts are embedded within its religious rituals, Zen Buddhism

in Japan extended its influence into popular social entertainment.[37] The two traditional theatrical forms of Noh and Kabuki continue in unadulterated forms in modern Japan, the former having arisen in the mid-14th century in direct response to an earlier performance tradition.[38] In systematizing the form, the actor and playwright Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363 – 1433) developed a specifically Buddhist philosophy of drama which can be found in the twenty-one treatises he wrote over a period of forty years. Covering all aspects of theatre making from acting to music and physicality, the treatises' overriding theme concerns the principles of Buddhist conduct that he refers to as 'conducting oneself according to the "Way"' (Wilson 2006:15).[39]

A study of Buddhism and performance, both classical and contemporary modes, comes under the auspices of a wider context of theatre, performance and philosophy. How can an actor perform philosophy? As philosophy cannot be 'performed' as such, the artist constructs interventions that attempt to point the spectator towards an understanding of the philosophy. According to Buddhism, ultimate reality cannot be named, hence the Zen proverb, 'If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him' (Komjathy 2015:553). In other words, if you can name it, it is not it. In the Noh theatre, one of the ways Buddhist philosophical concepts are achieved is through the use of stock characters depicted through the use of masks (Fig. 14). These characters include deities, spirits, ghosts and humans and enable the actors to take on a variety of archetypal human and supernatural roles.[40]

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[37] The treatise specific to traditional Tibetan performing arts is the *rol mo'I bstan bcos* (Rolmoe Tenchoe or Treatise on Music) by 12th century Buddhist scholar Sakya Pandita. The work includes 400 verses of recitations alongside an outline for the practice of monastic chanting. Other than this work there is no comprehensive training manual as it has historically been based on an oral tradition.

[38] *Sarugaku* (lit. 'monkey fun') was the predecessor of Noh between 11th – 14th centuries. It developed out of the earlier form of *sangaku* which came to Japan from China and included similar elements of the modern circus including singing, dancing, mime and acrobatics. Traditional Japanese performance culture is directly related to the warrior class or *Samurai* who were the original patrons for this once plebeian popular entertainment.

[39] There were approximately 2000 plays written for the Noh theatre, not all of them still in existence. There are 240 plays in the current repertoire of the five main Noh schools in Japan. The plays adhere to a set of five themes which include god plays, warrior plays, mad-woman plays, 'present-day' plays and final or demon plays. A typical Noh festival will include one play from each category and last an entire day.

[40] There are around 450 different mask styles which are based on 60 stock characters.

Fig. 14 *Oni* (demon) *Hannya* (female demon) *Waka Onna* (young woman) *Okina* (old man)

In constructing the basis for a performance art work, the image of the *Hannya* or female demon (Fig. 15) dictated both the aesthetic and sonic elements that correspond most closely to the autobiographical depiction of my relationship with my father and suggested the construction of the narrative. Like all Japanese performing arts, my performance practice adopts a hybrid mentality, borrowing and appropriating from a diverse range of Buddhist influences. [41]

Fig. 15 ***Hannya* mask, *No(h) Father***

In the first instance, the name *Hannya* itself is the epitome of the *Buddhadharma* in the origin of its name: *prajna* or wisdom. This is directly related to one of the core texts in the Buddhist canon, the *Prajñāpāramitā* or The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra. The element of the supernatural is related to the mask in its perceived ability to ward off evil spirits, hence it functions in a dual role as both the depiction of so-called evil as well as protection from it. Tibetan Buddhist iconography also contains a host of demon-like deities that are perceived of as *Dharma* protectors (Fig. 16 & 17).

[41] Traditional Japanese performing arts including *Noh*, *Kabuki*, *Kyōgen, Kagura and Bunraku* can all be traced back to earlier forms that came out of Chinese culture to form a hybrid performance style distinct to Japan.

Fig. 16 *Ekajati*

Fig. 17 Yamantaka

By embodying the role of the *Hannya* throughout the performance, I am no longer myself but a projection of a self that, in the world of the performance, is both protector and the one who haunts a man who is perceived to have caused great harm, my father. In the Noh plays, the *Hannya* serves the function of the transpersonal, depicting a female character whose soul has been tormented either by jealousy or obsession so as to turn her into a demon.[42] Of the three categories of Noh plays, the *Hannya* is most often associated with the *Mugen* or supernatural Noh. In these plays, the protagonist (Jap. *shite*) inhabits one of the many characters associated with the supernatural such as deities, spirits, demons and ghosts, all of which are represented through the mask.

Ritual studies acknowledge the role of the mask as the primary factor of transformation:

> [I]n order for the early men and women to transform during [the] ritualistic dance, they had to not only let go of their own identity, but also conceal it in order to make the illusion total… [A]ncient persons thought of the spirit as living in the face of a person. Thus by donning a mask, one could admit another spirit into one's physical body. The mask made it possible for its wearer to become one with the mask, or at least become possessed by it (Hiltunen 2004:52).

[42] The literal meaning of *transpersonal* is 'beyond persona' or 'beyond mask'. The definition extends to a range of psychotherapeutic processes acknowledging that the individual's sense of self or identity 'extends beyond the…personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche and cosmos (Walsh and Vaughan 1993:3).'

It is the mask that provides the impetus for transformation in *No(h) Father*, just as it does in traditional Noh theatre. There is no ancient precedent for autobiography, however, thereby rendering the use of mask problematic. After all, if *No(h) Father* is a performance of my own experience and history, then the mask may be adding an element of the Other that takes both performer and spectator further away from each other when the intention is to bring them closer. This technique is akin to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* or distancing effect. As the mask is removed, the placement of gauze over the eyes and mouth is also a kind of mask so that at no point is the spectator able to see the eyes. From the perspective of the performer, the dual masks prevent any kind of visual engagement with the audience or environment. [43] The importance of sight is, perhaps, further amplified by its distinct lack thereof and further highlights the destabilized relationship between sight and language put into perspective by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972):

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight (Berger 1972:7).

If the lack of sight presents obstacles to the ability of the performer to fully engage with the performance, then the modes of sensory perception must be deconstructed in order to interrogate whether sight, in this instance, can be achieved through alternative sensory gates such as the mind or 'mind's eye'. Neurological studies support the idea of alternative ways of seeing since 'higher areas of the brain can also send visual input back to neurons in lower areas of the visual cortex… As humans, we have the ability to see with the mind's eye – to have a perceptual experience in the absence of visual input' (Ratey 2003:107). One such experiment confirmed that the act of visualizing an action stimulates the parietal cortex along with the prefrontal cortex to react as if actual sight was being utilized. This suggests that in spite of the lack of visual input from the point of view of the performer, it did

[43] During the performance, a fixed point was held through the small eyeholes in order to follow the trajectory of a straight line diagonally across the stage.

not hinder my ability to engage with the spectators since I maintain the visualization of my own childhood and my father throughout the performance. In contrast to my point of view as a performer, the masks fulfill the purpose of distancing the audience from any representation of a real face other than the one in my father's photographs in order for my life story to be understood through their respective symbols: the image of the demon mask with glaring eyes, sharp teeth and horns, ready to pounce if under threat; my naked body bearing the marks of self-protection through layers of fat while at the same time appearing in its most vulnerable state, without clothes; the toys being dragged behind me, presenting a past that is very much present throughout my life, as if I never grew up; the repetition of my father's face on the ground highlighting his presence in my life although physically absent and by walking over him, I am stamping on his power; when I drop the demon mask, my second face is revealed to show eyes that cannot see, a mouth that cannot speak. This is the only way to show an aspect of my autobiography for which there are no words: the feeling that I spent my life with my father as if blind, not knowing the route back to a functioning psyche, free from his influence. Meanwhile time always moves forward as symbolized by the hourglass in my hand (which belonged to my mother). The process of integrating the past into my present life involved a working backwards, hence the reversal of the soundscape at the midpoint of the performance. *No(h) Father* was the culmination of my years of struggle and the gathering of insight gained through my life as a Buddhist. In performance terms, it could only be acted out and realized through a Buddhist framework such as Noh as it is, ultimately, a public ritual exorcism for which the visual field and sound design rely upon each other for interpretation.

To place the sound design outside of its visual context would be to remove it from its ritual element. The reliance of sound upon carrying out the action of moving through space in symbolic response to the past, present and future depends entirely on the transient nature of sound and, in this regard, my 'self' is constantly reminded of its lack of existence during the performance. The midway point at which the sound reverses reflects the fundamental Buddhist teachings on Self, No self and phenomena: 'All things which are made of parts eventually come apart… All phenomena are empty of inherent existence' (Dudjom Dorjee 2013:11). Of all the performance art works in this cycle, *No(h) Father* contains the most complex performance structure by bringing the audience in most direct contact with the

Buddhist philosophical element of impermanence. Sound is inherently unstable, ephemeral and doubt-producing whilst being wholly accessible to all who hear.

Artist and scholar Salome Voegelin refers to listening as an aesthetic practice which challenges the Western philosophical tradition founded upon a hierarchy of the senses 'which positions sound in the attributal location, sublimated to the visual and its linguistic structure. In that position, sound is left to describe and enhance but never to do and become' (Voegelin 2010:13). From the Buddhist perspective, the senses are gates of perception (Skt. *ayatana*). In this way, auditory consciousness simply perceives sound while the mind imputes meaning upon it. [44] Sound, in and of itself, is meaningless as the organ of perception, the ear drum, is only capable of transferring the result of sound waves to further parts of the hearing mechanism which, in turn, translates the vibrations into electrical impulses to the brain. It is what the hearer does with the sound that is important. As a result, Voegelin's stance is, perhaps, not tenable in the field of performance art and its postmodern acceptance of the equality of attributes which contribute to the performance's reception. From the perspective of performing in *No(h) Father*, at least, the soundscape's autobiographical elements did more than simply 'describe and enhance' but contributed to a transformation of consciousness. In other words, I was not the same person who began the twenty-minute walk across the stage by the time the performance was complete, a process attributable to the affect-producing nature of a sound design containing my own and my father's voices. In this way, the sound was able to 'do and become'. This is Schechner's 'transformance' in action again.

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By the time I finished walking my way through At Sea *and* No(h) Father*, I did not end up the same person I believed myself to be when I began the journeys. The experience they gave me was the discovery of the purpose of walking meditation in the context of performance art: a moving through emotion, allowing it to rise and settle and, finally, to disperse. The performances taught me that there is ultimately nothing to hold onto;*

[44] The mind, in this case, is also said to be a sense consciousness. According to Buddhist epistemology, there are a total of eight consciousnesses: (1) sight (2) sound (3) smell (4) taste (5) touch (6) mental (7) the afflicted or *klesha* mind (8) the ground or *alaya* consciousness. For further details see: Thrangu Rinpoche (1998), *The Five Buddha Families and the Eight Consciousnesses*, Boulder: Namo Buddha Seminar

no ground upon which to rely nor permanent Self to pin any expectations of future outcomes. This consciousness arose out of the practice of meditation in situ, the close watching of my thoughts as they passed through my mind. This included any thoughts of self-consciousness arising from awareness of being observed by an audience. Part of my practice included equalizing the thoughts – being aware of the quality of the thought as either positive, negative or neutral and recognizing all feelings as simply thoughts and reducing their seeming power to name who I think I am. In other words, destroying the victim mentality that I grew up with and replacing it with the sense of being a consciousness in a body compelled by habit. The way in which this differed from my experience on the meditation cushion in solitary practice was the added element of the onlooker. Having an audience as a witness forced my ego consciousness to observe even more sharply the ways in which it self-sabotages through feeling like 'I' am 'someone' being watched rather than simply feeling myself to be housed in a body containing a complex web of habits and predispositions towards certain mind states.

In many ways, the performances acted as a framework or container for practice. Although the audiences were not privy to the details of each passing thought as it arose in my mind, they were offered a glimpse into their effects as made manifest through my aesthetic responses. By way of example, At Sea *depicts this impermanence through the dissolution and building of the cairn of stones for my mother's 'grave' while* No(h) Father *shows it through the sense of the beginning, middle and end of the journey I take across the stage as I trample on the images of my father and the soundscape goes into reverse, as if arising out of and falling away into emptiness. The experiences also taught me that trauma is not a fixed state by any stretch of the imagination but that it is entirely dependent upon a mind willing to continue to fan the flames of histories of suffering, blame and unfulfilled dreams. If phenomena is in the nature of change then trauma also contains this fundamental manifesto. Its effects are a moveable feast. By 'unburying' my father in* At Sea *and walking 'through' my father in* No(h) Father *I am able to show the audience my readiness for confronting the past and a willingness to 'move through' psychological pain. The performances teach the practice of unburying the past in order to lay it in a new and blessed grave.*

III. Liberation through Long Duration

sitting

Fig. 18 ***(whispers)*** **© Pema Clark**

(whispers)

I am sitting on the floor inside the makeshift Buddhist temple surrounded by walls of my mother. Each wall contains 108 photos hung like prayer flags between the bamboo poles. The photos are from each of her four plays: Shakespeare for my Father, Mandrake Root, Rachel and Juliet *and* Nightingale. *The plays are familiar to me, particularly* Shakespeare for my Father *because I had been a stage manager for some of the original productions. The construction of the temple is delicate as the only thing holding it together is string – it feels like it could fall on top of me at any time. This is not unlike the feeling I lived with for many years as a member of the Redgrave family, a feeling constructed entirely in my own mind. They did nothing wrong.*

I begin to read the plays aloud but not too loud. I speak in an audible whisper which also reduces the possibility of too much characterization. I was not doing a play reading as much as embodying of the spirit of my mother. As soon as I begin to speak her words, to make her thoughts my own, I am filled with emotion. At times I take a

short pause to gather myself as I am aware of the long task ahead of me. Given how close I was to the first play having watched it every night from either the lighting booth or the wings, depending on what theatre we were in, my own memories of the woman I was in my twenties come flooding into consciousness along with the requisite feelings I had towards my mother during that time. Back then I felt small and powerless and full in the shadow of my awe-inspiring mother. In the play she talks about feeling small and powerless in the shadow of her awe-inspiring father. Reading the play out loud in my middle years comes with sadness, recognition, familiarity, guilt, shame, love, admiration and compassion. I mourn the loss of my mother.

I continue to whisper the plays. I feel a comfort in the companionship of my audience, two of whom are my in-laws. I am struck by their ability to listen so attentively, my mother's lines eliciting laughter at all the right moments. She was a very funny woman, my mother. As I read I am also aware of the dead all around me: my mother, my uncle, my cousin, my grandparents, my great-grandparents. My awareness of my father is one of negation. This is a sacred space I have made for my mother and although she talks about him in two of her plays, I feel as if she is protected from him because I am here. This is how it was at the end of their marriage. I took on the role of protector. This is also what it means to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Protection. I am protected only to the extent that my consciousness is transformed from sense of Self to No self. In (whispers) *I am a 'self' for most of the time. This is the one performance in which I am not afforded the benefit of silence.*

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When Prince Siddhartha Gautama sat himself down under the Bodhi tree, so the story goes, he vowed to stay seated in meditation for as long as it took to liberate his mind from the shackles of delusion. Once he reached complete enlightenment or Buddhahood, reported by different sources to have arisen anywhere between seven and forty-nine days in silent contemplation, he walked to the Deer Park in Varanasi and gave the first sermon or 'turning of the wheel of Dharma', commonly known as

the teachings of the Four Noble Truths.[1] The significance of the story of the Buddha's enlightenment is embodied through the traditional statue of the Buddha that has, in modern times, become a universal symbol for meditation and contemplation (Fig. 19) Although there are various depictions of the Buddha in seated, standing and reclining postures, it is the seated meditation posture at the point of enlightenment that has become the sine qua non of Buddhist iconography and points to the performative actions of the historical Buddha that brought about a method for attaining enlightenment.

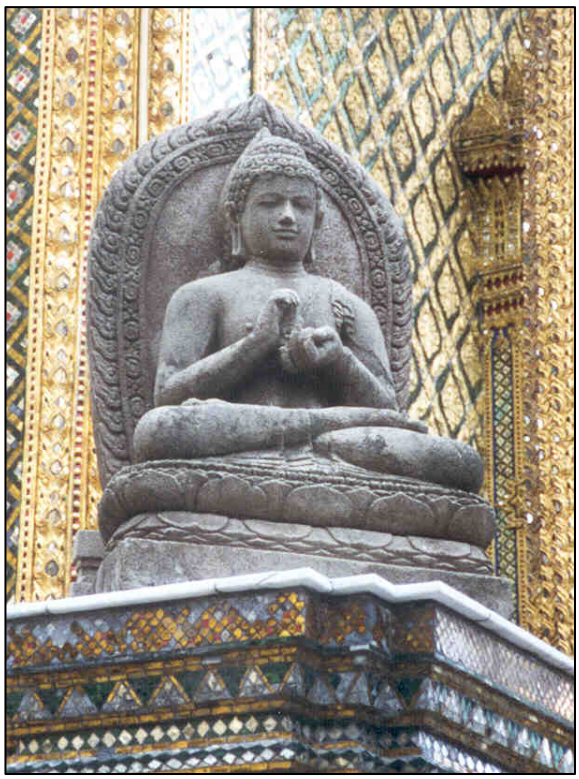

Fig. 19 Borobudur Buddha, Royal Temple, Bangkok. © Peter Harvey

Art critic and John Cage biographer Kay Larson refers to Siddhartha Gautama as the 'world's first performance artist' (Baas and Jacob 2004:64). She makes this claim based on the purported actions of the Buddha, demonstrating his worldview through skillful means rather than relying on words to convey that which language struggles to articulate. Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman also likens the actions of a Buddha to a form of art making:

[1] Biographical sources of the life of the historical Buddha include the *Buddhacarita* (2nd cen. CE), the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (3rd cen. CE), the *Mahāvastu* (c. 4th cen. CE) and the *Nidānakathā* (5th cen. CE).

> Say you are a Buddha and you're free of suffering and you feel totally great… and then you see all of these miserable people. Yet what good would it do for you to go and give them a big grin and a hug, or smother them with joyfulness? They'll just get freaked out and be paranoid and say, 'What does this person want? So instead, a Buddha has to develop some strategies – some art – to, first of all, open that person's imagination to the fact that there is a world where they don't have to be miserable all the time. And then he has to help them with a method of how to move from their paranoid corner of misery into the great ocean of the bliss of the universe that you, a Buddha, perceive (Thurman 2002:7).

In some cases the action might consist of performing an act of generosity or telling a parable or some other beneficent deed. The strategy of the Buddhist performance artist is to demonstrate methods of dealing with pain and suffering indirectly through the artwork. The two works in this chapter, *(whispers)* and *Still Life*, are both examples of utilizing seated meditation to convey one of the fundamental postures most conducive to meditation. According to Tibetan teacher Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche, it is not necessary to sit with the legs folded as long as the spine is erect (Shenphen Dawa 2012:5). Following on from this instruction, Tibetan Buddhist masters of meditation take this posture at the time of death and are facilitated to remain upright in order to meditate in the white light stage of death, while the subtle consciousness of the individual still remains in the body. This is said to enable the practitioner to utilize the death process to attain complete enlightenment, an example of the way in which Buddhism views death outside of its negative Western manifestation not as a process to fear but an opportunity to put a lifetime of meditation practice to use when it is most needed to face death directly.

The theme of death continues to resound throughout *Sutra* after the walking meditations of *At Sea* and *No(h) Father* have come to a stop. Considered alongside each other in order of progression, the performances should be read in relation to the wider Buddhist trope of life as a *bardo* state between birth and death. In this way, the works become pedagogical tools in order to consider death and impermanence as underlying factors of existence upon which to meditate in relation to the affective memories of shame and trauma being triggered by the archives. Although the five works in *Sutra* vary in length, *(whispers)* and *Still Life* are the longest in duration, lasting five and a half and six hours, respectively. The act of long

duration in my work creates its own performative principles similar to the process of meditation and provokes questions about the human condition that can only be answered experientially: What happens when I stay with difficult emotions? How does my relationship with a fractured past change through long durational performance? Over time, the practice of mindfulness meditation enables a cutting through of the repetition compulsion of shame-induced trauma and brings the practitioner into the realm of the 'beside'. As Sedgwick reminds us,

> *Beside* is an interesting preposition… because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: non-contradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object (Sedgwick 2003:8).

It enables a direct encounter with death in the most skillful of indirect ways.

Aesthetic Choices and Form in *(whispers)*

In careful consideration of the archives I had available to me, I wanted to work with my mother's plays in some way but as a solo endeavour. The performance was constructed around five basic aesthetic elements:

1. Temple
2. Prayer flags
3. Meditation
4. Stones
5. Gong

Thinking carefully about the form the performance could take, the idea for the temple structure arose out of the number of plays she had written: four plays, four walls. In total contrast to my feelings about my father, my mother engendered thoughts of containment and warmth. I wanted to give the viewer the impression that I was somehow inside of my mother's womb, giving voice to the notion of the body as a temple. I decided to construct the temple out of her images, choosing

suitable production photographs that could be easily duplicated. Continuing to work with repetition as a metaphor for the pervasive presence of the parent within the consciousness of the adult child, I also wanted to give the viewer the symbolic resonance of the Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags. Hanging the flags along the ropes that served to hold the temple in place, the photographs of my mother in each of her plays' characters were a continuation of the prayer flags, as if the air could blow her essence into the space around me and the spectators. I also wanted to give the impression of my mother's continued presence in the memories of those who knew her or admired her work, long after her death.

Given the temple structure, my place within it was as a Buddhist practitioner, seated in the meditation posture, whispering the plays as prayers or mantras. My intention was to create an atmosphere of respect and recognition of my mother's words as arising out of her own essential 'Buddha-nature'. One of the reasons for whispering the plays rather than speaking them at full voice was to give the audience the impression of sacred words being spoken, even if the content was not necessarily sacred in tone.

Next came the element of the stones, reflecting some of the aesthetic tone of *At Sea*: stones as graves as well as a symbol for nature out of which all life arises and falls. I wanted the audience to feel a connection to ancient times, long before our modern era's reification of the intellect. As I whispered the words of my mother, I hoped the audience would be comforted by the quiet tone of my voice while also enjoying a sense of being read a story at bedtime by their own mothers.

Finally, the Tibetan gong served to punctuate the plays with starting and ending points. Just as in a Buddhist temple where the gong signals the start of prayers or meditation practice, I used the sound of the gong to signal the start and end of a play as well as to indicate the start of a new scene or act. Each time the gong sounded, I wanted the audience to use it to come back to the present moment and remind them not to get carried away by the words spoken but to simply stay present in their own bodies while using the content of the plays to reflect on their own lives.

Although the form of *(whispers)* enabled the audience to come and go of their own accord, there were members of the audience who sat through the entire 5 ½ hour event. Others sat through one or two of the plays while some people came in and out at different intervals. Whatever the case, there were few changes to my tone or pace as I wanted the viewer to experience an essential quality of stillness and

quiet in the work even if they could not experience the full extent of my mother's words. In terms of objectivity on my part, I found it challenging to remain composed throughout the reading of the first play, *Shakespeare for my Father*. My last encounter with the work was in 1996 when I was the stage manager for the West End production and sat in the wings, night after night, watching the play and calling the sound and lighting cues through a head set to the technicians. Reading the play aloud inside my makeshift temple eighteen years later brought many latent emotions to the surface that could not be hidden from the audience. What they could hear in the cracking of my voice and see in the flow of my tears was the sadness at the loss of my mother and the complexity of my relationship with her. In spite of my attempts at composure, some of the witnesses to this outward display of emotion told me afterwards that this early section gave them particular insight into my past even without knowing the details of that history. It exhibited the depth of my connection to my mother as evidenced through the outward display of erecting a temple to her memory.

Although my mother wrote her plays to be performed in a theatre setting, the personal connection to them as part of my extensive family history added to the overall intention of the work as both theatre and religious ritual. I wanted to see what it would be like to 'take the words out of her mouth', so to speak, and act as a medium for her voice after her death. It was a surreal undertaking, to say the least, to speak as if I were my mother, with her voice so familiar to me in my consciousness. I also recognized the way in which some of her personality traits have transferred over to me through time (this was particularly apparent to my in-laws who attended the performance as they both knew my mother personally).

Beside Death

> **To begin depriving death of its greatest advantage over us, let us adopt a way clean of contrary to that common one; let us deprive death of its strangeness, let us frequent it, let us get used to it; let us have nothing more often in mind than death… We do not know where death awaits us: so let us wait for it everywhere.**
>
> **Michel de Montaigne[2]**

> **Meditate single-mindedly on death, all the time and in every circumstance. While standing up, sitting or lying down, tell yourself: 'This is my last act in this world,' and meditate on it with utter conviction.**
>
> **Patrul Rinpoche[3]**

In 1966, my late mother became a household name in the pop culture of London's 'swinging sixties' when she starred in the film *Georgy Girl*, earning her an Oscar nomination at the age of twenty-four. Aside from a long and successful acting career, she began to write autobiographical plays as a way to exorcise her past growing up in the shadow of my late grandfather, Sir Michael Redgrave, as well as find a way to mourn his passing. She wrote four plays that archive the dynamics of her place within the family and that have since become textual archives of my own complex family history. The final performance of her one-woman play, *Nightingale* (2009) took place less than five months before her death from metastatic breast cancer.[4] In the year leading up to her death, she made some major revisions in the text, which she had originally written in 2005. The new version included her thoughts on the break up of her marriage to my father as well as reflections on her impending death. A few weeks before the play opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club she had received news that the cancer had spread to the lining of her brain which began to impact her

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[2] Montaigne, Michel de (1991), *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne,* trans. and edited by Screech, M.A., London: Allen Lane, p.95

[3] Patrul Rinpoche (1998), *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, trans. By the Padmakara Translation Group, Boston: Shambhala, p.54

[4] The world premiere of *Nightingale* took place at the The New End Theatre, Hampstead between January 17 – February 19, 2006 (featuring Caroline John and directed by Redgrave). Further productions featuring Redgrave took place between 2006 and 2009 at the Kansas City Repertory Theatre; the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles; Hartford Stage, Connecticut; and the Manhattan Theatre Club, New York (all directed by Joseph Hardy).

ability to learn lines. In order to be able to go on stage every night, she was put on a course of steroids to increase her energy and had a script on stage in case she needed to refer to it. The intensity of this time in her life and the fact that I lived in another country contributed further to the fractured relationship that had developed between us over the previous years. This fracture was not put to rest until the completion of *Sutra* just as my mother experienced in the process of creating *Shakespeare for my Father*.

In an article about the loss of his own father, *Times* journalist Matthew Parris articulates grieving as a process of integration:

> With this realization has come another: that this sorrow is not itself a cause for sorrow. Regret is not a cause for regret. We ought to be sorry. We ought to regret. Death is not a 'wound' to be 'healed' or a 'scar' to 'fade'. Once someone has been in the world, they have always been in the world; and once they have gone their absence will be in the world forever, part of the world; in Dad's case part of mine. This is a good thing (Parris 2009).

In stating his father's 'absence', Parris implies that, in life, his father was very much a 'presence'. Perhaps what he is trying to say is that his father represents the absence within consciousness that is an ever present reminder of the unavoidable fact of death. As he says, 'death is not a wound to be healed or a scar to fade.' With the death of a parent with whom a close relationship was shared comes the residual aftershock of a mourning that is intricately tied to a sense of self through the dynamics of the parent-child relationship.

Jacques Derrida's final project before he died concerns some of the theoretical implications of mourning which speaks both to Parris and my own experience of the loss of a parent. *The Work of Mourning* (2001) makes reference to the pedagogical implications of this loss:

> [T]he world [is] suspended by some unique tear ... reflecting disappearance itself: the world, the whole world, the world itself, for death takes from us not only some particular life within the world, some moment that belongs to us, but, each time, without limit, someone through whom the world, and first of all our own world, will have opened up...." (Derrida 2001:107)

He does not make reference to the quality of the relationship but, rather, reveals an insight into the depths of relations that have the deepest influences. In my case and for many others it is parental relations. With relationality comes mourning not only for the dead but, more significantly (according to Derrida), for the death of the relationship and the extent to which the psyche has developed through it. Philosopher Simon Critchley expounds upon this view using language that reflects Buddhism's notions of interdependence and selfhood by pointing to the relational aspect of mourning: '[D]eath and finitude are fundamentally relational,… constituted in relation to a lifeless material thing whom I love and this thing casts a long mournful shadow across the self' (Critchley 2002:169-170).

In the years proceeding my mother's death the motif of the shadow transformed from a sense of living in her shadow to one of learning how to exist 'beside' her after death. The structure of *(whispers)* positions me as the daughter once contained within her body through the symbol of the temple only to emerge in her shadow as the child of a celebrated public personality. I sit inside the temple constructed by images of my mother, the actress, playing herself on stage as I repeat her words about her life. Within the work there is no room for my own voice; it can only speak through images and by what is not said. *Still Life*, on the other hand, places me beside her not as public persona but as herself, post-mastectomy, alone in front of the lens of my sister's camera. In this image she appears wholly authentic away from the admiration of a live audience. The photograph appears as her own meditation on death.

These two performances of seated meditation seem to go from active to passive whereas in reality, in terms of selfhood and identity, it is the reverse. The seeming external activity of *(whispers)* gives way to the innate passivity of my younger self within the dynamics of my family, superseded by the speaking of my mother's words. By contrast, considering that of all five performances *Still Life* seems to have the least happening, it is in many ways the most active for by doing nothing I am doing everything: liberation through long duration. It is the long duration of the testimonial feature of the two works that infuses them with the ideal circumstances for meditation practice. It is, in many ways, the culmination of the active element contained in the first three performances. *Still Life* is their antithesis, both in the stillness of my mother's portrait and the stillness I hold in the six-hour sitting and yet it contains the most active level of mindfulness towards the

memories arising. Like the listener to trauma testimony, I become 'the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum' (Felman and Laub 1992:58), teaching myself in order that my work might have something to teach others.

Shoshana Felman's contribution to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) concerns the subject of trauma and pedagogy. She opens the chapter by posing a series of questions not dissimilar to some of my own:

> Is there a relation between crisis and the very enterprise of education? To put the question even more audaciously and sharply: Is there a relation between trauma and pedagogy? … Can trauma *instruct* pedagogy, and can pedagogy shed light on the mystery of trauma? … Can educators be in turn edified by the practice of the testimony, while attempting to enrich it and rethink it through some striking literary lessons? What does literature tell us about testimony (Felman in Caruth 1995:13)?

These questions are not unlike my own. She argues that testimony is the dominant literary technique of the modern era and that, as a result, 'our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony' (1995:17). In many ways this foreshadows testimony as a form of documentation, whether or not it is preserved through some other media than the listener. If it is not preserved, then the act of testimony sits 'beside' death in its arising and fading away.

According to Freud, 'It takes two to witness the unconscious' (Henke 1998:xii), a statement which supports the premise that public validation can be a starting point for the healing of trauma. In opposition to Freud's notion of the 'death drive', I demonstrate throughout *Sutra* that the liberating function of testimony presupposes the wish to confront outmoded mental states such as shame and trauma prior to death. This is particularly evident through my brief commentary in the soundscape of *No(h) Father* and through the whispering of my mother's plays (especially her final play, *Nightigale*). By introducing the practice of mindfulness, testimony and meditation become pedagogical tools and, in the case of this project, function as a pair. Without the element of meditation, the risk of re-traumatising myself through the mourning process increases, even if my testimony serves as

pedagogy for others. Freud's insight into the loss of a parent offers some insight into the psychological risk of the endeavor:

> If the most profoundly mourned persons happen to be our mother and father… then no one can imagine that the withdrawal of libidinal investment from every 'memory and expectation' associated with the beloved can go without explanation. If our memories and expectations are invariably bound up with the human beings who mean the most to us, how shall we dismiss our preoccupation or withdraw our investment without (risk of) autodestruction? (Krell 2000:15-16)

In order to avoid the risk of severe psychological damage through the performance of distress-inducing material, I mitigate it through Sedgwick's 'beside', in this case, placing myself 'beside death'. To be beside death is to welcome the discomfort of its affect-producing presence and to recognize that Freud was only right insofar as a person in mourning clings to a 'self' who mourns.

Fig. 20 ***Still Life*** **© Nick Bishop**

STILL LIFE

It was December 2002 when I got the phone call from my mother in America to tell me she had breast cancer. I was pregnant with my third child. It feels like a long time ago now but I can still remember the crying. It wasn't coming from my mother.

My younger sister, Annabel Clark, is a photographer in New York.[5] *Ever since her teens she has carried a camera with her everywhere she goes. She has an uncanny ability to capture time without people noticing she is even in the room. After our mother's cancer diagnosis, the camera never stopped. Our mother always seemed so happy in front of a camera or on stage. The photos poured out of my sister: the diagram of breast tissue drawn by the oncologist. Our mother sitting silent on a New York subway after a hospital visit. The moments leading up to her full mastectomy (she is wearing a hospital gown and cap, laughing because her best friend has just told her a funny story). Half naked, in her underwear, plastic tubes and drains coming out of her chest. I can't help thinking it looks like a heart. And then there are the post-op photos, the most*

[5] At the time of writing of this piece for the *Monument Review*, my sister was based in New York. She now works out of Seattle.

beautiful (to my eyes) being a portrait of my mother in a white linen nightie, standing and looking straight into the lens. She is not smiling. She has one breast. Her hair is very short. She doesn't look happy anymore.

Our mother always wanted to live for a long time. She never let the cancer stop her from acting or from living life to the full. In fact, she used to say her cancer was a kind of gift, a tool for teaching her how to live for the moment and get the most out of each day. It gave her back her happiness, in a strange way. When I asked her if she was afraid of dying she said, 'No. I'm not afraid to die. I'm afraid to say goodbye.'

May 2010. The end finally came. Our mother went out in true style, at home in Connecticut, surrounded by friends and family. I remember thinking how beautiful even her final breaths sounded. What an extraordinary sound and how much we take breathing for granted.

The ground opened up to take our mother home. The grass grew again.

2014. Still Life. *This is the title of a performance I gave for the Sainsbury Centre in the Undercroft in Norwich. Surrounded by contemporary monuments for the commemoration of WWI by French and British artists, I sat in silence for six hours in front of my mother's white linen nightie portrait. I also wore a white linen nightie. It was my mother's although not the one in the photograph. People came in and out of the gallery to see the exhibit. Although I fixed my eyes on a spot on the far wall, I was still very aware of the people around me and the variety of responses. One man asked the gallery assistant if I could still hear and if he thought I was saved by Jesus. Another man sat on the floor and watched me. A woman who knew me covered her mouth in surprise upon discovering who my mother was. Others stood back. Some glanced. Some came close. And all the time I sat in silence with my eyes open and using every tool possible from my seventeen years as a practicing Buddhist. Watching the thoughts. Watching the play of my mind. The Buddhist masters refer to the everyday mind as the monkey mind and as I sat in the gallery I could really see why. For the first couple of hours my thoughts darted here, there and everywhere. After a while I noticed boredom, discomfort, fatigue, and an endless display of thoughts from thinking about what I needed to do later in the week to my shopping list. But after all of the noise in my head*

calmed down, I began to realize there was nowhere to go and nothing to achieve. My mind settled. I began to think about my mother. I began to wonder what it must be like for people seeing me next to her portrait. After all, I have always been told how alike we were. The older I get the more I realize it is in ways other than just appearance.

After the performance I took water and felt hunger (I had not eaten nor had a drink since the day before). I felt elated and exhausted, humbled and, somehow, transformed. I wondered how sitting and doing nothing can have the ability to transform. I have come to a few conclusions since that day and it has something to do with the mind having nowhere else to go but into the body. We can spend so much time looking out, comparing ourselves to others or berating ourselves, living in the future or the past. But with nowhere to go and nothing to do, the mind can come to a stand still. Its true domain seems to be: be here now. When I think of my mother and the lifetime I had with her I wish I could have followed this directive. I have so many regrets but the only solution, now that she is no longer with us, is to be present with my memories of her, try and see her for who she was, doing her best in a broken world, loving her family and her work and holding a beacon for all women who have suffered and continue to suffer from breast cancer. There is still life, after all. This is my memorial to my mother (Clark 2014:60-63).

Aesthetic Choices and Form in *Still Life*

The entire six hours duration of *Still Life* is a meditation on death and impermanence, considered the two most important objects of meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The first aspect is in order to recognize the fleeting nature of the human lifespan in order to live a meaningful life and, secondly, to confront the fear of death. The two figures in the work, myself and my mother, are at opposite ends of this cycle of birth and death. I sit as a living figure, the offspring of the woman in the photograph facing death. A surface reading of the performance depicts two women at polar ends of existence, grounded in the duality of life and death. A deeper reading shows that we are both facing death and it is only through sitting with the past (beside and 'beside' the woman in the photograph) can I settle into the present. The public aspect of the performance enables my interior transformation to take place for it is the coming and going of spectators that forces

me to confront questions of identity that are intricately linked with my experience of psychological trauma connected to childhood. There is also something about exposing oneself through art in public that forces attention to authenticity rather than the 'acting' of a certain kind of self I wish to be seen conveying. In this case, the witnessing power of the public gaze takes on a therapeutic value that exceeds the act of verbalization of the traumatic event(s) or experience. Although it is not possible to get feedback from every audience member who witnessed my performance of *Still Life*, I can be certain that the phenomenological experience of feeling and remembering in the public domain contributed to the catharsis experienced near the end of the six-hour sitting.

The form for the work arose as an aesthetic response to my sister's portrait of our mother after her initial treatment for breast cancer. Although there was an entire series of photographs taken during this time, there was something about this one that stood out from the others. For one thing, it was the only photograph that was a deliberate staging (all of the others were captured in daily life). From my point of view, this had the added effect of theatricality that went along with my mother who was never only my mother but a celebrity. I was forced to share her with the world. In order to depict this additional relationship status I knew the portrait needed to be enlarged to give the viewer a sense of my mother as 'larger than life' (this was reflected in her personality).

As a departure from the layered symbolism of the previous three performances, *Still Life* was intended to reduce everything down to one main symbol: meditation. I wanted to create a piece where nothing happens, reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist proverb:

> Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.
> After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.[6]

In other words, nothing changes. By sitting completely still for six hours, I wanted the viewer to be drawn into their own internal response to stillness. It is unusual to come across a human being who is not 'doing' anything but simply being still. I did not exhibit any emotion nor did I display a completely detached gaze but allowed

[6] See: Fields, R., Taylor, P. et al. (1984), *Chop Wood, Carry Water*, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc.

my expression to remain open and alive (this can be seen in the video documentation of the performance). No matter how long members of the audience chose to stay and looking at this living sculpture, there was no apparent beginning, middle and end such as in the previous three works. In this way, there remained complete flexibility to attend at any given point.

In terms of my intentions for the autobiographical element of the work, I wanted the audience to see the resemblance between me and my mother and reflect upon the theme of 'reflection'. What they saw was a woman sitting and meditating with a portrait of her dead mother (this was explained in the programme given out at the entrance). My hope was that this would offer a perspective on the nature of reflection as something requiring stillness of mind in order to open up the space for painful memories to be integrated into everyday consciousness. Meditation is a difficult skill to teach without using words and I wanted to explore the possibilities within performance art as a teaching tool. By modeling behaviour such as simply sitting still for hours at a time, I hoped to offer the audience the instruction: sit and be present with the past.

Restoring the Archive to Revisit Trauma

During the time of my mother's cancer treatment in 2003, my sister Annabel launched a photo diary project for her dissertation as a photography student at Parsons School of Art and Design in New York. One of the post-operative portraits she produced of our mother became the basis for *Still Life*, a six-hour durational performance art work for the Monument exhibit of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art in Norwich, England. In the case of my parents, the question remains: whose archives are they? Not only did both my parents contribute to public performance archives but these archives are also entirely personal as they go on to embed my performance work with a complex web of private meanings and semiology. More precisely, the archive material used in *Sutra* stimulates shameful and traumatic memories of one kind or another, especially in *At Sea* and, for my partner, in *Boudhanath*. In Buddhist terms they become external stimuli towards recognition (but not necessarily realization) of No self which, in this instance, may only be confined to the performer's perspective. In their own way, they become the means

towards psychic integration using Buddhist meditation practice as the key performance methodology. It is the synthesis of the external and internal archive which gives rise to this recognition, enabling psychological and spiritual transmutation to take place in the therapeutic encounter between performer and spectator.

The word archive (Gk. *arche*) holds two foundational principles within its definition: origin and commandment, both of which foreground the archive's role within this project's performance cycle. Given the physical absence of both my parents in my life, their archives stand in for them as proxy figures (calling into question whether the works can truly be considered solo endeavours). For both Aristotle and Plato, the archive 'most worth seeking would be an originating power from which the material order flows and upon which theoretical knowledge of its nature might be grounded logically' (Peters 1967: 25). The definition links itself intimately with the Buddhist notion of emptiness or *shunyata.* In other words, the interdependent principle from which all phenomena and experience arises is precisely the same universal principle sought by the ancient Greek philosophers. I argue that the impetus for creating autobiography based on the parent-child relationship arises out of this same quest for origins, particularly when working with trauma. In Aristotelian terms, this is in keeping with the principle of the archive's potential for making something new or as the 8th century Buddhist pandit Saraha observed, 'That by which fools are bound, by that same thing are the wise liberated' (Schaeffer 2005). The logical conclusion is the classification of the archive as liberator in relation to Buddhist autobiographical performance art.

As with *At Sea* and *No(h) Father*, *(whispers)* and *Still Life* continue to make explicit use of the external archive.[7] In the former the archive is a closed circuit, in other words, my mother's plays exist as pieces of theatre history, bearing no relation to the way in which they are appropriated for the purposes of performance art. In the case of the latter, my mother's portrait exists as a stand-alone work and can conceivably be re-produced for purposes other than a standard gallery exhibit or published work of photography.[8] Therefore, as open-circuits, the appropriation of

[7] In discussing the archive in this context a distinction is being made between the *external* archive (that of objects, texts, recordings, video and photographs) and the *internal* archive (personal/subjective memory).

[8] Annabel Clark's portrait was published in a book she collaborated on with our mother, *Journal: A Mother and Daughter's Recovery from Breast Cancer* (2004).

the archive for use in a work of performance art allows for a supplementary rendering of meaning. It is through appropriation in both cases that a new archive is being formed while also placing myself in the role of archivist. Derrida's affirmation of the archive as exteriority frames the way in which my parents' archives reveal to me an interior gateway towards the integration of shame and trauma. Without the use of these external archives, the triggers for memory would be impossible to frame for the purposes of *Sutra* (the exception is the final work, *Boudhanath*, which predominantly utilizes memory or the internal archive in its creation).

It is through Derrida's work that the philosophical role of the archivist has taken on a fluid evolution from its primary definition as custodian of truth to one of a process of *archivization* that 'produces as much as it records events' (Nesmith in Hill 2011:9).[9] In his work *Archive Fever* (1995), Derrida interprets the archive through Freudian analysis, relegating it to the death drive. In light of the Tibetan Buddhist focus on death and impermanence, the connection is central to the understanding of the relationship between memory and the archive: 'The archive takes place at the place of the originary and structural breakdown of the said memory' (Derrida 1995:11). Derrida also refers to the process of archivization as a passage from the private (secret) to the public (nonsecret), such as when Freud's family home was relegated to museum status or my mother's letters and theatre memorabilia were acquired by the Folger Shakespeare library. These are acts of becoming. In other words, nothing starts out life as an archive but become so via a consigned topology. Far from producing a meta-archive, Derrida asserts that the archive is established on the principle of the *archontic*: 'The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future' (1995:68). In the case of my performance cycle, this Derridean principle is enacted through the creation of a new archive from those that existed previously. In fact, the creation of the performance works relies entirely upon the need for an existing archive, both inner and outer, in order to carry out the process of consignation.[10] If

[9] Previously formulated by Sir Hilary Jenkinson, his contribution to the field of the archivist included an ideology fixated upon the archive as stating 'no opinion, voice no conjecture; they are simply written memorials, authenticated by the fact of their official preservation, of events which actually occurred and of which they themselves formed a part… [which provide] an exact statement of the facts' (Jenkinson 1965:4). He advocated that the archivist remain a disinterested and passive party dedicated to the preservation of 'truth'.

[10] Derrida refers to the necessity that the 'archontic power… must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation*… consigning through gathering together signs' (Derrida 1995:3).

the point of choosing to remember trauma is in order to move through and away from its designation, then the contradiction inherent within Derrida's 'archive fever' (the desire to remember while seeking to forget) stands as the primary impetus for enacting autobiography that deals with shame and trauma.

The process of consignation moves from the work of the archivist to the task of the documentarian. Whether in film or theatre, the creative handling of documentary material implies instability and subjectivity, calling into question its ability to render the truth of the matter. In the case of autobiography, however, the form is inherently subjective which allows for a certain amount of freedom in the development of its narrative form and structure. Ultimately, autobiography is not a search for conclusive knowledge but a formal ground in which questions are asked of the past and answered with potentialities into the future.

> The spectator is not in need of signposts and inverted commas to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other. Documentary is predicated upon a dialectical relationship between aspiration and potential (Bruzzi 2006:6).

In this case, the archive offers the documentarian access to a point in time where the imagination can simply acknowledge the fact of events taking place. In the case of *Sutra*, it cannot be disputed that my father's voice was the voice of *Just William* nor can my mother's portrait be mistaken for anyone other than my mother who is clearly missing a breast. Beyond these facts, the contexts for which I have appropriated my parents' archives infuse them with potential, rendering them as the primary stimuli for performance art but offering little in the way of singular truth. For myself, each archive contains a gateway through which to access, transform and ultimately integrate personal trauma. In search of a global definition, psychoanalysis has theorized that trauma is a '…"wound" to the sense of self… During traumatic events, subjectivity becomes annihilated; the subject disappears or becomes transformed into an object – powerless, lacking agency' (Heddon 2008: 55). Freud's view is that 'the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind' (Caruth 1996:3). This suggests that the treatment resides in working with the mind (although it leaves out the Buddhist conception of a bodymind). Heddon suggests that in order to recover from trauma it is necessary

to rebuild the sense of 'self', even if that 'self' is a fictional construct: 'In psychoanalytic therapy, this recovery is linked to speaking about the traumatic experience, an impossible task, in fact, because trauma is precisely an event that cannot be made sense of, and, therefore, cannot be represented (2008:55-56). [11]

By attempting to represent trauma with the knowledge of the failure of representation, I place myself 'beside' it with the reliance of the language of theatre and performance art to contain the symbolic echoes of the past. For all of the methods available within the psychoanalytic framework for dealing with trauma, dramatherapy is the closest formulation to make a case for the therapeutic effects of performance-making.[12] After all, it is not trauma that is being enacted in *(whispers)* or *Still Life.* Rather than representations of trauma, it is simply being witnessed by the performer using the language of performance art while Buddhist meditation provides the method that enables the witnessing to take place without the addition of further trauma.

In connection to the external performance environment, the spectator is witnessing the witness in reliance upon both the external and internal archive. The witness, therefore, is twofold: the performer and the spectator. The former brings the sole element of subjectivity while the latter brings both subjective and objective experience to bear on the proceedings. Somewhere in between the subjective and objective viewpoints lies a dynamic interplay of truth and fiction that makes up the autobiographical theatrical narrative. The relationship between trauma (present) and memory (past) is played out in the narratives of *(whispers)* and *Still Life*, two performances which share a common thematic thread through the narrative of trauma. However, in the realm of memory as archive, particularly regarding trauma, it is impossible to arrive at pure objectivity. This is particularly evident in the attempt to work with trauma as either primary or secondary performance stimuli. It is within the purely subjective framing of the archive into autobiographical terms that the instability of memory and recall must be acknowledged and, in the two performances in question, visual and aural clues are suggestive of this transcience.

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[11] A position taken by Western psychoanalytic theorists such as Freud and Lacan, both of whose theories are not dissimilar to Buddhist psychology in which the 'self' is construed as the 'merely-labelled "I"'.

[12] Having experienced the traditional psychotherapeutic approach of 'talk therapy' and the benefits of bringing trauma to the surface of consciousness, my own experience is that it could only ever be witnessed through artistic practice.

In no sense are the performances attempting to represent 'real life'. In Guerin and Hallas' monograph *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (2007), the authors recognize the complexity of the image's ability to bear witness to trauma.[13] They regard this ability as primarily phenomenological in its capacity 'to bring the event into iconic presence and to mediate the intersubjective relations that ground the act of bearing witness' (Guerin & Hallas 2007:12). Bearing witness to personal trauma both in life and as performance art practice requires a continual relationship with the memory archive in order to recognize some of the prevailing patterns of the processes of traumatic thought.

The conception of *(whispers)* continues the idea of memory as archive within my work, although in this case the memories are not my own. My mother's plays became such an integral part of her identity and, in many ways, revealed more to me about her as a woman and mother than any of my own subjective memories. Much of what is written in the plays is pure testimony and, as my mother said to me on many occasions, they were her therapy (particularly *Shakespeare for my Father*), as mentioned in a private journal entry at the time:

> *9th May 1993*
>
> *I realize that much of the real sweetness of this success is the memory of all the times I've been looked down on, wrote off dismissingly* [sic.] *Well at last this makes sense of it all – I've learned from even the lowest of the jobs and while some loftily gazed over my head I was gathering steam for this my life's work – the sum of what I dreamed I could be – unfettered – free – Remember this (Redgrave 1993).*

It was through acting that my mother found peace with the past and she continued to approach it as therapy for the rest of her life. She described being on stage as 'weaving a spell' (ibid.).

For myself, *Sutra* picks up where psychotherapy left off and although they are not traditional forms of dramatherapy in that they are artworks created with an audience in mind, they utilize some of its principles (such as the expression of unconscious emotions through symbolism).[14] The main task, however, is for

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[13] In this context, I am including performance art as a particular type of temporal image involving movement, sound and three-dimensional space.

[14] Dramatherapist Dorothy Langley describes the task of dramatherapy '…is to facilitate the client's progress through an appropriate dramatic experience that will allow healing to take place…

investigating some of the ways in which learning and, therefore, transformation takes place through the combination of testimony and meditation. For *Sutra* this is articulated through short and long durational work. Abramović's experience of long durational performance over a period of more than 45 years offers some insight into the process:

> I know that when you are working in this way, psychological and physical change takes place. You are affected by duration: your perception and your reality become different. So, if it is done truly… transformation takes place; there is a natural decision to change or to end. Not letting change happen, that's when you risk becoming repetitive (Abramović in Heathfield 2009:352).

Under the conditions of the long durational performance I wanted to pursue a performance art work that went beyond my own story with my parents to the story with my mother's parents and other relatives. The aim was to metaphorically travel through time to find out what my mother's testimony could teach me about my own identity and lead the way towards acknowledgment of the idea of No Self. The opening scene lays out the position from which all of her plays were written - a sense of visiting the dead, resurrection and understanding her own impending death through an attempt to understand her role within the family:

> I thought I had time. All the time in the world. I must hold my daughter's hand. My sister's. My mother's. Hold my children to me. Don't let them go. My mother slipped away from me… but her hand is still in mine. Always remembered. And no-one dies who is remembered.. Tick…tock... tick. A heart stops. Really stops. My brother. But it was restarted, he was returned to us, battered from his travels. Tick… tock… tick ... and then another heart stops. And we can't jump start it. It can't be true. But it is. A bright light is gone. Apocalypse. What must I do? I was still here with the living. My children, my sister, my brother. I could visit the dead. Mum in her American field. Her granddaughter near her. But I needed more. Reach further back. Travel. Visit an English graveyard. Find my mother's mother. But the grandmother I am searching for is gone without a trace. Her name washed from her headstone by acid rain (Redgrave 2009:1-2).

[through] *catharsis* or the expression of deeply felt emotion, but equally important is the ability to distance oneself from personal issues (Langley 2006:12).'

The speech suggests that my mother links identity to family while also using the loss of family members as a means to make sense of her own impending death. Although Buddhism does not teach a doctrine of ancestor worship or veneration within the classical scriptures, the practice is found within the Chinese Buddhist schools as it has been integrated from previously existing social norms into the culture over the centuries since Buddhism's introduction to the region in the 6th century CE. As religious scholar Carolyn Heinz described, 'The Chinese have always been interested in their past; worship of ancestors is worship of origins' (Heinz 1999:225).

Although my mother was not a Buddhist, her words convey the theme of attachment for which Buddhism asserts is at the root of human suffering. By the end of the section, '…the grandmother I am searching for is gone without a trace. Her name washed from her headstone by acid rain,' her recognition of impermanence comes to the fore and remains throughout the rest of the play. By the end of the play she displays a marked change in philosophy as she refers to my great-grandmother: 'Now her hand is in mine. Now she is remembered. I've told her story. And I will tell it again tomorrow...and the day after that and the day after. The air is clear… A cloudless sky… And I can see for miles and miles. I still have time. All the time in the world' (2009:52). It was these final words coming out of my mouth during *(whispers)* that gave me the greatest insight into my mother's worldview and the realization that perhaps our philosophical outlooks were not so far apart since relative and ultimate truth or dual and non-dual reality are not consigned to Buddhism alone.

One of the overriding distinctions to be made between Buddhist theories of dual and non-dual reality is that to function from a perspective of duality is to differentiate like from dislike, attachment from aversion, good from bad, or, put more plainly, 'this' from 'that'. Again, this is another iteration of Sedgwick's 'beside'. According to Buddhism this is precisely what leads to suffering and dissatisfaction or *dukkha.* The usefulness of Sedgwick's theory of the 'beside' to the development of a theory of Buddhism and performance art allows for a consideration of the contradictions in the form. Whilst remaining subjective from the point of view of the performer or protagonist of the artwork, its Buddhist elements call for the relinquishment of subjectivity and the taking up of active detachment. From the Buddhist perspective, particularly in its Tibetan form, it is precisely subjectivity which allows or creates objectivity. It is not either/or but *beside*. To give an example,

I begin the performance of *(whispers)* as a subjective self with a clearly defined sense of identity as the daughter of the woman whose photographs I am surrounded by and whose words I begin to read aloud. The awareness of her death while speaking her words, as if she herself were speaking, arouses within me a set of affects related to mourning and my relationship with my mother and, hence, my childhood. As these affects turn to emotions, beginning to take hold and colour my reading of the text, I apply the practice of meditation precisely in order to situate myself 'beside' the material, not only so it does not overwhelm my nervous system with the heaviness of affective responses, but in order to arouse sympathy and compassion for my mother. In spite of death I am building a new relationship with her through the performance, while at the same time using the intensity of the affective encounter as the means towards liberation from my inherent attachment and aversion to people and events from the past. In this way I place myself 'beside' the material in order to be able to deconstruct my place in the family dynasty. The temple remains intact while my mind breaks through the illusion of self. Edith Almhofer's definition of performance art supports my own practice-as-research: 'In Performance Art, the action of the artists is designed not so much to transform a reality external to them and to communicate this by virtue of the aesthetic treatment, but rather to strive for a "self-transformation"' (Almhofer in Lehmann 2006:137).

The act of remembering and transforming my own traumatic memories in bringing these two performances to fruition brings with it a necessary filter in order to avoid being re-traumatized, a process tied in to the act of forgetting. Cultural studies scholar Astrid Erll identifies the process of memory as a binary: 'Remembering and forgetting are two sides - or different processes – of the same coin, that is, memory. Forgetting is the very condition for remembering' (Erll 2011:8). It is the emphasis on forgetting that allows memories to be prioritized and organized into patterns. As a result, trauma is not necessarily a single historical event but can be a response to the repetition of a series of negative events or perceptions. Erll argues that the act of remembering 'is a process, of which memories are the result, and… memory should be conceived of as an ability. Memory itself is, however, not observable. Only through the observation of concrete acts of remembering situated in specific sociocultural contexts can we hypothesize about memory's nature and functioning' (ibid.). However, if Erll's hypothesis is

correct, then it would not have been possible for Gautama Buddha to draw conclusions about the nature and functioning of memory from his enlightenment experience. In the context of meditation there are no concrete acts to observe, there is simply the mind and its functions. Performance art, however, necessitates concrete acts which, in the case of this project, begins with memory as archive. In the case of trauma and autobiography, I would argue that the concrete act begins with the lived experience of trauma, a process concretized throughout childhood and brought to fruition in the act of public performance. The lack of access to this internal transformation on the part of the audience adds another layer of complexity. Without knowing whether or not they were aware of my own suffering (depending on which part of the work they were engaged with or whether there are spectators who choose to sit through the durational performances), it is difficult to provide an analysis of any potential audience transformation but, at the very least, I am able to offer insights gained from my own pedagogical encounter with the material.

The Body as Memory Site

> **Our best sculpture expresses the effort of thought – one might be tempted to say its impotence – by a tensing of the entire body, from the forehead to the toes. But the thought that the Oriental figure conveys through the serenity of the Buddhist smile is thought released, freed from the flesh. It doesn't search; it neither strives nor tires. It contemplates.**
>
> **Jacques Bacot[15]**

In meditative terms, five to six hours is a long period of time more akin to *Vipassana* (insight) meditation than to *Shamatha* (calm-abiding).[16] In *Vipassana,* the meditator uses the body as the point of discovery of the three features or marks of human existence: the realization of *duḥkha* (suffering or dissatisfaction); *anitya* (impermanence); and *anātman* (No self). During the performance of *Still Life*, I used my training in Buddhist meditation in order to deal with both the element of time

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[15] See: Baas, Jacquelynn (2005), *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. vii

[16] *Shamatha* meditation is characterized by mindfulness of the breath and is considered the preparation for *Vipassana*.

and the thoughts that continually arose in my consciousness from the mundane to the sublime. Starting with the breath, I became aware of my body in space and in relation to the people and environment. Although I did not have any awareness of actual time (there were no clocks in the room), a habitual restlessness arose in recognition that I would not be able to move or speak for six hours. When spectators arrived I noted an ego response that wondered if anyone would take notice of my performance. These kinds of questions always prompted the meditative response: to return to the breath and to continue to note the rising and passing away of discursive thought. Given the long sitting, the pervasive memories of the past arose frequently, prompting the repetition of one of the foundational practice questions: Who is thinking? Nowhere can a truly existing 'I' or 'self' be found. Taken as the object of meditation, the 'self' is open to analysis:

> One recognizes that it – like all phenomena of cyclic existence – is empty of inherent existence. All phenomena lack a self; they are dependently arisen due to the force of causes and conditions other than themselves. Through repeatedly familiarizing oneself with this notion, one gradually weakens the force of the appearance of inherent existence and directly apprehends the emptiness of the object of meditation (Powers 2008:60).

It is in light of this fundamental question of existence that psychological trauma must be contextualized in order to arrive at some understanding of the ways in which Buddhist philosophy and practice offer practical solutions for its psychic integration.

Cathy Caruth, a pioneer in the field of trauma studies, points to the 'peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma' (Caruth 1991:181). In other words, the way in which the memories of specific traumatic events continue to effect the sufferer carries with it the knowledge that its effects are not yet known in full (which can become another kind of trauma). She also argues in favour of the impossibility of being able to access our own or others' experience of trauma and, therefore, the impossibility of passing judgment on such experiences. Although Caruth's analysis of the nature of trauma as paradoxical offers a certain understanding of its process, it does not go beyond the accepted hypotheses of the nature of consciousness and the self as inherently existing phenomena. It calls into question the compatibility of psychological approaches to trauma and Buddhist

practice. Theorist Babette Rothschild, who classifies trauma as fundamentally a psychophysical process, perhaps comes closer to the Buddhist approach which takes the body as the primary focus of meditation prior to thoughts and memories as the objects of meditation. This approach is corroborated by Deirdre Heddon's observation that '[t]he neat distinctions of past and present, like truth and fiction, are blurred, the one blending into another… Equally, the rememberings of the past are interrupted by the physically present body and its enactments in the present moment' (Heddon 1999:198).

Trauma is made manifest in the photograph of a woman in the wake of treatment for breast cancer; her hair is beginning to grow post-chemotherapy and the obvious lack of a right breast under a thin white linen nightgown bears witness to the trauma, both physical and psychological, of a full mastectomy. Her eyes look directly into the lens of my sister's camera as if staring into the eyes of death. She is resigned to her fate even though she did not, at that point, know how many more years she would live.[17] On the day of the performance in the Undercroft gallery space in Norwich, I am sitting in front of the portrait, my resemblance to my mother impossible not to notice.[18] I do not speak but simply sit while the spectators are free to walk around the exhibit. Throughout the six hours, the gallery audience exhibited a variety of spectating behaviours: walking past while glancing briefly; walking past and stopping to look briefly before moving on; walking past and not looking; standing still and looking either briefly or for a sustained period of time; sitting in a chair for a long period of time and looking; sitting on the floor for a long period of time gazing at me. In spite of exhibiting curiosity about my live sculpture amongst the rest of the static artworks in the space, not a single person looked me in the eyes and held my gaze. And yet the gaze of my mother in the photograph enables a different kind of engagement for although she seems to be looking directly at the spectator, the lack of liveness renders the viewing safe (I noticed spectators spend more time gazing at the photograph than at me).

The point of departure for the analysis of *Still Life* lies with the question of the gaze (as external factor) and the one who gazes (as internal factor) in relation to Buddhist practice. Art criticism has theorized the gaze, beginning with its depiction

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[17] My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2002 at the age of 59. She died in May 2010, age 67.

[18] The performance took place on June 28th, 2014 as part of the *Monument* exhibit for the SCVA (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art).

in Renaissance painting in which the female form was wholly intended for the pleasure of male spectatorship (Simons 1988:6). While this line of reasoning is entirely valid, particularly in light of feminist critical analysis of the social development of the patriarchy, my own work takes the stance that the gaze begins by inviting the viewer into the autobiographical encounter (as expressed in Abramović's work in Chapter Two).[19] Once the invitation has been accepted, the spectator gazes back at me and the image of my mother in whose face my gaze is reflected through our likeness. Peggy Phelan examines the nature of self-identity as an extension of the discoveries a young child makes during the Mirror Stage which, according to Lacan, continues to develop through identification with the Other and includes the living environment and relationships with other people, particularly parent figures.

> Identity cannot, then, reside in the name you can say or the body you can see – your own or your mother's… Identity is only perceptible through a relation to an other – which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being (Phelan 1993:13).

In many ways, Phelan uses language that contributes to an understanding of the Buddhist conception of self-identity through its reference to an illusory 'I' perceived solely through relationship. In *Still Life* the signification of my resemblance to my mother contributes to the entire process of transformation from total identification as my mother's daughter to the gradual dissolution of these labels as fixed entities, at least from my subjective viewpoint as performer.

Throughout *Sutra*, the object of meditation shifts developmentally from my observations of the reaction of my nervous system to the external archive and continues in a circular fashion as is the nature of memories related to shame and trauma as well as the nature of the discursive mind, endlessly circling in thoughts. French explorer Jacques Bacot, the first Tibetan scholar in the West, observed from a trip to Tibet in 1906 that '[r]otational movement is one of the most obvious

[19] See Laura Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), originally published in *Screen* 16(3) Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18. The essay introduces the theory of the male gaze. Also, Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's *Staring: How We Look* (2009), in which she develops a theory on the reciprocal gaze.

characteristics of Tibetan rites' (Bacot 1909:196). As the four performances of my own autobiography come to a finish through yet another archive (a doctoral thesis), I make way for one final work that endeavours to integrate the practice of testimony and meditation with relational practice. The analysis of the 'beside' within my work recognizes that complexity and simplicity are not mutually exclusive, particularly given the luxury of the long durational performance as a framework. The length of time reveals the fluidity of identity and provides the most conducive circumstances to practice renunciation of the past. The next chapter positions myself in the role of witness to my partner's trauma testimony through the motif of circling, taking into account both the repetition compulsion connected to psychological trauma with the element of flow that is the nature of circling and, as such, conducive to the practice of meditation.

IV. Sharing Suffering

circling

Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits
Up the o'er wrought heart and bids it break.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*[1]

This final chapter, whilst taking a marked departure from the prevailing subjectivity of much of the analysis of *Sutra*, is in many ways its heart. Testimony and the witness co-exist on stage and I am left to look on as both 'other' and 'together', a position made tenable (to me, at least) by the notion of the 'beside', a recurring theme throughout this project. *Boudhanath* sees me step aside from my own personal narrative to become an advocate for my partner Nick Bishop's autobiography as he faces the impending death of his mother and takes stock of his life. To listen to my partner's testimony is a painful thing, made even more difficult as I am powerless to do anything to make it better. This is one of the more painful truths of disclosure. The performance also elicits the insight that with relationality comes the realization that 'it's not all about me.' For all of the creative approaches to self-development that the solo autobiography brings there is a shadow-side to the experience in which the self is reified and stands in the way of recognizing that there was never a self to begin with. With the duet, especially with an intimate partner, the tables are turned and the self is mirrored back through the relational exchange.

In setting out to create a performance art work with my life partner, my awareness of a discourse of relationality had not yet been explored. I was more concerned with uncovering a set of research questions equally applicable to the solos that positioned experience prior to theory whilst following an intuitive call to the aesthetic considerations of the duet: What are the obstacles to public meditation and can they be overcome? How can philosophy be performed? Does *Boudhanath* contribute to a pedagogy of performance? Only during the performance did I discover that it was unlocking another set of questions (some more personal than

[1] Spoken by Malcolm, Act IV, sc. 3 in: Shakespeare, William (1606/2005), *Macbeth*, London: Penguin, p. 75

others) that any amount of theorizing did not reveal to me: How does circumambulation offer a solution to Nick's 'descent into Hades'? What is the nature of our relationship? Does my own silent meditation practice 'teach' meditation to my partner? Given the intimate knowledge I have of Nick and his recovery from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse and alcoholism, our discussions began with the form in which his testimony could be contained. The idea of containment, however, is problematic, given the nature of trauma recovery and the gradual unfolding of memory that, when brought to light, may seek to abandon containment for freedom. At the same time, it offers a real metaphor for recovery, not unlike the corralling of wild horses. The boundary became a thirty-minute performance entitled *Boudhanath*, named after the Buddhist *stupa* in Kathmandu where I visited in 1997, my first year as a proponent of the faith. Whilst *Boudhanath* may feel like a work created in dramatherapy, its development arose out of the performance art milieu in which I have been working throughout *Sutra*. In other words, I was interested in the symbolic aspects of telling his story as well as the methodological concerns of applying meditation practice to its enactment. The framing of the work around the theme of death was chosen entirely out of the given circumstances of Nick's life at the time and was coincidental to my own life as documented through *Sutra*.

In the last chapter, *Still Life* was presented as the culmination of the process of mourning my own mother's death and, literally and metaphorically, there was nothing left to say. As performance artist Linda Montano remarked at the end of Tehching Hsieh's performance *Art/Life* (1983-1984), during which she was tied to Hsieh by a rope for an entire year:

> Besides training the mind, the piece raises so many emotions to the surface that the soap opera quality eventually gets boring. I feel as if I've dredged up ancient rages and frustrations this year and although I'm glad that I went through with them, I now feel that holding any emotional state for too long is actually an obsolete strategy (Montano in Stiles and Selz 1996:780).

Montano's words echo the instructions of John Cage in Chapter One: 'You can feel an emotion, just don't think that it's so important… Take it in a way that you can then let it drop! Don't belabor it!' (Cage in Baas 2005:162) The machinations of my own mind during the first four performances in *Sutra* are perfectly described by Montano's use of the term 'soap opera'. For this reason, I contend that the practice of

releasing emotional states and recognizing their lack of inherent existence is the most useful aspect of Buddhist philosophy for the performance artist. The challenge of working with intense emotions without giving voice to them relies on the continuous application of mindfulness. Without such a public meditation practice, it would be impossible to extricate the effects of ego-clinging that would invalidate the works' Buddhist credentials. In Linda Montano's case, she credits her one-year performance with Hsieh as keeping her in therapy for many years (Silas and Stathakos 2012) in spite of having learned meditation during her two-year retreat in a Zen Buddhist monastery prior to Hsieh's project.

In my partner's case, after years of traditional psychotherapy to deal with the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, it was his exposure to mindfulness techniques in his training as a mental health nurse and in a twelve-step recovery programme that he credits with enabling him to begin to integrate the past with the present and live without the overwhelming consequences of historical trauma. *Boudhanath* not only symbolizes the process he endured but became a site for the focused practice of meditation under the stark conditions of testimony as a means of highlighting the central components of his life story. His particular trauma narrative and recovery mirrors what Carl Jung refers to as the 'night sea journey', a metaphorical 'descent into Hades' (Jung 1966/2013:84):

> The 'night sea journey' is the journey into the parts of ourselves that are split off, disavowed, unknown, unwanted, cast out, and exiled to the various subterranean worlds of consciousness… The goal of this journey is to reunite us with ourselves. Such a homecoming can be surprisingly painful, even brutal. In order to undertake it, we must first agree to *exile nothing* (Cope in Van der Kolk 2014:123, author's emphasis).

The archetype of the journey within the context of both therapy and autobiographical performance art takes the foundations of self-estrangement and charts its development towards self-knowledge. In *Boudhanath* this is symbolized by circumambulation (Fig. 21).

Fig. 21 ***Boudhanath*** **© Pema Clark**

The nature of circling suggests a path without goal; an ongoing journey of the Self that, in this case, moves towards recognition of No Self. It is also a reminder of Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist philosophy of 'interbeing', the term he introduced into the Western Buddhist vernacular based on the doctrine of dependent origination or the law of cause and effect (*karma*).

> If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. 'Interbeing' is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix 'inter-' with the verb 'to be, we have a new verb, inter-be (Hanh 1988:3).

He stresses the importance of the term's relationship to the doctrine of emptiness when he says that '[t]he important part is the realization that there is no independant self – that the perception of self, of "me", of "mine" is an illusion. Awareness that "I" am made of "non-I" elements leads to the understanding of non-self and it is the realization of non-self that brings an end to suffering (Lu 2009).' It is also important to emphasize here that understanding is not akin to realization, in Buddhist terms. The term 'realization' connotes a level of integration such that the attachment, aversion and ignorance that prop up a sense of an inherently existing 'I' cease altogether, hence the end of suffering. I am not

suggesting that a work of performance art necessarily has the ability to prompt an enlightenment experience but, at the very least, that it can plant seeds for thinking and feeling differently, contributing to a change in the relationship between the performer and his trauma narrative.

The principle of 'interbeing' is essential to the dynamic exchange between Nick and myself during *Boudhanath.* In many ways, enacting a relational performance helps to highlight the core principles of the work. To start with, the soundscape is in the form of an AA 'share', prompting the audience to relax into the testimonial.[2] Given the nature of Nick's history, it is impossible to account for any members of the audience who might have some things in common with his story. Not coming from a background in theatre, the thought of having onlookers was disconcerting, at first, especially given the responsibility Nick felt for exposing the subject of childhood sexual abuse in public (one audience member got up and left part-way through). After a performance in Bournemouth, Nick was approached by an audience member which helped him put his impulse to disclose through performance art in perspective:

> **Pema:** How does it change, being watched, being in public with this stuff, as opposed to being private or talking stuff through with someone in a private way?
>
> **Nick:** I think the difference I found was in my conversation with one audience member afterwards, and I knew what she was going to say and it was that she was taken inside of herself in watching this, it brought up her story, it brought up her relationship with her older sister and how her older sister had kind of carried her into behaviours that were not appropriate for her age and her relationship with her mum and dad and that doesn't surprise me at all. That it wouldn't be about me, it would be about them. You watch something like this and it stirs up lots of old stuff and that's what it did for this audience member (Artist interview 2014).

In many ways it could be said that Nick was there for the audience and I was there for Nick and the audience was there for us. As Adrian Heathfield remarks, 'performance artists make vivid the drama of the artist's own life in relation to the life of the other, be that the life of the distant witness or the life of the intimate

[2] Alcoholics Anonymous is structured around the 'share' whereby members take turns giving their personal testimony to the rest of the group. The format avoids cross-sharing in order to enable the speaker to express him or herself freely without interruption.

partner (Heathfield 2004:18).' In creating performance art works, I am most interested in experiments in form and finding symbolic language to express that which cannot be spoken.

Aesthetic Choices and Form in *Boudhanath*

Coming off the back of the complete stillness of *Still Life*, I created *Boudhanath* as an aesthetic response to the living archive of memory as recalled by Nick in an extended interview with me in a recording studio. I did not plan any of my questions but rather opened up a dialogue between us, posing questions as they arose out of his initial responses. Given that he is my partner and I already know a lot about his past, I did not want the line of questioning to be prescribed nor to follow my own ideas about what content I hoped to gather from our conversation. The studio engineer recorded the entire interview, after which I listened back to it and made detailed notes on its structure according to themes. By noting the time code for each section I was able to create a blueprint of the conversation from which I could begin to shape the monologue. By the end the day, with the help of the engineer, I had edited the content of the interview into the kind of 'share' that Nick might have given at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. The only section I asked Nick to add was the opening line, 'Hi, my name's Nick and I'm an alcoholic.' This was an important contextualizing element in order for the audience to understand the space in which Nick was operating as a recovering alcoholic.

In terms of the aesthetic environment of the work, the following elements made up the framework for the piece:

1. Stone circle
2. Photographs of Nick's parents
3. Prayer beads
4. Circumambulation
5. Costumes: black (Nick) and white (Pema)

My intentions for the piece were for Nick's story to take centre stage, situating myself on the outskirts of his internal process by silently walking and reciting mantras under my breath with the use of a *mala* or prayer beads as a focusing tool. I

wanted the audience to understand that my relationship to his past was simply one of support rather than being part of the focus. As he began to destroy the multiple images of his parents inside the stone circle, my intention was to display the current state of mind Nick was in as he was confronting the imminent death of his mother and his ambivalence towards them as parents given the nature of his upbringing and the lack of protection he experienced under their care.

The stones, a recurring theme throughout *Sutra*, were intended to provide both Nick and the audience with a sense of the boundary between internal and external consciousness, 'self' and 'other' (with Nick spending half the performance on the inside of the circle before joining me in circling around the outside) and the permeability of sense perceptions (the stones were deliberately placed with gaps between them to suggest a lack of solidity to the boundaries). One of the 'happy accidents' I discovered as I developed the work was the way in which the paper balls mirrored the stones. By the end of the performance, as seen in the video documentation, the performance space is entirely inhabited by the stone circle and a chaotic array of paper balls with single photos of Nick's parents remaining in the centre of the circle. As referenced in previous chapters, the stones were intended to symbolize nature. I wanted the viewer to always feel that nature is the governing force behind all our actions. In other words, I wanted them to feel nature as the instinctive influence shaping human behaviour and reactions within the phenomenal world.

The decision to base the performance around the central aesthetic of the circle came out of my experience travelling in Nepal in 1997 (the year I took refuge as a Buddhist). I spent many occasions during my time on retreat in Kathmandu circumambulating the Boudhanath stupa, one of the largest of its kind in the world. As practitioners walk clockwise around the stupa, it is under the watchful eyes of the Buddha (see Fig. 22). I wanted the title of my performance to suggest to the audience that Nick was symbolically placing himself inside of the stupa which represents the enlightened mind. From the Buddhist perspective, living beings are already Buddhas, they just don't realize it yet (as opposed to enlightenment being a goal to achieve or something outside of the realm of experience).[3] As Nick's ritual destruction of his parents as they appear to live inside his mind builds to a climax

[3] See: Merzel, Dennis (2005), *The Path of the Human Being: Zen Teachings on the Bodhisattva Way*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, p. 171

and his actions become more controlled and deliberate, I continued the slow walk around him without making any contact. I wanted the viewer to feel like chaos and stillness are able to co-exist.

Finally, at the end of Nick's ritual destruction, he joins me in circumambulation, walking directly opposite me on his own journey of walking meditation. The monologue continues to play and the audience are subjected to the calm and quiet presence of our walk in spite of some of the disturbing content of the soundscape which includes details of Nick's pre-recovery life as a drinking and drugging survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I wanted the viewer to be aware of this contrast and how his present experience contains both the calm and chaos of working through suffering by taking up a spiritual path. This is not to suggest that this is the answer for everyone but that this is one man's experience that can be used as a model for recovery.

The costumes were deliberately chosen for their symbolic value. I wanted Nick in black to show the darkness of his past and myself in white (the same dress I wore in *At Sea*) as a symbol of pure intention. The colours were also intended to symbolize the workings of the dualistic mind and the way in which thinking is commonly 'black and white' in quality. Buddhist philosophy describes the way in which the mind of ignorance constantly labels all experiences as either 'good' or 'bad' and how this leads to misunderstanding and confusion. [4] The choice of colours for the costumes was a simple response to this notion and reflected my wish to demonstrate some of the teachings of Buddhism through an aesthetic resonance.

Turning Wheels

The universal symbol for Buddhism is the wheel (*chakra*), symbolizing the teachings of Gautama Buddha for their wheel-like capacity to transform the minds of its adherents. While the Sanskrit term *Dharmachakra* means 'the wheel of law', the Tibetan term *chos kyi'khor lo* or 'wheel of transformation' comes closer to describing what the teachings claim to be able to accomplish if practiced diligently. The teachings of the Buddha are mapped across three progressive stages known as 'turnings.' The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma took place in the Deer Park at

[4] See: Albahari, Miri (2006), *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-tiered Illusion of Self*, London: Palgrave MacMillan

Varanasi after the Buddha is reported to have come out of deep meditation under the Bodhi tree. This stage marks the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path along with other elements such as *Abhidharma* (Buddhist logic) and *Vinaya* (monastic code). The Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma took place at Rajagriha (Vulture's Peak) and comprises of the teachings on emptiness and compassion; while the Third turning of the Wheel of Dharma took place primarily at Shravasti and comprised of the teachings on Buddha nature. The wheel or circle can be found across Asian Buddhist cultures as the first symbol of the *Buddhadharma*: it can be found on the palms and feet of Buddha statues as well as atop pillars erected by the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka (272 – 232BC). In Tibetan Buddhist iconography it is amongst the eight auspicious symbols as well as denoted in the Dharmachakra mudra (in which the position of the hands forms a wheel during meditation practice). [5]

Fig. 22 ***Boudhanath Stupa*, Kathmandu**

It is the wheel in the form of a stone circle that grounds *Boudhanath* to its Buddhist roots and, as the title suggests, symbolizes the *stupa* or hemisphere-shaped structure that is used both as a shrine to house important Buddhist relics as well as a point of practice for walking meditation and the turning of prayer-wheels

[5] The eight auspicious symbols are: the white conch, the precious umbrella, the victory banner, the golden fish, the Dharma wheel, the auspicious knot, the lotus flower and the treasure vase. See: http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b8symbol.htm

(in the case of Boudhanath *Stupa* in Kathmandu and many other Tibetan forms of the structure). Although *stupas* were erected in honour of the Buddha and other 'awakened ones and their disciples… the *stupas* did not become objects of hero worship, but symbols of *nibbāna*, of illumination' (Govinda 1976:5). Anagarika Govinda describes the symbolism of the cupula (Fig. 22) as imitating 'the infinite dome of the all-embracing sky which includes both destruction and creation, death and rebirth' (1976:5). Given the impossibility of recreating a *stupa* in the performance space, I settled on the stone circle as a representation of its principles as well as for the way in which it mirrored other circular symbols within traditional Buddhist art. The artists expounded upon in this thesis are also known for working with the symbol of the circle (including John Cage, Marina Abramović and Meredith Monk) for its ability to display an array of concepts in one simple form. An example of this can be found in a relational work by Marina Abramović and her partner Ulay who became known for their duets on the complexities of relationality.

Relation in Movement
In a chosen space.

Ulay: I am driving the car for an indefinite time in a circle.

Marina: I am sitting in the car, moving for an indefinite time in a circle, announcing the number of circles by megaphone (McEvilley 2010:51).

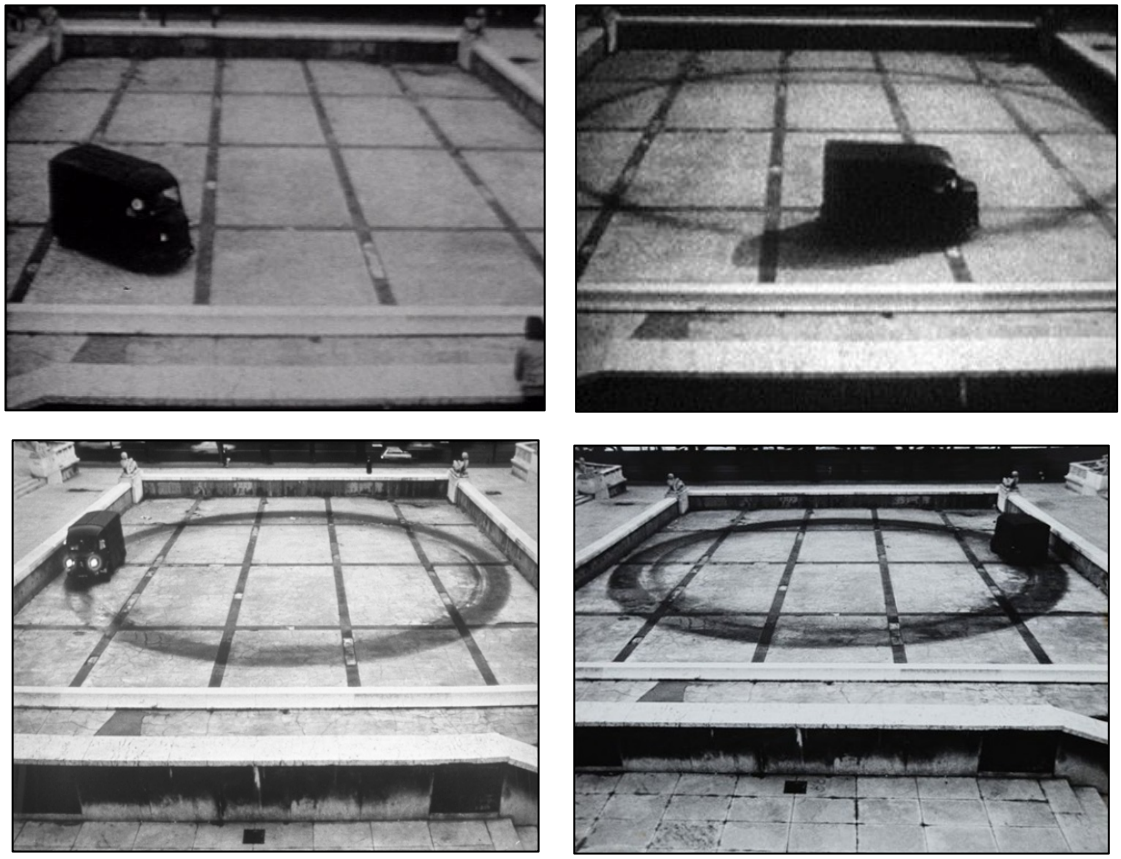


Fig. 23 Ulay/Abramović, *Relation in Movement* (1977) © Hartmund Kowalke

At 3pm on September 15th 1977, Abramović and Ulay began a sixteen-hour circular drive in their black Citroën van which also served as their home for five years. *Relation in Movement* was one of a number of performance artworks that marked a turning point in Abramović's solo career, spending a total of thirteen years performing relational works concerning the nature of duality. Over several hours, the van began to leave a marked circular oil trail in the courtyard of the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where the work was being presented for the 10th Paris Biennial (Fig. 23). Although the couple did not set out with the intention to draw a Zen *ensō* or circle with their tyres, the result was a type of action painting on concrete reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage's 1953 action painting

'Automobile Tire Print' (Fig. 24). Both cases point to an analysis given by Allan Kaprow in his 1979 essay, 'Performing Life'. In it he outlines the practical implications for this philosophy:

> I was certain the goal was to 'do' an art that was distinct from any known genre (or any combination of genres). It seemed important to develop something that was not another type of painting, literature, music, dance, theater, opera. Since the substance of the Happenings was events in real time, as in theater and opera, the job, logically, was to bypass all theatrical conventions… it was a matter of doing something to experience it yourself. Doing life, consciously, was a compelling notion to me… A new art/life genre therefore came about, reflecting equally the artificial aspects of everyday life and the lifelike qualities of created art… the very process of paying attention to this continuum is poised on the threshold of art performance (Kaprow 2003:195-196).

Kaprow highlights one of the fundamental principles that is a recurring theme of this thesis and that defines Buddhist philosophy: '…doing something to experience it yourself.' (2003:196) When asked about their intentions for the piece, Rauschenberg replied, 'I think it was a Tibetan prayer wheel' (Rauschenberg 1999),

Fig. 24 Robert Rauschenberg/John Cage, 'Automobile Tire Print' (1953)

referring to the printed prayer scrolls rolled up within the structure of a wooden or metal wheel which is turned with the idea that an unlimited number of prayers will be sent out into the world. Like the scroll, the *ensō* represents the summation of the entire *Buddhadharma*, as if all 80,000 sutras and the numerous tantras and commentaries were to be condensed into one essential symbol representing complete enlightenment (Fig. 24).

Fig. 25 ***Ensō***

The *ensō* (Fig. 25) also exemplifies the Japanese Zen aesthetic known as *wabi-sabi*, 'a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete' (Koren 2008:7). Its essential principles are founded upon a metaphysical perspective of the universe whereby all phenomena are seen to be moving toward or away from 'nothingness' (2008:42). Reflecting its Buddhist foundations, the Zen circle represents 'direct, intuitive insight into transcendental truth beyond all intellectual conception' (2008:76). For this reason, I argue that Buddhist performance art's defiance of intellectualism challenges the principles of academic enquiry, inviting alternative modes of investigation into its theoretical framework. New forms of documentation, such as the book of *At Sea: 1980 – 2010*, are just one example of engagement with the wider discourse in performance documentation practice, as are the development of performance art works addressing the complex relationship between performance and philosophy. In many ways, the symbolism of the *ensō* embraces the complexity of this enquiry through the representation of the endless movement towards and/or away from something and nothing. Its integration of both void and manifestation make the *ensō* an ideal depiction of Sedgwick's 'beside'. Abramović biographer Thomas McEvilley draws a parallel with the Western philosophical tradition: 'Plato's teaching that all eternal things move in circles is relevant, and even more so is Aristotle's mind-that-knows-itself, endlessly circling in its self-awareness' (McEvilley 2010:42).

The *ensō* created in *Relation in Movement* through the shared subjectivity of Ulay and Abramović was in keeping with their intention to focus their own and

the audience's minds on a presence free from discursive thought. As Abramović says:

> First of all: what is performance? Performance is some kind of mental and physical construction in which an artist steps in, in front of the public. Performance is not a theatre piece, is not something that you learn and then act, playing somebody else. It's more like a direct transmission of energy…The more the public, the better the performance gets, the more energy is passing through the space (Abramović, 2002: 27).

Abramović extends this shared subjectivity into the realm of energetic exchange which, in the case of artworks enacted by more than one performer and particularly when the performers share an intimate relationship, the energetic exchange can act as further stimuli to be utilized in public meditation practice. What Abramović does not mention is what it was like inside the van as they drove in circles for sixteen hours, but to put the performance into context, the fact that they lived in the van as their permanent home must be factored in to the analysis of artworks exemplifying the art-life paradigm.

I bring Ulay and Abramović into the analysis of *Boudhanath* precisely because they paved the way for relational performance art through thirteen years of performance practice together.[6] McEvilley likens their work in terms of allegory:

> [T]he relation work unfolds as an allegorical activity of lovers, both lovers of each other and of the surrounding world. In terms of the world at large, this work is characterized by more openness, more investigation of other cultures and of our ability to receive from them. In terms of their collaboration, it is based on the desire to express what they have called the 'impossibility of escaping one another' (McEvilley 2010:58).

Although *Boudhanath* is not an exercise in expressing the 'impossibility of escaping one another', it is 'an allegorical activity of lovers' for although it contains all the elements of a solo performance (Nick's story and the symbolism of the tossing out of his parents from the circle of his psyche), my presence on the outside of the stone circle invites him to interact and join me in meditation. The action of my silent circling acts as a way of cutting through the chaos of his inner life as it is described

[6] The couple performed together between 1975 to 1987 and collaborated on over thirty performances together.

in his testimony and bring him into the present moment of the simple act of observing thoughts.

The entire work is a symbol for mindfulness meditation, framed through the title *Boudhanath*, the symbol for my start on the Buddhist path in 1997. In my post-performance interview, Nick asked me to talk about my experience of the performance:

> I didn't realize that it would feel, it was like, I was here for *you*. I was here to help facilitate your story and really put myself in the background. Obviously I'm an integral part of the piece as far as aesthetically and part of that narrative in terms of relationship and support, but as far as my own, I didn't worry at all about my own, what I need to do. Also, I'm able to draw from some years of performance work and that was very helpful because then I didn't need to worry about that, I could be here for you not just as a witness but almost as we have been in life, in our relationship, as your mum was getting more ill, kind of there by your side to support you in whatever way you need and then to do that publically, as you tell your story on the soundscape… (Artist interview 2014).

In recognizing my role as a facilitator of Nick's journey, the pedagogical aspect of the work takes the form not of teacher-student but of teacher-teacher (and student-student). There is a mind-training practice (Tib. *lojong*) that is unique to Tibetan Buddhism whereby the practitioner puts everyone in the role of teacher. Composed by the Kadampa Geshe Langri Tangpa (1054 – 1123 CE), the practice is laid out in eight pithy verses, guiding the practitioner towards a state of utter humility. The second verse gives an example of the principle of surrender of the ego in Buddhist terms: 'When in the company of others, I shall always consider myself the lowest of all, and from the depths of my heart hold others dear and supreme (Dalai Lama 1981).' It is important to remember that Buddhism works with the concept of ideal or perfected states of being. In other words, this verse is an example of what perfected humility might look like. On the other hand, it is problematic in that it does not take into consideration the effect of so-called unperfected states of mind in attempting to act out such idealism, depicted by my circumambulation in *Boudhanath*. There may also be some confusion about how to define seeing oneself as 'lowest of all.' Western culture may not be ready for working with such an ideal given the tendency towards the extremes of either self-aggrandizement or self-

loathing but at the very least it offers a framework for the loosening up of ego responses. This is particularly useful in the context of a relational performance artwork such as *Boudhanath* due to the delicate nature of its narrative.

Circling also indicates the Buddhist doctrine of circling in *saṃsāra*, the Sanskrit term for 'world' or 'wandering'. It symbolizes the endless wandering through the cycle of birth and death though the process of reincarnation until reaching the state of complete awakening, after which consciousness is said to have been liberated from the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. Circling is also a symbol for the nature of the discursive mind and the endless circling of untamed thoughts. The performance of *Boudhanath* begins with the focus on the inside of the circle where Nick is crumpling up photos of his parents and throwing them out. This could be seen as the workings of Nick's mind as he navigates his memories to the backdrop of his audio testimony. The testimony cuts between present time (2014) and memory and is interspersed with his thoughts from a Buddhist perspective, beginning with the question, 'What is the cause of suffering?', the first Noble Truth. He replies to himself with, 'The cause of suffering is… I don't know. Being taken in by the illusion' (Bishop 2014). Not only does this opening remark prepare both performers and audience for what is to come, I take it as an instruction for how to listen to suffering.

Teaching Compassion

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag writes about the sufferings of war and its associations through the image. She says, 'One can feel obliged to look at photographs that record great cruelties and crimes. One should feel obliged to think about what it means to look at them, about the capacity actually to assimilate what they show. Not all reactions to these pictures are under the supervision of reason or conscience' (Sontag 2003:95). If the performance art event depicting the after-effects of trauma such as Nick experienced as a child were to be considered in the same light, it begs the question of the audience: What is to be done? To hear of the suffering of another human being may not always be in order to take action. In Nick's case, the abuser is long dead and his testimony makes equal use of the way in which he has gone about transforming himself from a position of victim and survivor to one of a man in recovery. The word itself suggests that the day may

come when he can declare himself 'recovered.' In a recent conversation he articulated this transformation:

> I'm losing some of the identification with labels. I don't go around thinking of myself as a recovering-alcoholic-survivor-of-sexual-abuse. I think of myself, I'm morphing into some kind of spiritual being, sentient being, experiencing the moment, that's where I'm aiming, being alive to the moment, label-less. Partly because of this issue of non-duality I don't feel I want to be set apart from someone who hadn't had those experiences. I think there's beauty in the mundane life, I don't want to be remarkable. There is a certain embarrassment, awkwardness with it. I don't really want to be different. I know my story is helpful to others but I have a growing sense of privacy about it. The over-disclosure about it, I want to be a bit more private. [My daughter said,] 'you may have a need to tell it but not everyone has a need to hear it' (Bishop 2016).

In the frame of recovery from trauma his statement makes sense, but what about within the frame of testimony as artwork? Surely the tropes of childhood sexual abuse as well as drug and alcohol addiction stand out as the central elements of the narrative, leaving the audience to question either their passivity or call to action? This is not, however, what the performance is seeking to engender. In writing about trauma and pedagogy, literary theorist Shoshana Felman declares that '[a] "life-testimony" is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*' (Felman in Caruth 1995:14, author's emphasis). Far from any perceived separation between himself and the audience, Felman's statement enables the compassionate response in which Nick is able to feel heard and witnessed without interruption. Sontag challenges this notion: 'Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action or it withers' (Sontag 2003:101). Part way through the testimony Nick says of his parents that '…they said all the things that you hope people won't say like, "Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you stop him?" It's the kind of shame… those are the things that people who have survived sexual abuse often ask themselves… often beat themselves up about. "Why didn't I stop it? Why didn't I say something?"' (Bishop 2014). His subjective experience questions Sontag's view, particularly from the Buddhist perspective on compassion:

> When I hear the word 'compassion' it makes me think immediately of my work as a nurse and all those years of working with some of

> the most tortured souls and the world's rejects. Of seeing the humanity in the rapist, the arsonist, the murderer and having compassion for myself (Bishop 2014).

Nick's version of compassion does not appear to be unstable, as Sontag would suggest. On the contrary, he demonstrates a particularly stable version of it, particularly in the context of public service.

His words point to the Buddhist understanding of compassion which is often referred to as 'great' compassion as opposed to 'mundane' compassion and, along with wisdom, is one of the fundamental aims of Buddhist practice, to enable an individual's inborn compassion to break through the discursive mind. Translator Tony Duff describes mundane compassion as '[h]aving a mind that looks towards the benefit of a few sentient beings… that is not real compassion' (Duff 2010:185). Great compassion is considered 'compassion which is looking towards all sentient beings… Whether you are able to help them or not is another issue; what you need to do is to have this kind of thought, "I will be the helper"' (ibid.). If Nick's objective in *Boudhanath* is to dissolve his own discursive thoughts through testimony in order to arouse compassion towards his parents and my objective is witnessing as compassionate action, then the goal of *Boudhanath* is to arouse compassion in the audience. Professor of mental health nursing Graham McCaffrey defines compassion as 'suffering with', both 'bound to suffering and [arising] in response to suffering (McCaffrey 2015:19).' In his analysis of 'idiot compassion' (i.e. compassion without wisdom), he turns toward a pedagogy of suffering and its intimate link to compassion: 'Suffering and compassion are bound together dialectically' (ibid.). In this way *Boudhanath* is engaged in a pedagogy of suffering.

Professor of Psychiatry Dori Laub offers an alternative perspective on the role of listening in order to understand the spectator's potential transformation from passive to active helper of the performer's emergence:

> The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation… [H]e comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made…The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time… The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony (Laub 1992:58).

Nick's realization that as he is able to have compassion for the rapist, arsonist and murderer then he must develop compassion for himself is suggestive of the insight that compassion engenders. Laub continues:

> The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and its momentum… The listener to trauma needs to know all this, so as to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone (ibid.).

While talking specifically about trauma testimony and the witness, Laub is also unwittingly drawing out the Buddhist doctrine of interdependence as well as the Mahayana ideal of the Bodhisattva who vows to lead sentient beings out of suffering. Framed in this way, the *Boudhanath* audience has the potential to take on the role of teacher while silently engaging in pedagogy. In this way they become active participants in Nick's transformation while he, in turn, attempts to transform the audience.

Change

> ***Dear Marina, It was you and I knew it was going to be you, but I did not know which you you would make me become. Yes – make me. I did not want to change. I rarely want to change. You stood there, daring me, inviting me, commanding me. You. You… At first I resisted the idea of being converted but then I began to think it would really be quite a spectacular destiny and maybe that was part of your point – that this performance I had just declared your interior walk was actually a complicated kind of alchemy, whereby I would be emptied and you would be filled… I remembered all my failed attempts to meditate. If I could not do it alone in private, how could I attempt to try and do it with you in this hot, crowded, public gallery?***
>
> **Peggy Phelan on Marina Abramović's *House with the Ocean View* (2002)**[7]

In writing about the potential for Buddhist-influenced performance art to change or transform an audience, I turn to the work of performance theorist Peggy Phelan who wrote a series of letters to Marina Abramović when she performed *The House with*

[7] See: Abramović Marina ed. (2003), *The House with the Ocean View*, Milan: Charta

the Ocean View (2002) at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York (Fig. 26). The work took place over a period of twelve days during which time Abramović never left the gallery and did not eat, speak, read or write. Her goal was to engage the audience in an 'energy dialogue'. During the performance she would shower, go to the toilet, rest or make eye contact amongst other mundane and repetitive actions.

> There was no object. There was a kind of fused subjectivity, a condensation of the main themes of psychic, emotional, and perhaps spiritual development. It passed through and touched on aggression, surprise, trust, fear of betrayal, fear of annihilation, acceptance, connection, beauty, exhaustion, transformation… It asks strangers to become witnesses (Phelan in Abramović 2003:178).

Phelan's observations point to the ephemeral and multi-layered nature of a genre seeking to define itself as much by what isn't happening as by what is. She also alludes to the myriad of affective reactions to Abramović's work that has something to add to the conversation about performance art's ability to transform through pedagogical relations. As art historian Debra Koppman asserts, 'The experience of art begins with the senses, but simultaneously provides a path to spiritual transcendence' (Perlmutter and Koppman 1999:95).

Fig.26 **Marina Abramović, *The House with the Ocean View* (2002)**
© Marina Abramović

The transcendent is alluded to in *Boudhanath* through both the emptying of the stone circle and returning it to (mostly) empty space as well as through the ritual act of circumambulating the symbolic *stupa*. As Nick's testimony plays out in relation to the spectacle, he speaks of his mother's daily wish to die in her sleep, ending with the words, 'Actually, none of it matters. And all of it matters. If that makes any sense' (Bishop 2014), words alluding the numinous within human experience. I am using this example to draw attention to one of the differences between traditional Eastern and Western expressions of the numinous in art. Artist Jungu Noon differentiates between the Eastern approach to artmaking in which 'painters identified and explored the non-rational mystery behind religion and the religious experience' (Yoon 2010:59) versus the Western approach in which the painter is 'limited to the expression of a formal belief system (ibid.).' Contemporary expressions of the numinous in art have broken away from such formalities such that Eastern and Western art is often indistinguishable. I assert that the abiding principle of traditional Eastern art, however, has been retained in contemporary Buddhist performance art, as reflected by the following description of the fundamentals of Chinese landscape painting:

> In his discussion of Chinese landscape painting, Tung Yu argued that the purpose of traditional Eastern *Shanshui* was not to reproduce exactly the grandeur of mountain scenery but rather to grasp an emotion or atmosphere so as to capture a sense of the numinous… It was a symbolic Utopia to both those who saw it as well as to those who only heard about it (Yoon 2010:58).

The symbolic elements of *Boudhanath* work in the same way. The grandeur of the *stupa* is reduced to a circle of stones; the grandeur of the narrative is reduced to its fundamental message, that of the twelve step principle to share 'experience, strength and hope' (Wilson 1939:xxii). As for bodies in space, my slow walking meditation is countered by Nick's frenzied destruction of the traces of his parents and his past through the photographs. Like the calm after the storm, he finally joins me on the meditative path, symbolic of our relationship in life. In this way we are seeking to use the personal towards revelation of the universal message of the Four Noble Truths, all within the nature of change or transformation. Quoting his acting

teacher Richard Fowler's reasons for wanting to work with the ideas of Grotowski and Barba, theatre scholar Daniel Mroz:

> I wanted to change myself… I began to develop the idea of the artist as the instigator or the element of change. That the function of an actor could be other than to entertain, as it is normally understood; that the actor's function could be to change the perception of reality, to open up people's perceptions to other levels of reality beyond the daily (Mroz 2011:40).

This level of insight is an echo of John Cage's credo: 'When I find myself… in the position of someone who *would* change something – at that point I don't change it. I change myself. It's for that reason I have said that instead of self-expression, I'm involved in self-alteration' (Cage in Bernstein and Hatch 2010:232). It is the change in consciousness in the form of mindful awareness to actions, sustained through consistent training, which contributes most significantly to a state of active presence on stage.

Gone, Gone Beyond

As I come to the end of *Sutra* I also arrive at a new starting point. The demons are exorcised, the past is put to bed and I am learning what it means to live an integrated life, particularly through the creation of *Boudhanath*. An actual place both within memory and Buddhist iconography and architecture, it symbolizes for me where this project really began, in 1997. It took seventeen years to create five performances. This feels like a fitting timescale given the nature of Buddhist practice.

The analysis in this final chapter points to the three main themes within *Boudhanath*: testimony and the witness as framed by the symbolic elements of circling. It is due to the essential agency of the audience to contribute to the transformation both of themselves and the performer in what may seem like inaction but is imbued with the active principle of compassion. The problematic nature of compassion which Sontag destabilizes appears fundamentally stable when viewed through the lens of Buddhist philosophy. The reciprocal nature of live performance also arises from the altruistic intentions of Nick as he shares his

trauma narrative with a room full of strangers in fellowship. As Nick says in his post-performance interview:

> The way I was trained [as a mental health nurse] was… very much about self-awareness and the self used as a therapeutic tool in helping other people. Various things we were told, one that really sticks for me, is you can't take anyone any further than either you've been or that you would be prepared to go or you've been in some kind of imagined space. So in other words, if you're asking someone to vent their emotions, you need to be able to do that too (Bishop 2014).

As Deirdre Heddon remarks, '[d]ialogue is impossible without a contract being undertaken on both sides to enter into it' (Heddon 1999:348). In other words, interdependence depends on a circular exchange, as discussed in Chapter Two through Erika Fischer-Lichte's use of the term 'autopoiesis'. It also points to what Marina Abramović refers to as an 'energy dialogue' which is a key element in the pedagogy of suffering.

I have argued that the pedagogical encounter in *Boudhanath* is not only supported by compassionate action on the part of the performer but that its Eastern roots enable it to take on a transformative function. This is particularly important for the trauma narrative as it can easily overtake the form of presentation and potentially destabilize an audience. Perhaps it is best summed up by Santoka, a Zen Buddhist priest in early twentieth century Japan:

> High noon – in the deep grass
> The cry of a frog
> Being swallowed by a snake [8]

Whether he writes of suffering or compassion is not for me to say.

[8] Santoka Teneda (1882 – 1940) was an alcoholic priest who wrote haiku and wandered the countryside as a beggar. See: Santoka, Teneda (2009), *Mountain Tasting: Haiku and Journals of Santoka Teneda,* trans. by J. Stevens, Buffalo, NY: White Wine Press, p. 100

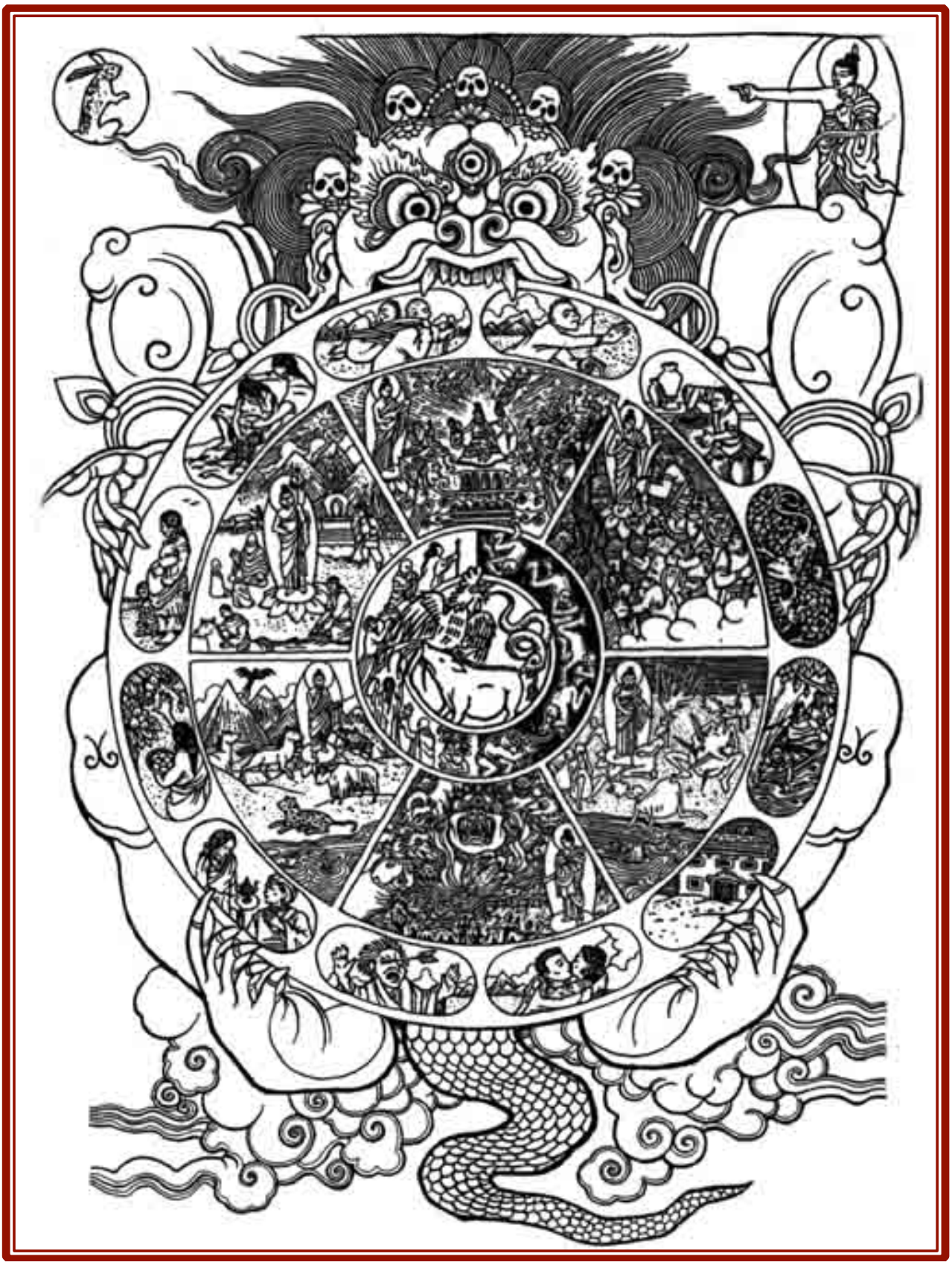


Fig. 27 **The Wheel of Dependent Origination**

V. Sweeping Conclusions

> **I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfill what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer – to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion…**
>
> **Virginia Woolf**[1]

Huddersfield
June 2016

I pick up a broom and begin to sweep away the stone dust and the crumpled up balls of paper strewn across the stage. Each ball is a grave of sorrows and gratitudes and although they are not my sorrows they contain my thanks. Without Nick's mother and father there would be no Nick. I remember to think of my own parents in the same light. I pick up the stones and pack them away while the audience wait outside for the next performance to begin. Boudhanath *is only a drop in the water in the sea of trauma tales told since the early Greeks but unlike the Greeks, this tale shall soon be forgotten. However, its significance in the lives of Nick and myself and in relation to the rest of* Sutra *is palpable. Freedom. Liberation. Awakening. Just words. Fingers pointing to the moon. So what now?*

More life.

§§

Over the past four chapters I have formalized a subjective practice and analysis of a selection of contemporary performance art works influenced by Buddhism both in philosophical and practical terms. Given that I unofficially started the project in 1997 in Kathmandu I am aware of a certain reluctance on my part to state conclusions as if they signified some kind of final or ultimate conclusion about the effects of Buddhist meditation practice in the context of performance art. I have heard it said on numerous occasions that the Buddha taught so widely and in such a

[1] Woolf, Virginia (1928/2002), *A Room of One's Own*, London: Penguin, p. 5

diversified way because of the countless types of minds there are in the world that require different ways of teaching. Conclusions, therefore, can hardly be thought of as definitive. But in an attempt to bring my research into a cohesive whole, I can conclude that, at the very least, I have discovered a path. Not *the* path but a path.

This thesis offers a performance-based account of Buddhist autobiographical performance art practice alongside elements of literary and performance theory that contribute to an analysis of the pedagogical functions of the genre. It diverts from some of its predecessors in PaR that emphasize the theoretical contribution of phenomenology, especially that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although I stress the subjectivity of my work (and hence its phenomenological roots), my focus was not to make a case for subjectivity as research output in itself but to analyze some of the prevailing themes within *Sutra* for which theories of affect and trauma have much to contribute to a discourse on pedagogy. What this approach has revealed is along the same lines as certain instructions for Buddhist meditation: the invitation to neither accept nor reject a particular theoretical framework but to use it as a tool of analysis within its particular discourse. This is especially useful for autobiographical performance art practices that operate as hybrid forms of text. In *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001), Leigh Gilmore says:

> As a genre, autobiography is characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts… in order to achieve as proximate a relation as possible to what constitutes truth in that discourse (Gilmore 2001:3).

'Truth in discourse' amounts to what Buddhism posits as relative truth and is fundamental to an understanding of Buddhist-influenced performance art that attempts to bridge the boundary between relative and ultimate truth (dual and non-dual reality). This is what constitutes the intertextual and transdisciplinary nature of the genre.

In recognition of its intertextual nature, my intention for this project was to find out what performance art and autobiography could teach me and, in turn, teach others, about the Buddhist doctrine of Self and No self. I wanted to find out the

limitations of the form as well as its strengths and discovered both. I discovered that performance art runs the risk of being 'lost in translation' but that it also allows for a certain freedom of interpretation on the part of the artist. What is it that is being interpreted? Mind and its habits. Throughout this thesis I have argued that what Buddhist meditation has to offer is no less than a particular filter for experience that, in all of its subjectivity, creates the space for the deconstruction of the negative ramifications of clinging to self (or ego-clinging) in order for the experience of a lack of intrinsic self to arise and, thus, facilitate a reduction in suffering (in particular the sufferings of trauma). I contend that it is not that self-conception is a problem, *per se*, but that self is a particularly unstable position for the psyche to reside in given its predilection towards extreme affective states. Whether joyful or depressed, excited or suicidal, none of these states are permanent and, hence, a purely objective singular sense of self is entirely fluid. As Jeff Shore writes,

> We can waste a lifetime trying to see it from without. From the standpoint of self, we really can't even begin, for we immediately get stuck: If there's no self, who's talking now? Who's listening? Who realizes no-self? These questions may sound interesting; indeed, we could speculate about them endlessly. But we can only come to a conclusive answer through the actual realization of no-self (Shore 2004:1).

Although I posit that a realization of No self was not necessarily possible to achieve during the enactment of a single performance art work, I argue that a certain amount of insight was enabled by the performance art event and helped make evident some of the meditative processes inherent in the genre.

The overriding research question for this project began with: How do I perform Buddhist philosophy? It was only as I proceeded with the creation of the performances did I discover a host of other questions deconstructed from the meta-question including: How can Buddhist philosophy be taught through performance art? Can something be taught that has not been experienced? What can performance art teach me about Buddhism? How can Buddhist-influenced performance art be used in trauma testimony? In turning to the work of Cage, Abramović, Monk, Hamilton and the Happenings and Fluxus movements, the pedagogic promise of the *Buddhadharma* was revealed through both the aesthetic qualities of their work as well as the motivations behind them. Positioning my own work 'beside' these artists I discovered that far from the disconnection I believed theory to be when I set out

upon the journey of analysis, I discovered it to be an inevitable outcome of performance research. In other words, the act of engagement with practice-as-research forced upon me more questions that demanded a variety of theoretical lenses through which to tease out methodological and epistemological challenges to the art of testimony. This is particularly true for trauma testimony and its difficulties as it wends its way towards the witness. As Gilmore argues,

> Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. Thus language bears a heavy burden in the theorization of trauma. It marks a site where expectations amass: can language be found for this experience? Will a listener emerge who can hear it (Gilmore 2001:6)?

The seeking after language to express the body-centred vicissitudes of trauma is far from futile within the wider realm of performance art's ability to act as a mediator between the body and the word or the 'beside' of everyday speech.

The language of performance art enables process-orientated theory to live within the performer through the pedagogical encounter with Self. This, in turn, plants the seeds of awakening for which the *Buddhadharma* was always intended. As Albahari proclaims,

> …I propose that nirvana, as a deep and transformative insight into No self, be understood as the culmination of a process whereby the trained use of witness-consciousness, through meditation, brings about a full de-identification from all mental and physical phenomena. The result will be the undoing of the self-illusion (Albahari in Siderits et al. 2011:103).

The final resting place for *Sutra: Five Works for Performance* is in the minds of performers and spectators alike, potentially contributing to the dissolution of Self, at least in theory.

Appendix A

Chronology of performance works

I. At Sea: 1980 – 2010

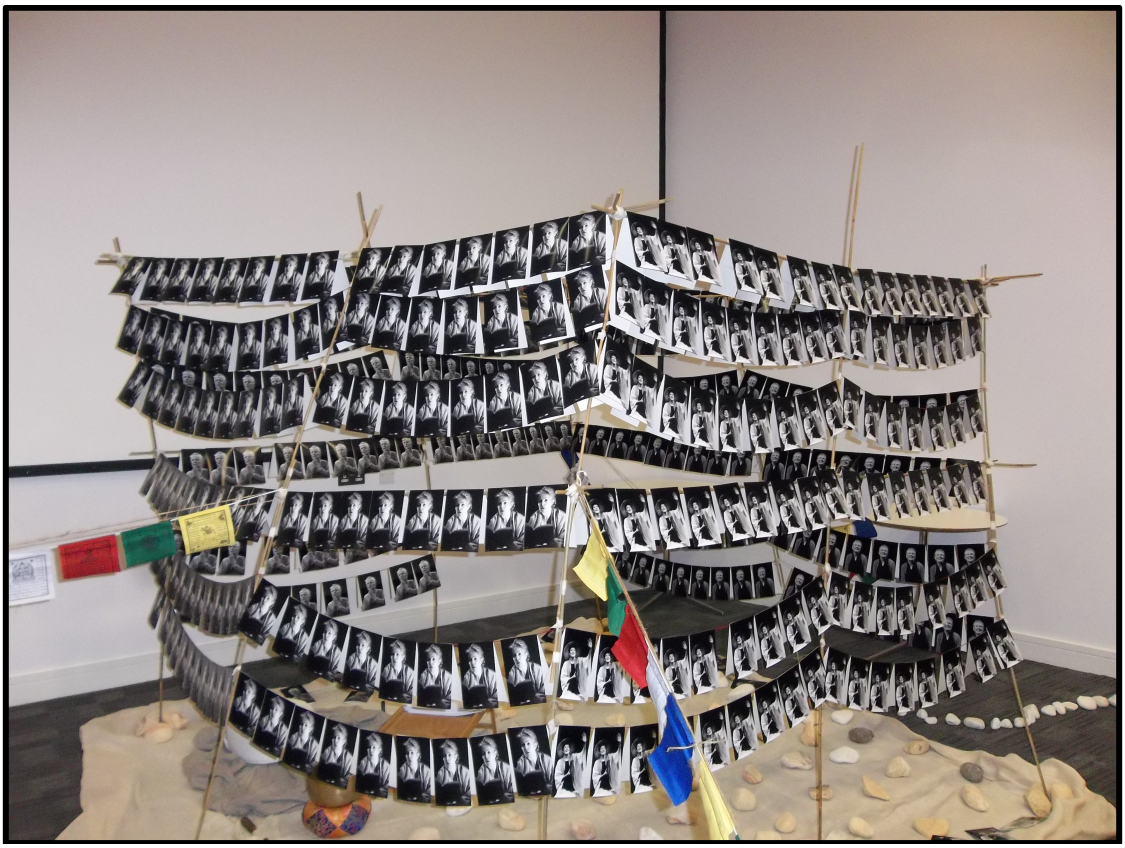
Centre for Creative Collaboration, London (16th November 2013)
Norwich Arts Centre (27th January 2014)

II. No(h) Father

University of East Anglia (11th March 2014)
Warwick Arts Centre (31st July 2014)

III. (whispers)

Goldsmiths Graduate Festival (13th May 2014)



IV. Still Life

Sainsbury Centre, *Monument* Exhibit (28th June 2014)

V. Boudhanath

Boscombe Fringe Festival, Bournemouth (14th September 2014)
Performance & Mindfulness Symposium, University of Huddersfield (3rd June 2016)

Appendix B

At Sea: 1980 – 2010 (text from book)

1980

When I was ten years old I had no idea that my family's move to California would summon in the next thirty years at sea.

2010

My mother dies.

The sea drift ends.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 1

Move to California.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 2

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 3

Grow up.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 4

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 5

Move to England.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 6

Take refuge in Buddha. Take refuge in Dharma. Take refuge in Sangha.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 7

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 8

Get pregnant.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 9

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 10

Watch your parents divorce.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 11

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 12

Banish your father.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 13

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 14

Get married.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 15

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 16

Get pregnant.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 17

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 18

Get divorced.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 19

Cry.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 20

Watch your mother die.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 21

Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry
Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry
Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry
Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 22

Bury your mother.

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 23

Repeat Performance Directive No. 21

PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVE NO. 24

Unbury your father.
(He's not dead yet).

Appendix C

REHEARSAL INTERVIEW
***BOUDHANATH* (2014)**

Pema: *What has the process of trying to prepare this piece been like for you?*

Nick: I think for me it's about sorting out in my head about not acting. Although it is a performance, it's a performative thing of me being me and me being in my process so the clearing of thoughts and centering is very important for getting into the right psychological space for me to react to respond to the soundscape we're playing when the performance is given.

What makes this easier is because it's you being director of a piece I'm in with you, and its about the trust that we already have…

Pema: *How has your life experience contributed to this new experience of working with performance?*

Nick: I think there's a lot more crossover than people might imagine but I think that's not about mental health training, per se, but about the way I was trained. The way I was trained [as a mental health nurse] was a process training, very much about personal growth, very much about self-awareness and the self used as a therapeutic tool in helping other people. Various things we were told, one that really sticks for me, is you can't take anyone any further than either you've been or that you would be prepared to go or you've been in some kind of imagined space. So in other words if you're asking someone to vent their emotions, you need to be able to do that too. You can't ask someone to do something you wouldn't be able to do yourself. And I think good mental health nursing is facilitative and it facilitates personal growth and encourages people to look to their strengths, build on their strengths and use their creative mind to work around the difficulties they're having in their mental illness.

Pema: *What led you to think about getting into performance yourself?*

Nick: I think it's seeing performance art at the ICA in my 20s when I lived in London. I think it was real curiosity and a real sense of wanting to create. I have to admit that there was a lot of anxiety and a real sense of 'oh fuck what have I agreed to do?' And a sense of having committed myself, 'oh' I have to go thru with it now.'

Pema: *What is the anxiety around do you think?*

Nick: I think it's something we've actually worked out now, that you've helped me work out through the Viewpoints and through lots of discussion. And that's about not performing, not acting. Not acting but the difference between performance and acting and performing a role and life being a performance. … We're performing an aspect of our own psyche. So I think a lot of it is about teasing those things out, that's calmed the anxiety a great deal.

Pema: *Any thoughts about how you think it might be perceived by an audience?*

Nick: I think having heard the soundscape that you edited from the interview, I think it will be incredibly powerful. And I'm glad that you've kept it away from the rehearsal space so that it's fresh. I've heard it through in sections because I left the recording studio and walked while you were doing that, I found it a little disturbing. So I think it will have a huge impact and I think it's right that it has that impact on me during the performance.

POST-PERFORMANCE INTERVIEW (Boscombe Fringe Festival)

Pema: *Stream of consciousness, your experience today.*

Nick: So we've just finished our second performance of *Boudhanath*. The second one had more impact emotionally than the first one and I think that's because of the letting go of the technical, logistical process of it which as much as I tried to clear my mind for the first one clearly was there because I wasn't aware of it the second time. So I was able to reflect more on what I was saying in the soundscape and spend more time with my parents in my mind and in my heart as I was doing it. So it felt like it was less mechanical, screwing up the paper, tossing it out of the stone circle was more of an act of meditation. And it felt at times that it was with some anger and at times with some compassion. I was less aware of feeling watched and more self-observing, watching myself and being very aware of you circumambulating me during the process. So it was a very different experience and that I found very interesting.

Pema: *How does it change, being watched, being in public with this stuff, as opposed to being private or talking stuff through with someone in a private way?*

Nick: I think the difference I found in my conversation with one audience member afterwards, and I knew what she was going to say and it was that she was taken inside of herself in watching this, it brought up her story, it brought up her relationship with her older sister and how her older sister had kind of carried her into behaviours that were not appropriate for her age and her relationship with her mum and dad and that doesn't surprise me at all. That it wouldn't be about me, it would be about them. You watch something like this and it stirs up lots of old stuff and that's what it did for this audience member.

§§

Nick: *So Pema, tell me about your experience of today?*

Pema: Well, this being a duet, everything up until now being solo performances. And I didn't realize that it would feel, it was like, I was here for *you*. I was here to help facilitate your story and really put my self in the background. Obviously I'm an integral part of the piece as far as aesthetically and part of that narrative in terms of relationship and support, but as far as my own, I didn't worry at all about my own, what I need to do. Also, I'm able to draw from some years of performance work and that was very helpful because then I didn't need to worry about that, I could be here for you not just as a witness but almost as we have been in life, in our relationship, as your mum was getting more ill, kind of there by your side to support you in whatever way you need and then to do that publically, as you tell your story on the soundscape,

it just felt, I felt really honoured to be able to be here with you and do that. And I'm very happy how both performances went. There were differences, it was wonderful, this gentleman in the second performance, started circumambulating with us just spontaneously and I noticed it out of the corner of my eye and I thought, 'Is he just moving from one side of the room to the other?' And then very quickly I realized, he's circling, how marvelous. And I know nothing about him. It was just wonderful that he felt at ease to do that. You know, the aesthetics of these things are one of the prime elements in the creation of these and when it comes to the reality of performing them I get really excited by just how something as simple as a stone circle and some photographs and a strong narrative, real life, human story, how you don't really need to do a lot, you just need to allow it to be in relationship with each other and pull back on the theatrics because the simplicity of the imagery speaks for itself alongside a very complex and drawn out and fascinating life story which you have.

Post-post feedback, 3/9/16

I'm losing some of the identification with labels. I don't go around thinking of myself as a recovering-alcoholic-survivor-of-sexual-abuse. I think of myself, I'm morphing into some kind of spiritual being, sentient being, experiencing the moment, that's where I'm aiming, being alive to the moment, label-less. Partly because of this issue of non-duality I don't feel I want to be set apart form someone who hadn't had those experiences. I think there's beauty in the mundane life, I don't want to be remarkable. There is a certain embarrassment, awkwardness with it. I don't really want to be different. I know my story is helpful to others but I have a growing send of privacy about it. The over disclosure about it, I want to be a bit more private. [My daughter said,] you may have a need to tell it but not everyone has a need to hear it.

But there is that sense of stuckness.

Appendix D

BOUDHANATH Transcript

Hi my name's Nick and I'm an alcoholic,

What is the cause of suffering?

The cause of suffering is…. I don't know. Being taken in by the illusion.
We first discovered that my mum had melanoma back in 2011. She'd had a spot on her nose that wouldn't go away and kept bleeding. And a locum GP had said it's nothing to worry about, it's fine. And she left it and left it. And then she went back and it was nearly a year and the GP said that she needed to go to hospital and it was likely to be skin cancer. And then they found it in her stomach and in her lungs and they said that she probably wouldn't live very long although my mother's been ill for a long time, in the last few days I know she's been quite acutely ill and bleeding and had to be in hospital for some internal bleeding. So I'm quite worried about her at the moment so talking about my experience of her growing up and my relationship with her as an adult is particularly difficult at the moment because my worry about, perhaps, disrespecting her and the fact that she's likely to die before the end of the year, very likely to die.

Like a lot of people, my mum and dad, they wanted a boy and a girl and they had a boy and that was great and then they had another boy and that was great and then they tried again for a girl and they got a girl but my mum miscarried, a very late miscarriage, she never really got over that. And they tried one final time and they got twin boys. So my mum and dad had four boys and understandably my mum was postnatally depressed for two to three years so the first key parts of my growing up and the first two years are very important for any person in, kind of, core identity, well with a depressed mum. My mum was quite strict, she wasn't averse to giving us a slap, she wasn't averse to giving us a slap. My dad was less into physical punishment but he used to threaten a lot and he'd threaten quite extreme violence. He used to say, "I'll squeeze your head 'til your eyes pop out like cherry pips. Or 'I'll beat you to within an inch of your life.' It wasn't just, I'll give you a smack.' It was this extreme shit that was really scary as a small boy. So I was kind of quite scared of him but at the same time he was, oddly, he was really very physically affectionate. He was a very cuddly man. But he wasn't very good at talking, he wouldn't play with us. He never took us to the park and kicked a ball around or played cricket or any of that kind of stuff. He always seemed to be working. My dad grew up extremely poor.

My grandfather was a railwayman and then he was disabled out of the railway and her became a watch mender and had a photographic studio in the cupboard under the stairs. They always lived in a council house and, I remember, they mostly ate offal when they ate meat, it was mostly cheap offal, tripe. I can remember my grandmother boiling a pig's head to make a thing called brawn which was like the meat off a pig's head in aspic. So my dad grew up in poverty as one of three boys. He was too young to fight in the war, he was a teenager through the war. He was fourteen when the war ended and my grandfather wasn't an easy man, my grandfather was an alcoholic, he used to beat my grandmother. I didn't know this until I was an adult. And my mum was an evacuee. Her parents were divorcing which in the 1940s was a source of huge

shame. So when her parents were divorced, she told me this herself, she was kind of considered a bastard by some of her peers because her parents were divorced. So it was like being illegitimate. She was snatched back and forward between her parents. She was kind of used as a pawn in a kind of a cruel emotional game, a battle between her parents so her and her little sister were constantly snatched backwards and forwards, one from the other, and when she was evacuated she was evacuated to an uncle, not a relative, someone who's known as an uncle but wasn't related who sexually abused her and her aunt made her do lots of housework early in the morning, she was always late for school and that was in the days of corporal punishment so she was punished pretty much on a daily basis for being late to school. I think of my parents, I think of the fact that they are frail human beings and they did their best. They did the best that they could do at the time that they were doing it. They didn't know any other way. So they have my compassion.

I don't feel any guilt about the past, I think I'm really resolved around it, I was in therapy for years, I think part of my recovery from alcoholism, as the working on the steps, and having a really supportive partner so I can say what I like, nothing's taboo, nothing has to be censored, really helps. I met my partner in church. I professed myself an atheist for a very long time until I got into Alcoholics Anonymous and then found faith and that led me to a wonderful contemplative church where I met my partner who was a regular singer there and had the most beautiful voice, I just feel in love with this voice. I assumed she wouldn't be interested in me for some time, it wasn't until I bumped into her in the street and she asked me if I fancied a cup of tea that I really, I really… suddenly the penny dropped. This woman really was interested in me and I asked her out, asked her on a date. The rest is history.

Two years ago I was a fuck up. Two years ago I was drunk every night though outwardly I probably wouldn't have appeared staggeringly drunk. My capacity for alcohol was huge, dangerously high. I had very high blood pressure, I was on shed loads of medication, I was on anti-depressants, I didn't value life. I predicted that I'd die in my 60s and I'm 50. I was a heavy smoker, I was very selfish, disorganized, terrible with money. But I think I was regarded by a lot of people as a nice guy but, I think, you know, I was morally bankrupt. I guess I had a very nihilistic view not so long ago, a couple of years ago, and just felt I was going to die young… ish… probably of liver failure, and, or choking on my vomit or something like that. The idea of… and I didn't care. I don't think that my parents know about my attempts. I think they might know about the one when I was 16. Yeh. No. No. My parents never talked to me about my suicide attempts. I think the age… yeh, I first seriously contemplated my death when I was 16 and I attempted suicide by hanging. I got as far as finding a good, strong bough on a tree and putting a rope up. And then sitting under it and thinking, am I gonna do this? Why am I gonna do this? And giving myself about three hours to contemplate it, I remember looking at my watch and thinking, right, if I haven't done it by 6 o'clock I'm not gonna do it. It was a hot summer's day, I'd left school, I'd started work but hadn't been doing that long, I was… it was a Saturday, I walked into the woods, yeh. I told myself, everything changes, everything moves on. I thought of adults I knew who'd suffered and moved on. And I kind of resolved to leave home as soon as I could. Yeh. I didn't know how I was gonna do that but I was gonna do that.

I don't think my parents handled the teen transition years at all well, they... It kind of… If anything changed it kind of seemed to happen by… because of some crisis.

There'd be crisis, then there'd be a resolution, crisis, resolution. It wasn't… nothing was ever really kind of negotiated or, they didn't seem to change their style, I think they changed their style as a result of there being some crisis or other. Like… one of us coming home drunk. And… it's hard, it's hard to… hard to describe, let me try again, so it's… they were… they were very liberal, they were politically very conservative, but socially very liberal. So, for instance, when they found out that I'd started smoking at age 14 they were very cross but then a week later my mum came to me saying, 'I've run out of cigarettes have you got any?' And this was in the summer, now my birthday around Christmas time and for Christmas that year, when I turned 15, I got a packet of Sabranie Coctail and ten Henry Winterman's amongst other presents. And that was the case every year until I left home. I'd get cigarettes and cigars. And we were introduced to alcohol at a very early age, we used to drink cider with Sunday lunch from, kind of, really young like, kind of, seven, eight, little glass of cider. And then by the time I was eleven, twelve I was used to having a beer, having a wine…

So, we were introduced to alcohol at a very early age, it was a normal thing to drink and I can remember seeing my oldest brother who is eight years older than me, I remember seeing him drunk a lot when I was, like, ten, nine or ten and so me getting drunk didn't feel like it was any particularly big issue and I… They never expressed their concern, never. I mean I'd come home drunk every Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night when I started working at sixteen and had a pay packet. I'd be pissed three nights a week. And when I, when I started smoking cannabis and they knew this was going on, they knew my oldest brother smoked cannabis and we were having a spliff together when I was like fourteen, I think they were aware of that. I remember staying out overnight when I was 15, a squat, a friend of his squat, and getting high and getting drunk at 15 and I can't remember there being an argument with my parents about not staying out overnight. They knew what he got up to, they knew where we were going, they knew who we were staying with. They didn't seem to want to have a confrontation and yet, weirdly, they were quite confrontational people. Ya know, there were a lot of arguments in our house but not about things like drinking and drug use. I was quite an insecure kid. Yeh. And wanting to change how I felt was something I did a lot of, I mean, anything from kind of spinning around and feeling dizzy to holding my breath to, when you get a little older, sniffing Tippex, sniffing glue. When cannabis came along when I was 14 and I was introduced to it by my big brother it was a revelation, I loved it. Alcohol from… well from ten. But seriously from 13, 14. I was drinking alcohol regularly by the time I was seventeen. All those things led to my being a very depressed man and I'd go in and out of cycles of this, sometimes I'd be on quite a high, feeling really good about myself but it never lasted very long, every year I'd have a deep dip and I would try and talk myself out of it, I never actually sought professional help until I was in my 30s, late 30s.

When I was 30 what came up for me was having been sexually abused as a 12 year old. Which I'd always kind of blamed myself for that. And that was by the commander of a sea cadet corp in the area I lived in. Yeh. That's probably the biggest event that's kind of shaped, kind of, putting a nail in a coffin of ever being a content and happy young person. I went for individual therapy around that specifically through an organization for men who've survived sexual abuse. And then I joined, from that I joined a group so I was in group therapy for about 18 months. Later in my late 30s I worked with sexual abuse perpetrators, with paedophiles, for… in forensic

psychiatry. Andthat was actually really, really helpful, really empowering. I think I saw men who do that kind of thing as weak, as screwed up, as sick and in my own mind I'd put my abuser into this kind of… I'd made him this big, powerful, scary individual and actually I kind of reframed that and saw him as actually a weak, sick, selfish… It helped me stop blaming myself and see myself as someone who's survived abuse rather than someone who was, in some way, kind of culpable for being abused. I was 12.

My parents found out about the abuse because my twin brother told them. I wrote to my twin brother in Australia asking for his help. This was with the encouragement of the police because he knew about it and he could be a witness and I asked him in the letter not to say anything to my parents. And it was the first thing he did. He phoned them and told them. And my parents asked my older brother to come and see me and talk to me about it which I really resented because I didn't get on that well with him. And, their reaction was really over the top. And it was particularly damaging because they said all the things that you hope people won't say like, 'Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you stop him? It's the kind of shame… those are the things that people who have survived sexual abuse often ask themselves… often beat themselves up about. 'Why didn't I stop it? Why didn't I say something? And… yeh. It was a very distressing time. Yeh. So, I kind of resent my dad for… if my dad had been different, I think, and if my parents had done more of that kind of talk that I've done with my kids and that my partner's done with her kids, and I've done with her kids about self-protection. I think, it wouldn't have happened. So I kind of… I did use to blame them. Today I don't because my parents are products of the 1930s the 1940s growing up so my dad didn't really have the emotional intelligence and I think that's kind of typical of men around these days who are kind of in their 80s, a certain kind of man is around who just doesn't have that kind of emotional facility to support other people, to talk about his feelings.

I think the next time I seriously contemplated my death was in my… around 30, it was around the time I disclosed my sexual abuse to the police and it wasn't going well. And I was really struggling with it. And I felt suicidal. I didn't mae an attempt. It came up just around the time I hit bottom as an alcoholic, I… I wanted to die, I had had a terrible alcoholic blackout and woke up in hospital and I'd been found in the street, 6 o'clock in the morning in the snow, hypothermic, and on the edge of death and they had to put a tube down and stuff, the ambulance crew. And two days later I tried to take my life because I felt I couldn't stop, I felt I just couldn't stop drinking and I was useless and people would really be better off without me. I felt I was a bad father and I took a large overdose with the intention of plucking up the courage, the overdose was of benzos, and that makes you very very sleepy and and, kind of, you don't care less, so I thought I'll take those, I'll jump in the car, I'll drive to a train line and I'll throw myself under a train. But it was very badly thought out because I took so much I couldn't walk let alone drive and I ended up in hospital. Again.

What now? Life is sweet. People ask me, 'How are you?' People I used to work with and for a long time that's been my answer, life is sweet. I'm on a… I'm on a great path of recovery, there's still some way to go. I've got a growing confidence in my sobriety but not forgetting that it's one day at a time. Sitting in the now, immersing yourself in reality, as it really is, and that's a lot harder said than done. So it's about recognizing, having really profound honesty with yourself about the fact that your thoughts

aren't… they're not who you are. And your feelings are just other thoughts, they're not who you are. What you recognize is there kind of is no 'I', egoic 'I' and there is this much more profound universal connected 'I' and when you feel that you don't feel a sense of separation. You don't see others as other egos, you see others as 'we'. I think constantly working with people with personality disorders, with severe depression and understanding that pathology, it does help you reflect on your own process, on your own emotional process and your own traits and a key part of it is, I think, having clinical supervision, so your with someone who is a very experienced therapist talking about your own relationship with your clients and your work and that's just an amazing opportunity for self development and I had years and years of that so apart from having individual private therapy I also had supervision for years and I think that really helps you get our head around… I had a lot of insight into what was wrong with me. I just didn't really have the will to do anything about it.

Finding faith has had a really profound effect on my relationship with my parents in that I… I still catch myself judging them, that's never gonna completely go away. I accept them as separate human beings with their own foibles and weaknesses and personality traits and they are the product of their time and of their own parents, of things like poverty and war and evacuation and struggle, being a wage slave, being manipulated by propaganda, by advertising, by comparing your parenting to parenting skills of others, yeh, they're people, like anybody else.

From very early on in my nursing career I was very interested in this concept called the 'unpopular patient', I remember reading some early nursing research by Annie Alchel * and it was called 'The Unpopular Patient' and I remember reading about the concept of 'malignant alienation'. People become unpopular and they become a scapegoat on a ward or for a community team of mental health nurses. I'm very interested in those people who are rejected by the system, who are seen as impossible. I wanted to work with the impossible. And as a forensic community mental health nurse I did work with a lot of people who were considered impossible. When I hear the word 'compassion' it makes me think immediately of my work as a nurse and all those years of working with some of the most tortured souls and the world's rejects. Of seeing the humanity in the rapist, the arsonist, the murderer and having compassion for myself. Being able to forgive myself. This life is impermanent. So… so this irritation, this… it's raining and it's my day off, this, the kids are making too much noise, that's impermanent. But also this feeling really happy with the woman I love is impermanent too. I think it reminds me to be in the moment. Be here now, as they say.

I think that when my mum dies I might have a sense of relief. Because I know it's what she wants for herself. I know she doesn't want to be suffering, she doesn't want to be dependent, she doesn't want to lose her dignity and feel anxious, she wants to be free of all that. And when I ask her, 'What do you want, Mum?' She says, 'I just want to die tonight in my sleep.' And she said that consistently for maybe the last year. I just want to die tonight in my sleep.

Actually, none of it matters. And all of it matters. If that makes any sense.

* The 1972 Royal College of Nursing study, *The Unpopular Patient*, was by Felicity Stockwell SRN, RMN, ONC, RNT.

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