

Spring 2024

## "Physical People": Contemplative Dance Practice and the Language of Touch

Abbey Givertzman  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2024](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024)

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Givertzman, Abbey, "'Physical People": Contemplative Dance Practice and the Language of Touch" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 107.

[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj\\_s2024/107](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/107)

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

“Physical People”:  
Contemplative Dance Practice and the Language of Touch

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Abbey Givertzman

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

# Table of Contents

#1- Introduction -----	page 1
#2 - Habituated Movement -----	page 24
#3 - Selective Buddhism -----	page 29
#4 - Offstage Onstage -----	page 34
#5 - Interior Exterior -----	page 36
#6 - Beyond Language -----	page 38
#7 Ineffability -----	page 43
#8 Learning How To Listen-----	page 45
#9 Effects of CDP Outside of CDP -----	page 49
#10 "I Will Help You With Your Senior Project!" -----	page 56
#11 Conclusion -----	page 60

# Acknowledgements

Thank You To:

Maria Sonevytsky!!!!, for patiently and kindly guiding me through my writing and research process and most of all introducing me to my field research group. Lucky lucky me!

Thank You To:

Andrew Bush, my Advisor, and Luis Chavez

Thank You To:

my parents, not exactly for helping me with the project, although I didn't really give you a chance to, but for raising me and shaping my capacity to think and feel and move through the world.

Thank You To:

Havvah, our friendship was a real and true inspiration for my project. You have shown me what it means to be really known by someone else, and for that I am so grateful. This was an essential piece of what I was getting at. Your friendship is a gift to me, and it truly informs the way I go about my life. Thank You!

Thank You To:

Interlocutors: Aiden for so kindly bringing me into the CDP space. And to the people I got the pleasure of interviewing, Mac, Will, and Kate and Aiden. And thank you to all the other wonderful people I got the privilege of dancing with! It was an honor to be accepted into the group and feel so welcomed all the time!

## Introduction:

I enter the building 2 minutes before 5 pm when the class was supposed to start, and I am greeted with 2 long flights of stairs that lead up to a yoga studio where the class is held. It was a narrow stairway with no railings to hold your balance protecting you from the long fall behind. The peeling paint on the walls reminded me of the feeling of being in Manhattan . I huffed and puffed my way up the stairs and opened the door to the entryway. As I walk into the space I notice the room is filled with shoes neatly put away in cubbies, and some scattered across the floor. This comes as a relief knowing I arrived in the right space. The walls are filled with fliers advertising things from yoga classes, to somatic experiencing workshops, to Tai Chi classes. The entry area was so silent that if I hadn't known about the class I would have assumed no one was in the building. I had arrived on time but it seemed everyone was already inside the room. I walked in as silently as I could, to a group of older women and one man sitting in a perfectly round circle seated on pillows and blankets. The ceilings were so high it felt like walking into a church. The floors were hard wood, and the windows were a beautiful stained glass floor to ceiling. One woman was wearing bright pink Adidas track pants, while another was in a dusty rose colored linen flowy pant. I was wearing my striped gray and white leggings with my oversized hoodie. Although there wasn't an obvious dress code to an outsider, I was not a foreigner to the dance casual New York City inspired chic that was influencing these linen pants and brightly colored clothing. But.....

I was not in Manhattan; I was in the smaller yet busy Hudson, NY. I was about to experience a dance practice to which I had no prior exposure, but this felt like a good thing. It felt right for an ethnography project to have a clean slate while going into a new field. I didn't have to initially do the work of separating past knowledge in order to see the field with clear eyes. I was a CDP baby ready to experience life for the very first time.

I was walking into a Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP) class. This particular group meets in Hudson NY at a yoga studio once a week. The group has been meeting for a year and a half. Contemplative Dance Practice is a dance process that is based on the combination of Zen Buddhism Meditation and Contact improvisation created by a woman named Barbara Dilley. Barbara Dilley taught at Naropa University in Boulder Colorado where she immersed herself into their contemplative (spiritual) teaching style. Naropa University is a college that is centered around the teachings of Mindfulness Meditation and Buddhism giving students a well-rounded education focusing on mind and body. She at first designed the dance movement studies program but soon after became president of the school. This is where she created the dance process of Contemplative Dance Practice. The practice itself can vary in timing due to the way different people choose to practice it. This can go on for an hour and 20 minutes, or the steps can be repeated multiple times and it can go on for 3 hours or more. The way Barbara Dilley practiced this was on the longer end of things, which was the way it was originally made to be. This group in particular does an abbreviated version only being an hour and 20.

Barbara Dilley worked with influences like Merce Cunningham, the modern dancer and choreographer, and John Cage the experimental avant garde composer and musician who she studied with from 1960 to 1975 in New York city. As I go further into what goes on in these CDP sessions it becomes clear there is a direct connection between the key aspects of Merce Cunningham's qualities of dance and the qualities of CDP. Cunningham was a pioneer in his field for many reasons, one being his use of chance in the choreography of his pieces. One night the composition of a piece could be decided by the flip of a coin. The end result of a piece was a mystery to the dancers and composers of music which created a detachment with the relationship between dance and score. He saw dance as having nothing in common with music other than time. Dance should be looked at for what it is rather than what it communicates. His ideas of chance in his pieces are connected to his ideas of nonattachment to a certain form (Copeland 2004, 20). This may lead to dancers facing their back to the audience, or other unusual directionality. Merce Cunningham's dancers were described as having a "collective sense of hyperalertness: the high carriage, the flexible head, the level gaze, the ultra articulated feet, the aura of sangfroid" (Noland 2007 29) As I will later discuss, these qualities of hyperalertness, and the focus on small minute details in the body is a key aspect of CDP dancing, and the elements that CDP members intentionally choose to focus on.

The cast of characters in this ethnography is made up of many wise and colorful individuals that I interact with during CDP, and some I was able to become closer with and get interviews from. To name just some of these wonderful and insightful people I got to know: one of the central people to me is a woman named Aiden. She has been a

dancer for most of her life coming from a more classically trained background. After finding out about CDP at dance festivals she brought the idea first to where she lived at the time which was Seattle. She then brought it to the gym of Bard College where she initiated the practice of CDP. Before this she was a dancer doing a lot of work in Seattle where she met another member of the group, Mac. Mac is another member of CDP who has been coming for quite a while. He went to Bennington College where he studied dance and later went on to work on his own pieces using theatrical elements. Mac's day job is being a tree doctor. Another woman who I interviewed named Will, has also danced for most of her life starting off with classical training and then moving into the experimental direction. She now teaches dance in the Hudson Valley. Kate is another character who I have gotten closer to. She grew up in California but then pretty soon after high school moved to New York City. There she explored dance and eventually landed upstate with her family. These are just the few of the many regulars and non regulars that come to CDP

This introductory chapter is structured to show what an average CDP session would entail. This is building from the research I have been doing since the fall of 2023. I will touch on the history of the CDP practice that has to do with Buddhism and mindfulness practice and how Barbara Dilley incorporated it into her practice. I will also look at ideas on witnessing and presence, and the ways that CDP provided real freedom for these people. I will also go into how these two practices relate to one another. I will be touching on my personal experiences I have had during the class through stories that connect to themes of comfort, intimacy, touch, and connection, and share some perspectives from different participants in this CDP group.



## Stepping into the space

When walking into the space for the first time I immediately understood the comfort people had with each other. I would later learn that the connections between the people in the group is a key part of letting the full intimate physical practice pan out to the extent it needs to. During the opening meditation people were lying down or wrapped up in blankets, almost as if they were in their own home. At the beginning of the session people took a second to greet one another by hugging and asking how each other were as if they were reconnecting after years of being apart. This wasn't the kind of greeting where the purpose was only for the sake of doing it. They really were curious how each other were, and genuinely glad to see one another. Already it was clear that the relationships formed in this group were intimate and real. During the practice I was introduced to the extent of this culture of comfort and intimacy through the person I mentioned earlier, a woman named Aiden.

### **20 Minutes of Meditation**

The first section of the class was a 20 minute meditation portion. This portion of time is meant to sit still usually with eyes closed, and meditate for 20 minutes. This also acts as a buffer period for the people who are late to arrive. Since I am easily distractible, I peek with one eye open to watch the late people slowly tiptoe to the shelves where they get mats and blankets to sit on, and then slowly tip toe over to find a spot to sit. Since there is already a circle formed made up of silent and still people, the new and late people have to find a spot to sit on the near outer ends and cracks of the circle so that they don't disturb the meditators.

People were seated on pillows and blankets in order to prepare, since being seated in one position for a long time can become uncomfortable for the body. The purpose of this section was to ground oneself and become more present in your body using Mindfulness practice. The idea of Mindfulness is brought up in Barbrea Dilleys book in a section where she talks about CDP. In her book she goes into ideas about how Mindfulness and movement are interconnected in her work. There is a presence and embodiment required to intentionally move the body, and this is a lens that Barbara Dilley uses when dancing. Mac, (a CDP dancer and tree doctor), talks also about the importance of mindfulness as a tool to be more present during CDP sessions. In CDP Mac is mostly focused on noticing small details of movement in the room, and experiencing “the passage of time.” In the context of Buddhism, Meditation is supposed to lead the mind and body together into the presence of the moment. This practice brings an acute awareness within the senses to become attune to the moment. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* he writes about how “During meditation, various feelings and thoughts may arise. If you don't practice mindfulness of the breath, these thoughts will soon lure you away from mindfulness. But the breath isn't simply a means by which to chase away such thoughts and feelings. Breath remains the vehicle to unite body and mind and to open the gate to wisdom” (Hanh 1975, 38). Mindfulness is partly about practicing skills of concentration to unite oneself with the present moment experience. The breath is a tool one uses during meditation to be able to connect with one’s bodily functions and center the mind around them. It is about connecting with the body. When thoughts arise that may distract from the present moment one can't force them away, but acknowledge that is a part of their experience and move on. Force is not

used in mindfulness practice, only gentle adjustments of the focus. The purpose of this mindfulness practice is to let the mind and body experience the rest from not worrying about the past and present. The focus onto the breath allows this practice of rest.

Presence is a big part of not only the personal mindfulness practice in the meditation but mindfully being aware of the open space in relation to others during the contact improv section. Will who is an attendee of this CDP group told me “The sense of the presence I experience is the sense of my aliveness”. It awakened her body and the sensations that come with it, to be able to engage with her movement instincts during the improvisation section of the class. A big part of Mindfulness is to let any thoughts or feelings naturally arise, and during CDP this is true for the body. The connection to the breath in mindfulness practice is similar to CDP in that it lets the body be the focus rather than the mind. In CDP it is important to connect with the mind of the body to let movements naturally come. This bodily presence is a goal of CDP practice. A person is not supposed to move with a prior agenda, but to be moved by the present moment. Mindfulness is the bridge to be able to get there.

In her earlier work at Naropa University, Barbra Dilley used the physical and mental stages to which one engages in mindfulness practice, as a way to create dance composition and movement vocabulary. She used postures like “Slow motion, Stillness, repetition, and imitation” (Dilley 2015, 55), to research an idea she created called “kinesthetic delight.” This is about the understanding of one's senses in movement practice. It is also about the “inner sensing that surrounds movement improvisation. It points to the goodness of being alive” (Dilley 2015, 59). The feeling of one's own aliveness comes from the act of awareness of the body. She talks about how when we

explore our kinesthetic senses we also should be practicing the Buddhist ideas of returning back to “this very moment”. This is a Buddhist practice of using awareness to notice where you have gone or merged off from the focus, and come back to the breath. She is using exterior physical posture to structure the inner world. The inner world and exterior world act together in this dance mindfulness practice.

In Mindfulness meditation practice there are also particular postures used to seek the full effects of the meditation. It is traditional that “your back is straight. This is very important. The neck and head should be aligned with the spinal column; they should be straight but not stiff or wood-like. Keep your eyes focused a yard or two in front of you. If you can, maintain a half smile” (Hanh 1975, 34). This mimics the way Barbra Dilley uses physical practices like walking in a circle, or trying to equidistantly stand away from everyone in the room. Structure is used to enhance a part of the mind by having there be a grounding physical structure to work around.

### **20 minutes of Personal Awareness Practice:**

This portion of the class is meant to have a chance to warm up the body individually rather than as a group. People usually take this time to stretch and walk around the space on their own accord. At the start of this section I had my eyes closed when the timer went off since we are coming out of the initial meditation. Startled by the sudden noise, I jolted back into the real world and opened my eyes to find myself back in the same room with the same people, with their eyes still closed. It’s a weird feeling being the only one with your eyes open in a room of people with their eyes closed. It reminds you how much it changes a space to be watched by others. When eyes are open there is always a potential they could look at you. With eyes closed it’s a peaceful

in between where I feel comforted by the presence of others, yet the ability to be free from being witnessed. To not be watched or without the possibility to be watched, can come as a freedom for me to be without the anxiety about what others think of me. There is something inexplicably powerful about being witnessed by another. It confronts you with the way you see yourself, and the way you assume others see you. There is a weight to a person's glance. There is an act of transmission that goes between two people when one witnesses another. For me, being watched can feel like I am being brought into my body, I can feel the boundary between my skin and the air in front of me. I can feel my existence in space much stronger when there is someone looking at me. I am all of a sudden aware of the space I take up, and the space I am not filling. As an anxious person, my senses are heightened to the way I come off. It can feel like an overload of unhelpful information, where my brain is filled with thoughts about the way someone looked to the side when I said that one thing, or the way they took a half step back when saying something else. Although these are just anxious thoughts they can make it feel like my brain is exploding and I can't act "natural" in social situations. I am confronted with thoughts of what they think of me, how they perceive me, and who I really am to them, which may inform who I am to myself. I notice I carry myself much differently when dancing by myself versus dancing with others. This to me feels natural due to the weight of the glance, and the impact of being witnessed.

When thinking about the concept of witnessing in friendship I find that it is something I crave. When I tell my friends details about my life, or explain different interactions I have had during the day, it can help me feel more sure of myself. It's a kind of inexplicable feeling where when a friend or person witnesses something I have

done or said it can release a feeling of loneliness or interiority. To me this phenomenon happens because when someone can witness something that was previously only known by me, one can get a sense of validation that they are still accepted and loved and most importantly seen. An example of this I have found in my own life is when I have felt I have done something wrong, or I have acted in a way I am not proud of, I can find myself either needing to tell a friend, or avoiding the act all together. In these moments it is scary to be witnessed by someone close to you or even someone you don't know. It risks the possibility that I could be a "bad person", or that I have done an act that can't be repented. This fear can be so powerful it can isolate people from even the closest people in their lives. To avoid being witnessed is to avoid oneself. On the contrary I can also find times when I have felt I have done something "wrong" and I am urged to immediately tell a friend. Although they will see what I have done wrong, I am secretly looking for some kind of push in the right direction to handle the situation. It's like when a friend calls to say they are about to do something destructive just to be able to give the friend a chance to tell them to not do it. We all are constantly acting as validators or rejectors whether that be in direct or non direct ways. To be witnessed and accepted is of course something that seems like the normal and reasonable thing to grant all people, yet it can still feel terrifying to give someone the opportunity to not accept you as you are. This is why it's so powerful when someone does.

The people in the room start to slowly open their eyes and very slowly move their way out of the seated meditation position. I feel the slight movements of everyone around me, stretching themselves out while coming out of a deep meditation. People cracking their joints, and stretching their necks, bending themselves forward and back.

This part of the session is meant to be very internal, people act as if no one else is in the room. As if they aren't interested in what anyone else is doing. I never once catch someone looking at me, it's mostly I am the one looking at them. As I am lunging forward to stretch my legs, I hear a low groan erupt from behind me. It sounded like the groan of ten men, who had been woken up too early in the morning. When watching to see reactions to this distracting sound, no one even glances in the direction. It's hard for me to think that they don't want to look at who groaned, but they do genuinely look like they are playing around in their own worlds. As it may be clear by now I am not very good at doing this. In another moment I hear a tapping sound almost like keys on a computer, and I do my very best not to look, but in the end I turn my head to see the sounds of nails tapping the hard wooden floor again, and again, and..... again. I am not saying it was annoying but I would be lying to say it wasn't distracting.

### 20 Minute Group Awareness Practice:

For the next 20 minute section the dancers are meant to slowly start to interact with the other people in the room. Contrary to the section before it would be seen as slightly taboo to not interact with others during this session. Although it seems to be a free space where it is encouraged to act in the ways your impulses tell you, there are also these mini "goals" of each section that people choose to follow. I pushed my torso up against the wall and my upper body fell over, my legs straight, and my neck relaxed. All of a sudden, Aiden appeared beside me with her torso pushed up against the wall and upper body fell over and neck relaxed just like mine. It seemed she appeared out of thin air when she started inviting me to dance with her. I was startled but ready. We exchanged our weight, my upper body over her back and feet intertwined beneath us. In

the context of this first CDP practice, Aiden was not just any person but my voucher to be a part of this group. We had not properly had a conversation yet, and so this dance improvisation was really our first interaction. She had short brown hair and stylish flowy yoga pants. There was no hesitation between one movement pattern to the next, it made her seem very comfortable in her body and with me. Our eyes would meet at glances through the cracks of my long hair, but I was too shy to hold her in a stare. Although I was meeting many people with just my body, with someone who I slightly knew in the verbal universe, it felt all the more vulnerable. She effortlessly broke the formal boundary between us and led us into this intimate dance practice. Our movements started to mimic play fighting, our hands pushing each other back and forth back and forth. Although there were no words spoken I felt a tension and frustration coming out in both of our movements as we moved in repetition. All of a sudden I was picked up for the waist and swung around the room as if my weight wasn't a factor at all. It felt very personal for a first interaction, but at the same time it felt nice to release what may have also been trapped in my body. Although I felt nervous in this new form of communication, she normalized the intimacy for me. I didn't know why I felt the emotion of frustration behind our movements, I was still unclear how to read this nonverbal language, but I assumed a key part in speaking this language is listening to your intuition. My guess is that my initial possibly awkward and bulky way of moving may have translated to Aiden as an almost confrontational conflict of body parts. It was like a game of telephone where you could whisper one sentence, and by the time it got to the end of the telephone line it transformed into a completely different formulation of words. This was only possible with an openness to the intimacy of dancing so close to



someone else. There is no room to hide what is happening inside and outside of you, I was forced to share my discomfort with a stranger.

I was relying heavily on the minimal knowledge about CDP and my minimal experience in experimental dance to guide me gracefully through this class. What moves me? My hips, my legs, what can I do that is new? How do I look dancerly like everyone else while also moving naturally? I knew the answer was that I actually didn't need to move like everyone else yet it felt like their fluid and moldable bodies helped to communicate with other bodies around them. I wanted to be a part of it. At a moment's notice you could be supporting the weight of another person, and the next finding yourself alone with your own movements. There were women popping out from behind and under you every direction you went. There was an intimacy about the touch that was unsexual, yet unrestrained. The quality of the touch of a hand to a stomach was as if it were as normal as saying hello. The body would offer itself by moving closer to another person, or opening itself up. There was a way in which to invite another body to dance with your own, that was with no words at all. I noticed people would mimic the movement of another to give a sign they wanted to move with them. They would inch slightly closer, or even move all the way across the room to touch a person's shoulder or hand. There was no fear in the touch, there was always an intentionality behind it.

This quality of touch that was unapologetic and free moving directly contrasted the inhibited and self-conscious way I felt in this first class. I felt like a square wheel trying to roll around the room. Although I had danced before I had nowhere near the experience level of improvisational dancing that the other people had in this space. A flash: there is a woman walking around the room at a fast pace dodging in and out

between the other people, her pony tail blowing behind her. I am standing in the corner not knowing what to do next, but knowing I needed to do something.

I noticed that when people wanted to take a break during the class they would stand off to the side of the room near the wall and watch and wait for something to happen. People waited to be overtaken by an instinctual feeling or movement to then guide them to interact with someone else. An interlocutor named Will described this as “allowing things to arise”. It almost felt like an energy that flowed through the room that at a moment's notice could grab you and throw you into a trance of movement. I never felt this energy source come to me, I only felt the waves of my overthinking mind wash over what could have become instincts but instead become planned actions. I felt awkward and too in my head. The same woman swept by me and I assume accidentally hit my face with her ponytail, she looked back as if to apologize but instead just looked at me. Although there were no words, the sheer acknowledgement of the action felt enough in this context. With nothing better to do I decide to follow her fast paced walking and dodging in and out of the people in the room. As I eventually catch up to her I decide it's time to dance. I place my hand on her shoulder and jump up next to her to show I want to engage. She looks me in the eyes and then gently moves her shoulder out of my hand, and keeps up her fast walking to the other side of the room leaving me without a partner.

This was the first time I had initiated contact with a person in this session and it had become an almost rejection. My thoughts immediately assumed it was because I was not as easy to dance with as the other people in the room, and that she didn't want to have to lead the interaction all on her own. It also could have been because she was

having a more internal day where dancing with other people didn't seem as appealing. Whatever the reason was, it felt uncomfortable. The energy in the room had only been warm and welcoming to me, and the purpose of this section of the class was to interact with others, so it was hard to not take this slightly personally. On the other hand this discomfort was in the context of the understanding I had about the essential nature of discomfort in ethnography and participant observation, so it didn't feel as bad.

I learned then that CDP isn't always therapeutic; it can also deal with or create conflict. As Mac says, "it can be a conflict sometimes that there are people and I am treating it as one thing and they are treating it as something else, but that isn't true with this group I think most of us treat it as a craft." With different kinds of people comes with different kinds of intentions, comes with different ideas of what CDP means. This conflict can look something like a person who is dancing alone in the group awareness section of the class without interacting with anyone else. This may not be the goal of CDP per say, but it may be the goal for having the most therapeutic session for oneself.

## Debrief

For the last section of CDP we do a verbal debrief discussing how the session went. People will talk about what they were feeling during the session, or how their day before may have impacted the way that they were dancing. Some will talk more about the compositions and spatial moments that were going on, while others will talk about how they kept wanting to stand on their heels. To me what is the most important thing about this section is how it is only verbal. Although I have expressed the importance of non verbal communication, it can also come with confusion. As we are taught from birth to communicate with words, it can feel like a relief to be using a mode that feels easy.

It's harder to get lost in translation during the debrief than I find during the dance sessions. Although this could be because I am more comfortable with verbalizing than moving the way I feel, and this may not be true for others in the room. People are allowed to talk about negative experiences as well as positive. People also volunteer information about their personal lives, which only heightens the sense of closeness within the group.

## Methods

My initial method of research was in fact, researching. I started with priming myself on the history of CDP as a dance practice and history behind its founder, Barbra Dilley. I then started to look at understandings of movement through different philosophical perspectives. I also was reading a lot of dance related ethnographies to better comprehend the ways I could potentially write and externalize my findings.

But beyond reading existing scholarship, my primary method of research in this project was active participant observation. Every Tuesday at 5pm I would drive to Hudson, NY to Sadhana Yoga studio to participate in CDP. Although I have had previous experience with dance, I really had never done anything like this before. The freedom CDP offered was very new to me in relation to dance. It was scary, exciting, and most of all, humbling. As ethnography can oftentimes be, the act of joining these people in their practice of dance could be something very uncomfortable. This was due to many reasons, one being the fact that most of them have been dancing for their whole lives, and have created dance companies and trained with important figures in dance. Another reason being that they are all much older (and wiser) than me, which created a hyper awareness of the ways my being there, affected the CDP sessions.

That said, they were also very welcoming to me, willing to talk and explain why they participate in this practice. And, as I got more used to the norms of the group, I started to get more comfortable too. Of course all of these factors lended themselves at times to awkward feelings, but discomfort mostly benefited my ethnographic process and writing. I was not only able to observe the practice from a mostly unbiased perspective but also be able to give my vulnerability to these people. Without my participation in the practice it would have felt like there was an imbalance of power. An imbalance of power would not only skew the information I was receiving, it would feel unjust. I was able to wear my fear on my sleeve, which ultimately felt less like a sacrifice or a chore and more like an opportunity for self growth. It reminded me of the importance of putting yourself in situations where you may be bad at the task at hand and getting more comfortable with those feelings of discomfort. I find it's important to be comfortable with the idea that you can be bad at something yet still be accepted by your community and most importantly yourself.

One of the most uncomfortable things about CDP for me was the lack of verbalization that happened during the practice. As dance usually can be, the main mode of communication was from body language. From birth we are taught to ask for help through verbalizing our needs. We often don't think about the ways that body language has been used as a crutch to read between the lines of speech. Not only are we taught how to interpret movement from a young age, our biology also informs the ways we move, making these gestures inherent to being human. This idea universalizes movement. Even with my inherent knowledge of my body movements and gestures, I found it very difficult to trust these instincts during CDP. It's not that I lack the ability to

understand others' movements, it's more that the lack of words can trigger a sense of doubt. This is something I battled throughout my time participating in CDP.

This lack of verbalization also made the process of writing more difficult. Instead of a direct translation from the words of my participants to the words on my pages, it took an in between step. It really did feel like I was translating this world of nonverbal communication into the world of words. With most translations there becomes a difficulty in finding "the right words". With most languages there may not be these direct translations that creates a direct throughline between the two meanings at hand. Language not only uses different words and sounds, but also can inform the way we think as people. It can inform the ideas of the passage of time, or even the ways we think about love. Language structures the ways we think by creating a mold we then fill. With dance it follows this same principle of providing set ways to be able to experience the freedom of expression.

The difference to me between the structure of language and the structure of movement is that after practicing CDP for a couple months now, it almost feels as though the limits to expression are much broader in dance. In language we are bound to words and bound to the meanings society associates with these words. With movement it feels that the point of it is to constantly be making up new "words", or new ways of expressing through the body. The subtleties of movement creates a wide variety of ways to express where the mere movement of the head from left to right can mean a completely different thing than right to left. This relates to the phenomenon of the ways that people can feel as though they have an "alternate personality" when speaking in a non native language. What seems inherent to our being, can be changed through the

power of language. The brain is able to be molded into these different structures of communication due to the place and culture one was raised with. I understand this ability for the brain and its thoughts to be molded by the inherent human need for connection. Our commitment to communication shapes the way we live our lives, and what we are able to do.

What is similar about language and movement are the ways that context can greatly impact the meanings that are born through the chosen expression. This directly relates to the ways J.L. Austin explains the speech acts theory. The purpose of an “utterance” can be very different in nature. As he explains it can be a constative meaning they are stating a fact ,or preformative which means there is potential for a successful or unsuccessful response. To say “this room is a little large” can be interpreted in two different ways determined by a different context. It could either be a statement or an implied question. To practice the sacred “Wolf Dance ” which is a practice of the indigenous group named Shoshone in front of the capital sends a completely different message than practicing this dance in their native homeland. In the world of language the meaning of a word can greatly change due to a specific context as well. When a friend tells you a secret and you respond with the words “wow, you just dropped a bomb on me” in the privacy of your own home this would have no dangerous consequences. Repeating these same words at an airport can be understood as a bomb threat and would result in being forced to confront the law. This idea is what Austin speaks about with the idea that an utterance can be felicitous or infelicitous depending on if it is “well-formed”. An utterance can be infelicitous if it is contradictory, or does not express the idea well enough and is somehow inappropriate for the context

of utterance. This idea shows the importance of the context in which one speaks. He also brings up ideas of Illocutionary vs Perlocutionary where illocutionary refers to the function the speaker intends to fill, while the perlocutionary act is about the effect that an utterance could have on the other person. These terms support the idea that to communicate with another there is a process that a person has to go through where a sentence becomes created in order to be interpreted. There isn't this seamless transference of ideas between people, there is always a possibility that the words one chooses do not necessarily compute with the other system of communication.

Goin off of the naturalness of using words, I used interviews as another way to research. We would talk about a range of things from their history with dance to the relationships in their lives and how movements affect them. This does give me a chance to have a very verbal based interaction with them, where my feelings of doubt don't come up in the same way. Talking does come more naturally to me which is a great contrast to the ways I feel during dance and CDP.

## What Follows

When thinking about writing my sproj one of the first things that became immediately important to me was accessibility. I wanted my sproj to be fun and easy to read, or as easy as 60 pages could be. This was one of the main reasons I broke my sproj up into a bunch of mini chapters since I wanted the reader to stay engaged, and not feel like they were drowning in my writing. Like my sproj, I tend to lean towards experimental ways of writing since I feel less trapped in a box of rules, I am very bad with rules. I also found that when dividing up my writing in this way it mimics the rhythm that may exist in a dance. To me rhythm is about a curiosity about the next step. When



a piece of dance or music is too steady it can become lost in the predictable and lose the intricacies and surprises of the piece. An unexpected rhythm is what keeps the attention moving forward. As my ethnography is all about dance and movement I wanted to have this same sense of moving forward in my writing. This is also a moment where I ask was it the chicken or the egg. The fact that I was dancing so much and focusing on rhythm and movement may have also informed the way I wrote.

## Chapter Summaries

### #2

In this chapter I talk about a term coined by an interlocutor named Aiden who introduced me to the idea of Habituated Movement. This term explains the ways that dance training and life in general has shaped the subconscious mind of our bodies and has formed our movement instincts. Aiden talks about how during CDP and other dance spaces she is focusing on harnessing her habituated movements, to be able to not act out of habit but act out of choice. Choosing when she uses the habituated movements and when she doesn't. I also talk about Foucault's ideas on docile bodies and the ways our body is easily formed.

### #3

In this chapter I talk about the Buddhists element of CDP which is the 20 minute meditation portion of the practice. I speak on interviews I had with CDP members and how they described their relationship with Buddhism. I found from my research that many CDP members who I talked to don't really consider themselves Buddhist yet their

philosophies on life and movement do intersect with Buddhist philosophy. In this chapter I try to figure out why this is.

#### #4

In this chapter I look at the uses of offstage and onstage in CDP practice. I look at the ways it can benefit the space, and the ways it can make it more confusing. I connect this offstage idea to the ways that CDP members talked about the constant content that lives in a space. An interlocutor named Mac talks about how the beautiful thing about CDP is that there is always something to react to. In this way the offstage does not exist to him since even when “offstage” you are still affecting the space.

#### #5

In this chapter I look at Tomie Hahn’s ideas of interior and exteriority and the ways that these two ideas affect the way we touch. I talk about my own experience with feeling confused between what is me and what is the other person. And I also talk about the opposite experience of feeling bound only to my own body. I talk about our human need to bring our interior into the exterior world in order to connect with other people.

#### #6

In this chapter I talk about my personal experience with processing emotion and the ways I was taught to process through words and conversation. I talk about how at times it can be hard to transfer a feeling of any sort that is inherently not connected with the human language and having to connect it yourself. I also talk about how empathy is necessary for connection and without it we would be lost.

## #7

In this chapter I talk about the concept of ineffability and the ways it relates to CDP. At its core it is about the ways that language is restricted in the world of connection and how the arts are a key human need to be able to express.

## #8

In this chapter I go into the ways that listening is key in human connection. I talk about listening in the context of listening with your body and how this could benefit non dance and movement spaces. I also go into the ways that listening is a key part of consent in a sexual context, and the ways that performativity can hinder true listening.

## #9

In this chapter I look at past interviews where I asked the question “How does CDP affect your outside life?” I look at the ways movement can help with communication and the ways it inspires the ways people view the capacity to trust one another. I also look at the term “Coded Ways of Being” that an interlocutor Aiden came up with. This refers to the ways that society expects us to hold friendship and relationships, and how these ways of being can feel boxed in.

## #10

In this chapter I tell a story about a moment of connection with a CDP member. It touches on the moments of humor and non-seriousness that to me is a key part of CDP.

## Chapter #2 - Habituated Movement

During CDP I am constantly touching other people and focusing on all of the intricacies that come with a body. I am constantly being challenged to try to maintain contact with other people even when it feels unnatural to me. I should now explain what unnatural means to me even though it seems like something inherently indescribable. I guess this is the point, since naturalness is a sensation I get when my body feels an aversion to certain ways of moving. This reminds me of a point a CDP member Aiden made. She elegantly explained to me the process of “constructing” a body and how when a young dancer is being taught dance technique whether that be ballet or modern, tap or jazz, they are being trained to move their body in specific ways. Aiden explains that in this process “You are constructing an aesthetic. You are constructing a way to dance where you aren't hurting yourself. Health is one concern, aesthetic is another concern, range of motion is another concern.” These techniques become built into the structure and mind of a body: Aiden calls this **habituated movement**. In Aiden's words, “If we didn't have these habituated patterns, we wouldn't be able to move. We would have nothing to go off of.” This expands on what a “natural” feeling may be built from.

Aiden is not only talking about habituated patterns as a learned dance technique, she is talking about the general movements built into living. I see these to be as simple as not wanting to put your elbows on the table as a form of respect, or even the squatting required to take a poop. They are developed socially as well as evolutionarily to prepare us for the motions of life. The principles of learning a dance technique mimics the way a human learns to fit into society. Going off of Aiden's explanation of the

foundations of technique, not hurting yourself is a concern, social aesthetic is a concern (for instance crossing your legs to take up less space on a train, or a pose to make your legs look longer in an instagram photo). Dance technique and the technique of life both require some kind of higher rules either set by a dance teacher or set by the want to fit in. To bring this all back to where I started, naturalness comes from learned habituated movements where some things feel right and others feel wrong, and this dictates the way we move through the world.

## Docile Bodies

In Foucault's chapter on Docile Bodies, he explains the ways that a body can be “used, transformed and improved.” (Foucault 1995 136). He gives examples like military and religious orders as early as the eighteenth century where bodies were able to be molded to better suit the system to which they are a part of. Foucault shows how “in every society the body was in a grip of every strict power, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations' ' (Foucault 137). The uses of the body were a product of a power structure the body was controlled by. The body was a product of social order. The phenomenon where people can feel as though they have an “alternate personality” when speaking in a non native language is linked to the idea that what seems inherent to our being, can be changed through the power of language. The brain is able to be molded into different structures of communication due to the place and culture one was raised with. In the context of Foucault , the body has this same ability to be molded to participate in a certain way that is in relation to a powerful social structure. Foucault discusses how “Production was divided up into and the labor process was

articulated, on the one hand, according to its stages, or elementary operations, and on the other hand according to individuals the particular bodies that carried it out: each variable of this force, strength, promptness, skill, consistency, would be observed and therefore characterized, assessed, computed, and related to the individual whose was its particular agent” (Foucault 145). Learning Dance technique was a foundational step in many of CDP members' dance lives. It molds and teaches the body to move in certain ways to fulfill an aesthetic goal. In relation to Foucault , he is talking about how each aspect of movement relates to the goal of a person's work. This was broken up into sections to which higher powers could easily assess their work. He describes the body as an agent to which these movements are assessed.

In a setting where ballet technique is taught, a dancer's skill is also broken into different aspects like flexibility, or turn out, and these skills are then used to rank the ability of the dancer. This process becomes very important to my studies on CDP since many dancers' relationship with movement originated in the world of Ballet. Foucault talks about rank directly by saying that “Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations”(Foucault 146) . This network of relations in a technique like ballet enforces a competition between two dancers where they are never seen as just themselves, but in a network of relations with all other dancers. This puts everyone somewhere on the rank. This network of relations makes dancers aspire to be better and to move up because of the ways they are pitted against each other. This ranking is a “perpetual movement in which individuals replace one another in a space marked off by aligned

intervals' ' (Foucault 148). It makes people feel as though they are only identified with what technical goal their body can achieve rather than a more personal view about who they are and what they can emote through their dance. Foucault describes this regimented programme as an “obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside, it is a programme, it ensures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the outside.” (Foucault 152). This idea of rhythm mimics the way that dance works in a rhythm, where movements can be cyclical in nature. The way that Foucault talks about the ways that these kinds of systems are running is a cyclical and neverending workflow of productivity. There is nothing that can penetrate or throw off this flow since there are regiments in place to keep the system flowing in its inherent rhythm.

## Construction / Deconstruction

I will now explain Aiden’s ideas on Construction and Deconstruction. As I have mentioned before, Aiden explains how the construction of a body in the context of dance technique is about shaping a muscular physique and an aesthetic of movement. It follows sets of rules in order to get better at a certain dance practice (ballet, jazz, etc). Construction can also be about social and societal rules of moving, with a goal being social acceptance or for health reasons. To agree with Hahns philosophy: “Touch is social” (pg 101). As for deconstruction, Aiden explains that it’s all about “habituating and dehabituing. How do you untrain yourself to be and think in a different way. Lots about deconstruction. Studying ballet and then undoing the imprint of ballet in your bodies so

that you don't look like a ballet dancer but ability to choose which impulses to follow and having a higher awareness of yourself. These choices determine “when you use your modeled (habituated) history and when you're unmolding altogether”. She is not saying that the technique you learned in your 5th grade ballet class should be gotten rid of, she sees that “tradition is useful to become deconstructed”. Without a molded body there is nothing to deconstruct. Aiden gives me an example of this that perfectly describes this practice: “It's hard to look like you don't know how to throw a ball if you know how to throw a ball”. This is the challenge that non traditional dancers take on. It seems that they do this in order to portray control over the way their body operates, this directly contrasts the contexts that Foucault talks about relating to the body. He provides examples of instances where the person is not in control over the body; they are in a power structure governed by domination. Without a rigid structure that governs the body's movement within the CDP, dancers who I have talked with express a freedom in being in control of their own body. This control over the body is not something that nondancers are taught to do, these dancers have trained themselves to be able to have authority over the way they move. They are also controlling what histories in their embodied knowledge they choose to show and not show.

## Chapter #3 - Selective Buddhism

As I have done extensive research on the history of the buddhism behind this specific practice of Contemplative Dance, I have come to realize that this Buddhist spiritual origin doesn't really concern the people who take part in CDP... During an



Interview with Aiden I asked her about the purpose of CDP. “What do you benefit from CDP rather than another form of dance?” To me it seems to be fairly simple and unassuming practice and I wondered why this, when these dancers are capable of doing much more complicated practices. She answers and reveals that its main appeal is that “it’s aesthetically neutral”. She explains how dancers can be picky with what they want to do because of their long histories with different styles, so CDP can be a safe and neutral territory. This alludes to ideas she was talking about earlier where the habituated knowledge a body holds dictates where it wants to go and what it wants to do. With humor she voices that, “Some people really geek out on it” (it being the intricacies of CDP), but she doesn’t. In CDP There isn’t set rules on how to dance, the only real structure to CDP is its timing. First a 20 minute meditation, then 20 minute personal warm up practice, then 20 minute group dance practice, then debrief. She does benefit from the meditation (which is the only buddhist part of the practice) for the aspect of focusing on presence, but it doesn’t go beyond that..... So she says. She makes it very clear that “This is not religion, these are not gurus. It’s more of a heart community , so much of dance is “I just do it, I just do a thing and that’s it.” The practice is centered around the body, which to me is a very unusual concept and unfamiliar to me in my life.

Most of the ways we understand life is through the mind's eye, yet a potential goal for CDP dancing is to break up with what usually governs our way of being. To be governed by the mind I associate with things like school, ruled by intellectual goals and structures, or a job where your mind is used to solve problems and follow order. People in general find the separation with the mind to be uncomfortable and vulnerable. Asking

a non dancer to communicate with their body can feel like asking a beginner in Spanish to give a presentation to a big group of people in their non native language. Both expose the intention of communication with a lack of knowledge of how to do it potentially successfully. This idea neglects the much deeper idea that we not only communicate through movement or words, but we each hold energies that are constantly being shared and exchanged. We can't help but communicate, even if the recipient can't exactly identify what it is being communicated.

As we speak more Aiden slowly leans towards identifying with buddhism by saying "I lilt in that direction. They make a lot of sense and they combine with things I have learned before. I don't think I'm walking in through a religious door but walking in through an improviser door." She seems to feel happy that the meditation portion is there, yet she wouldn't necessarily say that's the reason she's in the group.

When talking with another member of the CDP group Mac, he feels more strongly about the meditation Buddhism section of CDP. "Meditation involves more or less successfully clearing your head and noticing somatic information that is going through your head. It's a relief to not be processing thoughts." He thinks meditation sets him up to be able to "notice small movements in the room, watching people make decisions". He thinks this practices full presence and is what CDP is all about. He also talks about how "The meditation allows me to do a much better job of noticing the passage of time. It makes every little movement and every little impulse precious, it clarifies things. And I don't know how it works" As time is one of the only defining factors of CDP it makes sense that this becomes something to concentrate on while participating.

He also references the idea of “not knowing how it works ”which relates to what Aiden was saying of “just doing it”. There is an idea that this practice can be an outlet for mindlessness. I inquire more about his personal relationship with spirituality, Buddhism, or however he defines “it”. “At this moment I am kind of anti the ideas of buddhism because I don’t really think that it’s all about suffering. I don’t think CDP addresses any higher power but I guess it’s a spiritual thing. As I try to move I try to maintain the sense of focus I had during meditation and to carry it on continuously forward as I do things. I think meditation leads to a kind of intentional expression.”

Mac uses the beginning meditation as a guide in order to practice the art of presence during group dancing. When listening to him talk during the debrief section of CDP he reveals to me that in the midst of the dancing we had just done, from across the room he was in doing a duet with me. This caught me by surprise since I had no idea this was happening, and now thinking more deeply, I didn’t know a duet could happen without both parties being aware. This really stood out to me since as a CDP dancer I am most of the time wrapped up and tangled between bodies, leaving me with much less awareness of the people on the other side of the room. After listening to Mac’s ideas about what the potential principles of CDP might be, this attention to detail was one of them. As someone who has done a decent amount of meditating in their life, I still have a hard time with this practice. He says that the practice allows one to truly experience the passage of time. This seems to be another principle in his eyes. The passage of time seems to be important because it is the context that dance exists in, this is also directly related to buddhist practices of noticing the passage of time. He talks about how when noticing the passage of time he reviews the wonderful gift of

experiencing the rarities of life. It makes even the smallest movements much more special to him by moving through the dance practice with a heightened sense of awareness and presence. The meditation for him can “more or less successfully clear your head and notice somatic information that is going through your head. It's a relief to not be processing thoughts.” The idea of relief from my mind's chatter is something I know I am seeking in my own life, so this stuck out to me as a key reason someone would practice CDP, especially in the context of buddhism and presence. When asking more about if he aligns with buddhist ideals he says

“At this moment I am kinds anti the ideas of buddhism because I don't really think that it's all about suffering”

“What about suffering do you not like?” I say

“I just don't think that life is based around the idea of suffering, or how essential it is for life in Buddhism, I think there is more out there than that. I don't think it addresses any higher power but I guess it's a spiritual thing” At the beginning it seemed he was hesitant to admit a possible spiritual aspect to CDP, because of a buddhist connotation, or really a connotation with any kind of system of religion or thought practice. It seemed that he really just didn't want the ideals and foundations of CDP to be associated with anything, he wants them to stand alone as a practice where “We are creating this culture creating this shared understanding and value of making some ephemeral together, and through this culture it could make something beyond cdp and generate new creative ideas.” Its potential to go beyond CDP and become a possible performance piece, may then be put into a category of an already practiced idea like “a

performance of contact improv". It seems to me like that the space of CDP can be neutral without any other connotations of something else.

I find that CDP members don't really identify fully with Buddhism yet they practice its techniques during CDP. The word technique comes up again in the context of buddhism because even in meditation there are certain postures and certain ways of breathing that help one meditate to the best of their ability. This mimics technique in the sense of dance technique. Aiden used the word intuition and impulse to describe different thoughts or bodily sensation that pass through the body. In Buddhist meditation one is supposed to build a second self in order to observe thoughts and sensation that arise in the body without judgment, but with a separation. Going back to Aiden's idea of bodily impulse she links it with a "habituated self. Above that there is a consciousness about your own impulses and that's what this is about". In her dance process during CDP she says "I feel something I pick it I follow it. Notice that every time someone does that to you, you wanna do this other thing. Maybe notice and don't do it." These ideas lend themselves pretty perfectly with the techniques of Buddhist meditation practice where one is supposed to notice before action, or notice before attaching to oneself. Aiden shares with me a strategy told to her by one of her old teachers. You notice your 1<sup>st</sup> impulse and you don't follow it, you notice your second impulse and you don't follow it. And you wait till the third impulse to then follow. This for me brings up the idea of control. That one is not slave to the impulses that stream through the body and mind, but one is able to choose what to follow and what not to follow. In Buddhist thought, this would be considered a path to enlightenment. Why there is this disconnect between How CDP dancers identity, and how they act, I'm not sure yet.

## Chapter #4 - Offstage Onstage

The CDP session is not set up to be a performance. One could argue we are performing for one another, yet the space really acts as more of a rehearsal than a showcase. In more classic dance settings even in a rehearsal there still tends to be an idea of an offstage where dancers wait for their part to enter the stage and perform. In CDP the only real way that I would argue there is an offstage is the way people use the walls. When transitioning between different 20 minute sections people may back up to the wall to show they have not “started” yet. When speaking with Mac he says that, “I am against the idea of offstage or just a noticing role. There is always something to react to, there is always content. Most of us have had experience choreographing things and so I think a lot about pulse and observing pulse and creating pulse and seeing how people respond to it.” This idea that there is always something to react to and there is always something going on can be an ethnographer’s dream or nightmare. Initially I was more on the nightmare side of things since it’s very easy to get overwhelmed by the amount of content that is being created between people. Over time it became more normal and eventually existing. An example of me living in this “nightmare” which to be honest is an exaggeration, was when we were in the in-between transition between personal awareness practice and group awareness practice. Contrary to Mac’s ideas about there being no off stage people do use the walls to signify they have not entered what can sometimes feel like the boxing ring. I was standing with my back to the wall

and slowly everyone started to move inwards and engage with one another. As time went on most people had left the wall, making me the only one still attached. My back stuck to it like syrup, afraid to detach. I watched as dancing bodies in front of me turned to squiggly lines and shapes, making the clump of people seem all the more impenetrable. It felt as though my body had forgotten how to move. The discomfort and fear had washed over me and stolen any feeling I had of embodiment, and left me with a stiff and frozen stick to figure. As I stand there in stillness, I watch as a woman untangles her body from the others and skips over to join me on the wall. This transition she had made from, in it to out of it, had made the division between off stage and on stage even stronger. She looks at me and smiles and then leans back to rest against the wall and breathes off the dancing she had just done. I then see out of the corner of my eye another woman whose back was pressed against the wall. Now this woman was tracing her figures and pressing her forehead into it, making her body branch out. Both of these women were using the space in different ways. This created a tension in the idea of an offstage. Her dancer-like movements, brought us back into the “stage” by deeming our “offstage” as still a place where movement can occur.

## Chapter #5 - Interior / Exterior

There was a knot of women in the middle of the room, tangled amidst each other with feet touching thighs, touching shoulders, holding a head; yet they seemed so unstuck. They knew exactly how each part of their body was being held or holding

anothers. One person intentionally placed a hand underneath a woman's back that was raised above the ground in order to keep it steady. Each part of their body had a mind of its own and was highly aware of its surroundings.

When entangled with another body, I do become confronted with the difference between my body and anothers. At the same time there are moments when the reliance on another body for stability or body aesthetic can create an intertwined identity that needs each other. My leg was bent around the hinge of a womens knee and as she straightened her bend I was pushed to unwind myself and separate. It can be easy to lose track of where a foot or hand may be placed when I am focusing on the movements of another body. When practicing presence (a foundation of CDP) I notice my awareness pulse through my body and flow into different parts like an ear or pinky finger. This energy flow can be triggered by a touch or lack thereof. I crawl over her legs and place my hand next to hers on the ground. My feet and legs are still in interaction with her legs and feet yet this shift of weight to my hands invites my awareness to follow leaving my legs and feet as body parts without a mind connected. In this way I agree with Hahn that “touch can deny a separation” (Hahn 2007 101) between two bodies and I think it can also dictate the movement of awareness through the physical body. I find these waves of awareness to be what defines my ideas of self during this dance practice. My body is almost a vessel to which my awareness can move through. Hahn talks also about exteriority and interiority of the body (Hahn 2007 101), and how touch is bridge in order to understand the difference between these two ideas. In my experience touch becomes the liminal space between the inside and outside. In Hahns words, “active touch along the surface of an object can also verify its



textural qualities, from smooth to rough, hard to soft” (pg 101), and this signals to my brain that I am in contact with something other than myself. Although when my awareness is situated in one place in my body, the other parts are lacking a mind behind them, making those parts more susceptible to blending with another person: the exteriority of another body being unnoticed.

Hahn also talks about the idea of intention in touch and how important this is to what the touch then means to the individual and the person receiving it. He says that “Contact signifies an intention” (Foucault 102). In the context of CDP an intention behind touch is greatly needed for the first step of dancing with others. The initiating stage can be very tricky since you have to figure out how to say “hey can I dance with you” without words. Using touch by putting a hand on someone's shoulder or standing next to a person and mimicking their actions can initiate contact and start the flow of dancing together. Without this physical aspect it would be much harder to know what someone is wanting with you and from you. These are examples of the ways that the body is used to externalize internal intentions or wants, and make oneself comprehensible to an external entity. CDP also is a space where the interior doesn't need to be comprehensible to another exterior person. It can also be true that the point of externalizing is just to see oneself outside of the internal world of the mind. To birth out a part of yourself and see it in a space outside of oneself.

Communication is not bound to language, the body is our most humble tool in order to connect with another person. Although we have been taught ways to interact with other people, there is still an almost animal instinct we have that shows us what we need to do to communicate. Even when we are able to touch and interact with another

body, it can still feel like there is something missing. We are constantly motivated by the need for connection, which can be something beyond what the body can provide. It is a spiritual and emotional want to be able to break the barriers between oneself and another. Although touch can make us feel bound to another person, it can also exacerbate the division between a body and another.

## Chapter #6 - Beyond Language

In my experience with attempting to practice presence, I tend to lean toward things like therapy where I can talk through what is holding me back from experiencing the present. I also may do things like speak with a friend to try to get my internal feelings out. I have always been a person who tends to use word vomiting and heady thinking to attempt a sense of peace. I do this because I do get a great sense of relief when I feel that someone can know what is going on inside my head and heart. It makes me feel less lonely to have my interior world be shared with someone close to me and have them accept me with what I have shared. It's a practice where I am trying to externalize my internal world and then possibly see something new once it has been birthed out of me. This whole process is completely reliant on my head and my ability to come up with the right words to honor what kind of jumble is going on inside of me for someone to "understand". This creates great stress for me since at times (and there are plenty), the right words are completely lost, and I am only left with the "I don't know" or "I feel weird". I guess this practice probably comes from my mom's master's in social work and its

effect on me, or just the way society may teach someone to process emotion. It became the way I learned to attempt peace of mind. Although both my parents are extremely physically expressive, I never was exposed to the world of processing through the body. As I have grown older and hopefully wiser I have noticed the difficulties this process causes me. It's reliant on many things, like my brain not being lost in fog, or being satisfied with the way my words sound when my expectations are for them to be beautiful vulnerable poems of the heart. In times when I am in a universe opposite to presence I have recently discovered that I can move into a whole new world of being in my body. This transfer of information stored in my head into my body I thought was going to be tricky yet during CDP it can come very naturally, lending itself to the idea that the mind and body are connected. Whatever was living in my head up, also exists in my head down. I feel this is what many CDP members have been explaining to me, since for them processing through their body is their primary outlet for feelings, sense of presence, and a sense of peace. Of course, I still find that when I am trying to give my body full authority, my brain's jealousy overtakes me, and tries to become captain of the ship. I then try to reject it, yet the only way I know how to do that is through the head. As many people do, I get wrapped up in words and the lack thereof and it leaves me feeling less connected to myself and less connected to the people around me. Words are rarely able to truly defend my heart, and yet, I allow them to be the narrow and shaky bridge that frees my heart from my mind.

# Empathy

Hahn brings up the idea of Kinesthetic empathy which she explains is an “empathy rooted in the body that draws on kinesthesia the sense that comprehends the body's weight, spatial orientation, and movement of muscles, tendons and joints. Kinesthetic empathy is mediated via visual and tactile modes of transmission” (Hahn 2007 84). Empathy is talked about in the context of transmission, which I find lends itself well to dance. I am constantly transferring something like energy feelings, or trust, to the other CDP group members. It feels essential to at least transfer something to the person you are dancing with since without it I think it would become uncomfortable. Empathy being a transmissive thing in the context of CDP seems to be reliant on a person being open or having somewhat of a heart on their sleeve, to be able to share their internal world with someone else. I also find that when attempting to dance with someone, empathy can also live in my body and can dictate how much I interact, and what I interact with. I am an empathetic person in my own life, but my body also has a kind of sensor to feel out other people's emotions. CDP is not a dance practice one does with strangers, but with people who know each other enough to be able to see beyond just a body or rhythm. Mac talks about how “I have these slightly different relationships with different people, and I go around the room and the different people shape what I do and how I react”. He is talking about a thing that I feel as well when dancing in the group, where I feel unable to detach from the other dances and movements going on around me. I am constantly in conversation with everyone and they are in conversation with me. To reference again: As dance does not rely on words to understand another person, I

become highly attuned to other people's slight movements and tonality in their individual bodies. This is all about being given the chance to practice real empathy.

## Communal Language

Although I am a dancer I was never technically trained in my youth therefore the ingrained dancerly instincts don't come as naturally to me. I have also never done contact improvisation before so this practice makes me feel very exposed as an outsider to these bodily languages. There also seems to be a lot that is said through movement that I don't have the ability to pick up on. This makes it hard for me to know how to move through the space with intentionality. I also don't know the things I don't know which make it so I feel more alienated from the group members. What I can see from an outsider perspective is the communal physical/ spatial language they all use to communicate during the sessions. As Will has explained her love for space is what directs her movements during CDP. She thinks about the negative space and how your body changes its shape. She thinks about the aliveness of the space itself and how one can imprint on the space. During CDP the point is to let what comes to you arise naturally without having a set agenda. The language that the group shares has to do with their individual connections with their own instincts, which brings them together in a way I don't understand yet. How does individual attentiveness to internal instincts allow for a communal language to be shared? How does the internal translate into the external?.

Although I have danced in the past in high school classes, and local studios, I do not have the same association with certain genres of movement like these women do.

During a debrief discussion one woman remarked on how another's movements were “bursting of early Martha Graham”. She mimicked a gesture with her chest held high and arm stretched out and wrist flicked. When dancing with these people, I only see what looks like plain old experimental dancing, when what they see may be something all the more contextualized and complex. They see the technique and influence of each movement of another while I only see the moving of a head or toe. This again touches on the idea of shared bodily language that is built on a combination of more classical training, and the world of experimental movement. It is also about knowing one another well, where the energy of another person may be highly familiar which makes them more able to connect with through dance.

After taking a long absence from attending the weekly CDP sessions I was curious to see what would happen when I would come back and see the group again. During previous times I definitely felt out of place especially knowing that this environment was especially important to the people because of the closeness they had with each other. Coming to CDP this time felt different since it felt almost as if I was proving I was not bailing on being a part of the community and that I am committed to what they are doing. I got there a little late so I was unable to directly talk and catch up with any of the group members but the little smiles and winks I exchanged felt like all the catching up I needed. Even as my relationship with these people is centered around the body it can still feel like trying to communicate with someone in a language I don't know. This practice has really articulated the ways that knowing someone can be a language of its own. I found that with certain people who I had danced with before, it

was easier to initiate movement because we had started to create a relationship of trust with one another.

## Chapter #7 - Ineffability

When learning about the idea of ineffability in my religion class, it struck me as a way to externalize my ideas about movement. R. G. Collingwood's interpretation of this concept is about the ways that language fails to represent a feeling. He talks about how the “reason why description, so far from helping expression, actually damages it, is that description generalizes. To describe a thing is to call it a thing of such and such a kind: to bring it under a conception, to classify it. Expression, on the contrary, individualizes” (Spackman 2012 25). This beautifully describes the way that words feel like confined boxes we put our sacred and special experiences into. We do this not because we necessarily want to be, but it is the form of communication we learned since we were young. He separates the idea of expression as something that “individualizes” something, making it an externalization of oneself. The idea of expression is also associated with art and in this example music. The senses are a key link to emotion though “The cognitive content of many complex emotions involves interrelations between or sequences of several cognitive components, but because music is a process, we can hear it as expressing a sequence of mental states involving cognitive components and can thus hear it as expressing complex emotion” (Spackman 2012 27). This describes music as a process that becomes the key element that separates music from language and allows more authentic externalizations of experiences and emotions.

As emotion is an ever changing thing, music resembles this similar rollercoaster and whirlwind that envelopes us as people. In these ideas about ineffability emotionality is seen as more of a complex way of expression when compared to words. This quote talks about how music is processed which to me shows the ways that music and art and general references the possible future that moves emotion forward in time.

The Concept of ineffability encourages the importance of emotion in the way we structure our lives. More specifically these emotions play a central role in our ethical lives, as offering possible attitudes toward different situations and hence possible ways of responding to them. "Representations of different types of emotion are thus of great value, as they allow us to imagine and potentially adopt new attitudes and responses." (Spackman 2012 27). I see our relationship with emotion as if there is a string that holds together our emotions, and our actions. Our emotional side strings us along through life, where actions come second but following quickly behind. Although some say logic is another force that dictates our actions, logic to me is none other than a reaction to an emotional state. It can even be a flight or flight response for people who become uncomfortable with the rawness of emotion. Logic is formed as a way to organize and understand what emotional state has taken over, and what impulses this brings.

During CDP this idea of ineffability comes up regularly where I am constantly getting waves of feelings, yet I am not required to then translate these feelings into words that are then made to be comprehensible to another person. These feelings can live in the indescribable and are only used to dictate a bodily impulse. Events or feelings that come during CDP at times I rationalize since that's where my brain wants to naturally go, and other times it feels more comfortable to sit in the ineffable. This can



feel like a relief when I am not expected to explain what is going on in my head. It feels like a relief because these emotions that come up when practicing art are not necessarily meant to be explained.

## Chapter #8 - Learning How To Listen

I see the ways of being that CDP members partake in to be an inspiration to the way I move about my life. This universe of ways of being could really inform the way the real world operates. In more professional settings like school, touch is seen as very taboo. A discussion-based class is really about being able to translate the meanings of written words, into the words of the mouth. This process is definitely reliant on the strength of the classroom community in order to be able to communicate with one another. This to me is a perfect example of a space where movement and touch could improve ways of learning. There is a great disconnect between students in a classroom. Most of the time the students are head deep into their computers and only really raise their hand to hear their own voice or let the teacher mark down a point for participation. At times I can find it hard to have deep conversations since there isn't a developed culture of really truly listening. This is where I find the intimacy of touch to be greatly helpful to improve one's listening skills. To interact with another body, is to interact without words. To me it requires a much deeper form of listening that can involve really watching and witnessing the aliveness of another. With listening to words it can be much easier to tune out and rely on subconscious associations with words, rather than

a more thoughtful analysis of what the word may mean to another person. With dance and movement it inherently requires more of an attention, making it helpful to practice. Dancing in CDP has been a great way for me to deepen my understanding of listening and learning to become attuned. I find that this attunement is not something that we learn as new, it is something that is inherent to our human nature, but at times we are taught to forget this. CDP to me was about relearning these skills.

Dance classes at Bard have very different norms around the ways of touch than CDP. The rules around touching in a dance class can be in a direct relationship with the issues with sexual assault on college campuses. The teachers are in an almost performance-like state where they are there to mimic the correct use of consent in order to show respect to the individual, and show a compliance with the social norms. Bard colleges language around Sexual assault and consent looks like “A sexual act directed against another person, without consent of the victim, including instances where the victim is incapable of giving consent”. The way that Bard dance teachers subscribe to these rules are also in response to the ways that dance teachers outside of Bard can neglect to ask for consent when touching a student even when it isn't in a sexual way. On the contrary I also find this culture of consent in Bard dance classes to be again performative, where the purpose is only really to show that a person is acting in a politically correct way and to be in compliance with the federal law. This performativity can also become dangerous since it neglects the foundational components of consent which are all about real listening. It is dangerous because over time this performativity can become habit and slowly redefine what it means to consent and where the purpose of consent came from. It can become more about fulfilling a social goal than about doing

the real work of listening and seeing another person. Especially in and around college campuses alike to Bard, upholding political correctness is valued in all forms of life. Dance teachers may be confronted with the tension between dance, which is inherently touchy, and the need to not cross any boundaries that could be deemed as sexual. Hearing the experiences of friends and CDP members who grew up with classical ballet training, this culture of consent was not present in the same way it is at Bard. It was a give-in that a ballet teacher could tuck your butt and straighten your leg without even giving the slightest warning. In these kinds of classical dance practices the body is seen as a tool more than a personal aspect of someone's identity. It was something that was meant to be molded, and a teacher was there to help guide the body into its correct position. This also creates a distance between the person and the body which can be greatly harmful.

In the context of sexual interactions, this same idea can come up where the female body is seen as almost detached from the woman herself. She is only seen as “a body that can be used for male pleasure”. This detachment is the key to being able to abuse the body since it allows for less contact with a person's emotions and being, and avoids the action of real listening. The process of abuse uses the idea of tuning out feelings and body language from the abused. Neglecting the human capacity to listen enables this kind of dangerous contact between two people. This same detachment is also a key factor in classical ballet. Returning to Foucault's ideas of rank and hierarchy, and the docility of the body, the body is only seen as a tool to fulfill an aesthetic goal.

At its core consent involves the ability to listen not just to a person's words but to their body language, tone, and overall energy. In many spaces this idea of listening can

be lost on the idea that “she had said it was ok!, so I thought everything was fine and she wanted to have sex.” Taking these words outside of a context can seem like real consent. I can admit that there are plenty of times I am listening to a friend answer a question of mine, (being outside of a sexual context), and I am not really listening to what they have to say. I am waiting for an answer I want to hear. This is not real listening since it doesn't involve the act of self reflection, separating what they want the answer to be, and what the answer may actually be. When looking at the book *Keywords In Sound*, Rice talks about listening as “making an effort to hear something” (Rice 2015 183). Listening is an action rather than something passive. It takes energy to be able to truly hear someone. He also talks about how “There is a sense here that sound is subtle, masked, easily missed or difficult to pick up, not necessarily declaring itself or imposing itself on a person’s hearing, so that he or she must attend closely and carefully.” (Rice 2015 184). In the context of my writing I would like to expand this use of the word “sound” to mean the content that has potential to be heard. This may mean a movement, gesture, eyebrow twitch, or glance off to the side. Listening involves an attention to detail where the content that wants to be heard can at times be subtle and soft. “Listening to a person may refer to paying close attention to what that person has to say and often describes a compassionate, sympathetic and/or empathetic mode of engagement” (Rice 2015 187). Listening is inherently an empathetic process. The word “ok” in a sexual context may be used as a tool to please a sexual partner when the real desire is not an “ok” it is a “no”. To hear this possibly subtle difference is to put the work and energy into listening to them as a whole person. It is about putting their words into the context of one's relationship with them. To listen is to be able to see a person for

who they truly are. Listening is about breaking the wall between two people and creating a harmonious rhythm to transfer between them. Listening is about attuning oneself to another person's aliveness.

## Chapter #9 - Effects of CDP Outside of CDP

In this vignette I will be talking about the ways that the practice of CDP affects its dancers outside of the space. In my own experience it greatly affects me in terms of self reflection. I will be going into interview questions for instance “how does the intimacy that CDP consists of affect your outside life”. This question gets at the idea of the ways that dancing and being in your body can impact the instances when we are supposed to be more connected with the mind.

Even though the formation of the CDP group is relatively new, the intimacy it involves really bonds the group members. When Aiden was younger and living in Seattle she and Mac ran in similar dance circles, meaning that some of these people go way back. This is a key reason why Aiden benefits from CDP is because of the histories people share with dance. Most of the dancers come from a childhood of traditional, tap ballet, jazz, training and then slowly realized they wanted to be moving in a more experimental way. As Mac puts it “Most of these people have already gone through their phases of doing the whole rejecting thing”, this is a reason Mac enjoys CDP because the people are at the same point in their dance journey (in Aiden's words “deconstruction”). Aiden has also talked about how she finds most people in the group to be warm hearted, which to me goes back to an idea of trust between one another. Now again going back to Mac's words, he earnestly explains to me during our interview

how “It may help me for instance in a day job working out conflicts it may help me with that because I know how possible it is for people to trust one another and make something of it”. I find his ability to be inspired very beautiful since I feel the same way. CDP’s ability to bring me into a completely new space with sheer strangers and ask me to hold, and touch, lay across them is a powerful thing. There is a very vulnerable thing about asking someone to trust you, and this is what every member does. They are asking a stranger to watch without judgment the way their bodies move in a state of freedom. They are asking a stranger to make sure they are held when non verbally asked to.

On the way to a CDP session I walk by a man who's sitting on the stoop of a store right outside the door to the Sadhana yoga center where CDP takes place. To acknowledge his presence I give a slight smile and say “hi” in a whisper only I could hear. I do this in order to make him feel recognized as someone who has appeared in my walking path, and probably also to make myself feel like a decent person. This becomes a stark contrast to the way I greet my fellow CDP members in the span of about 5 minutes. When dancing I am not only acknowledged as a person in someone else's path, but as a body they will interact with. A touch on the shoulder, or the link of an arm, are the ways I feel acknowledged at the start of dancing during CDP. Aiden answers my question by talking about how it helps her to “connect in more playful ways. There are just so many other possibilities of connecting with out these being aware of what the nature of the relationship is ant therefore the limitations of the ways to connect based on that relationship” The opportunity CDP brings to Aiden is a non traditional way of connecting that isn't bound up in the boundaries set up by our social

norms. It would be weird of me to walk up to the man sitting on the stoop and hold him by the arms and invite him to dance. In the regular world there is little acknowledgment of someone's body, connection exists in the world of the language. Aiden goes on to say that in CDP "There's a little less boundary, there's a little more heart, and there's a little more of an untrammled and open field about how to be together".

I asked a similar question to Will about how CDP in general shapes her outside life. She opens up about how her partner is a "language person. He is a little heady, after we have a conversation, we move so that the conversation doesn't remain just words in my head but the words come down into my entire cellular being. That I have digested those words" . Similar to Aiden, she also finds herself to be a person that benefits from the lack of boundary movement provided. She associates language and "headiness" with a possible stuckness that cuts her off from a way of processing information in her body. She tells me that "A lot of people are cut off from their bodies, their languages stay from the head up and so if you take yor language and allow it to seep into your body. Listening with your body". This idea definitely shows itself in CDP as it is a practice that prioritizes the body's consciousness and the practice of listening to it.

## Coded Ways of Being

I'm sitting with Aiden at her kitchen table where both of our legs don't touch the floor, mine are criss-cross applesauce, and she is seated with one leg bent with her foot on the chair. I guess the fact that we dance together makes our seating habits slightly out of the box, since they are coming from a space where the body is encouraged to

move where it wants. Even more than me she seems very comfortable with squirming about in her chair, and stretching her legs out and then reaching for her toes.

I ask: "Does your dance practice in general shape the way you live in your body outside of dance?"

"It helps me connect in more playful ways. There are just so many other possibilities of connecting without these being aware of what the nature of the relationship is and therefore the limitations of the ways to connect based on that relationship. I have often had a hard time making friends who aren't dancers. It's hard to make friends without a shared language of dance. Which I think means connecting with a shared language that's non-linear and that's not coded in these boxed relationships like we take a walk together, but there's something that's coded in that. There are places of illegibility that come up with dancing that don't come up in other relationships. It's about being eligible to my mind and eye; it's not blurry. It's not why are you pulling her hair and why are you smashing your stomachs on the ground over and over again, those are not legible things, those are impulsive things that do not accomplish anything, they are nothing except for exploring an impulse with another person. They are the way I know how to be. Illegibility is so essential to my practices of intimacy."

The freedom Aiden would like to have in her day to day life, where social norms could be thrown out the window, would be in fact terrifying to a person less connected to their body. A person may be afraid of this also because they may be closed off emotionally, and find comfort in the ordinary and familiar. Hearing Aiden, I sense she finds comfort in the ability to use her body as a mode of connection where it can flail and jump and reach out and pull someone's tail. In usual life, the body stays as



something that could accentuate a sentence or story, but it is rarely the star of the show. Tomi Hahn talks about this same idea where touch is not a normalized mode of communication. She says that “Touch is an intriguing sense that I feel is often taken for granted, or relegated as taboo for its manipulative or sexual connotations” (Hahn 2007 111).

I find there to be very few instances in my life where my instinctual visceral emotional response is seen with as much importance as I do. In school when I am for instance---- writing an essay----- no one really wants me to emote how the reading reminded me of an ex boyfriends mom, and ignited the broken hearted rage inside of me. This would be considered inappropriate and too personal, and yet it is just the truth, what is so scary about that? The relief from a warm spring day can be powerful enough for me to want to get down on my knees, raise my hands up to the sky, and scream of joy. This would be seen as a public disturbance.

In an interview with an interlocutor named Kate, I asked her what would happen if everyone in the world acted as if they were in CDP. We both started laughing.

“What a world it would be!” - she says with a smile.

I ask Will the same question. “Does your dance practice in general shape the way you live in your body outside of dance?”

“My partner is a language person, he is a little heady, after we have a conversation we move. So that the conversation doesn't remain just words in my head but the words come down into my entire cellular being. That I have digested those words”

“ A lot of people are cut off from their bodies, their language stays from the head up and so if you take your language and allow it to seep into your body. Listening with your body. For me things often develop out of a movement instinct, and the language comes later for me. That’s why when I’m teaching I talk about not assuming how different people learn.”

I ask Mac again the same question about the way CDP may change the way he acts in the outside world: what makes us not touch so intimately all the time:

“it wouldn’t be special. I recognize most people wouldn’t do this and they would think it’s transgressive. Maybe they aren’t a physical person.” He is talking about the almost sacredness of touch, that in our society touch is saved for moments of deep connection, whether that be in a romantic context like sex, or a parental context of caring for a child. For something to be special it must be desired at times when it’s unavailable, making the moments when the thing does happen to feel like a reward for the time spent longing. What is special about the space of CDP is that these moments of touch and intimacy don’t read with sexual or scandalous connotations, they read as just a form of connection. In this way CDP is very transgressive to me because of the stark contrast I feel between it and the regular non CDP world. Sex becomes the default when it comes to what people think about when they think about connection. To me this signifies the lack of true connection that is encouraged in our day to day lives, and how rare it can feel at times. The idea of small talk comes up for me as a part of life that is attempting connection but fails. This completely verbal way of connection follows a very specific structure with very specific rules. With small talk you are not allowed to really truly go deep into the question of “how are you”. We are taught to tread lightly in these

waters by giving the other person a seemingly genuine answer, without the potential of burdening them with feelings that are “too real”. I can only imagine the way that touch could deepen this verbal way of connection.

## CDP as creative outlet

Many CDP dancers who I have talked to, convey to me that this practice is a way for them to exercise creative ideas or impulses. Mac thinks that “It makes me feel good about myself and creative impulse, or I'm able to have good ideas and I can come up with them at the drop of a hat every week. It makes me have confidence elsewhere” Although there is no set score during CDP, ideas that emerge from the practice can be used during more formal dance spaces. In reference to CDP being therapeutic for some people, as it can act as a safe space for people to really be themselves he says “it can be a conflict sometimes that there are people and I am treating it as one thing and they are treating it as something else, but that isn't true with this group I think most of us treat it as a craft”. Mac likes the idea that what he is doing is a craft, rather than an emotional exercise, although from what he has said in the past, he also values its emotional and physical freedoms.

## Chapter #10 - "I Will Help You With Your Senior Project!"

I was laying on the ground face up when the timer went off. We were done with our personal warm up practice and onto the group moving. I move my head slightly to the side out of the corner of my eye, a woman standing perfectly upright looking at the wall. I studied her posture by watching the way her ankles held up her legs and the way her back stacked above her hips. I could see so clearly the way her body aligned in just the right way in order to perform what really seemed like the miracle of holding oneself upright. I then watch as the force of gravity all of a sudden pulls her towards the ground as she falls with a thud and a sigh of relief. Her body melts into the floor like butter on the stove. I had just made dinner before coming to CDP and my brain then travels into the world of what I want to eat when I get home. I snap back into reality with the quiet unnerving feeling you get when it seems that someone is behind you. Still on the floor, I turn my body in a way where my spine curves itself into a spiral and I look back at the person passing by in quick and perfect turns. Another person follows closely behind her, almost looking to grab onto her, but being just a beat behind. I can see clearly the tension this creates that circulates in between the two moving bodies. The space is looking to be filled but unable. I slowly start to sprout up from the ground using the muscles in my thighs. I do a quick spin to then land in front of another dancer seated in front of me. Both of her legs are stretched out and being pulled in different directions by two different pairs of arms. I reach out to hold her hand and then with the support of her grip, I let my legs and body hinge and fall to the ground while my feet still press onto the

wood floors. The skin under my feet grip onto the shiny lacquered floor stretching my skin and making a subtle squeak. I grip her one hand with both of my two hands and pull her in the opposite direction. The sweat on my feet makes it so they slowly inch by inch move out from under me. I eventually fall back onto my butt and roll up into a little ball.

I started moving the parts of my body that felt like they needed to be moved. I stretch my arms out above me and circle my wrists and point my fingers as if I am raising my hand. I notice a CDP member behind me who is talking in an almost free word association, word vomit like manner. I had heard this before in CDP, where people like to use the freedom of the space to word vomit as a way of releasing. People talk about a whole number of things like the way they made breakfast that morning, or how they were anxious that they were late to today's session. They may also talk about content that is happening right in front of them, for example remarking on a movement choice, or the way another person grabbed their hand. Because I am so immersed in the physical and bodily world, when people speak in this way that I have described, it can at times go unnoticed. It can become something less than words coming out of a mouth, it can become simply just a background noise. At other times this word vomit was so startling in contrast to the usual silence that it really captured all of my attention. It can be very disorienting and can create an almost dream-like feeling to hear these words that really don't make any sense to a person other than the speaker. It's pretty startling for me as I have based my whole research on the fact that this practice prioritizes communication beyond words, and to be honest I really don't know what to make of it. This free word association word vomit only adds to the freedom that to me

defines the CDP space. Even the boundaries that I thought were in place were proved wrong. Although they are using words, which go against ideas of using the language of the body, the use of words seems to be different from the way words are used in regular conversation. Words in the real world are mostly used to be able to communicate something to someone else. They are designed to be understandable to another that lives outside of your own brain. The words that come out of peoples mouths during CDP are not meant to be coherent to another person's brain, they are meant only as a way to externalize the internal. This to me mimics the way movement is used where it is not necessarily understandable to the other people in the room, it acts as a way to free oneself from the ways that the outside social world dictates and restrains the way in which we use our body. CDP is all about externalizing the internal, for the purpose of seeing oneself in a different light.

I start to listen to what the CDP member behind me is saying and try to find some sort of rhythm within it to tap my foot to. At times I find myself trying to find or create noise in order for me to have something to dance with. I guess this is because the way I was taught to dance was always in relation to sound and music. From behind me I was hearing things about groceries, therapy, confrontation, and the ways of speaking to a child. I roll my body to face the woman behind me and I finally connect the voice to the face. Having entered her personal space, she starts to speak about me. Initially this freaked me out since first off she was breaking the silence that usually governed this CDP space, and second was directly calling me out. Of course you never know how much anyone else is listening or how much they care about people's verbal choices in this embodied space. At first I couldn't make out what she was saying but

then out of the blue I hear the words: “senior project! senior project!”. Not only has she broken the silence, but now she has unveiled what felt like my alternate ego and greatest insecurity. Of course at this point most CDP members knew about my project, but I always did feel as though I was some sort of spy trying to gather information for a secret project on the side. Once I hear the words senior project I perk up and start to point my focus in her direction. “Senior project! I will help you with your senior project! Senior Project! Senior Project!”. These words were the only words I ever needed to hear. They sang like church bells and came to my oh so sweetly. It seemed like she was wanting to get my attention by outing my purpose in the space. She immediately pinpointed my true intention in the CDP space without even having spoken directly to me about it and real life conversation. She pinpointed the reasons why it is hard for me to be present in CDP because of my pending senior project. After hearing those words I have an almost primal instinct where I fling myself over to her and grasp onto her knees. I squeeze her knees with all the might I have, showing her my desperation to finish my senior project, finish college, and move on with my life. I am latched onto her like a barnacle with my legs around her knees which creates a tension by restraining her legs. I look up at her to find a warm smile beaming down at me. We both start to crack up at the moment we had just created. We both knew how non serious and serious it really was. Without knowing these women for very long and only interacting in CDP or in an interview I had conducted, we could still have these moments of communicating with unspeakable meanings.

# Conclusion

When reflecting on where I thought I would be when ending the project, I mostly imagined myself to have found a deep refuge in dance. Although this to an extent is true, I still find myself battling with preconceived ideas about how I should be moving which gets in the way of my natural instincts and experiencing the freedom that can come from movement. I think I may have been naive to think that the process of shedding my habituated movements would be able to happen in the span of months. My more external goals I did feel like I accomplished which were mostly just bonding with CDP members and getting more comfortable through the language of movement.

If I were to keep going with this project I could really see myself using the foundational aspects of CDP as a template for a more experimental way of life. As I have touched on in chapter #8 I do feel that improvisational movement could really improve more professional spaces like school or workplace. I could see myself finding ways to extend the scope of CDP and see what other spaces would be open to movement. I also see myself developing deeper connections with the CDP dancers where I could get to know more about the extended community of experimental dancers in the Hudson Valley.

I would have also loved to go more into ideas of Buddhism in relation to the aging of the body and our connection to our own bodies. When interviewing Kate we touched on these ideas a little bit about how it feels to always be moving with the history of



where your body came from. There is something contradictory to the ideas of buddhism where in dance your life force really does exist in your body. In Buddhist thinking it focuses more on the insignificance of the body and its inherent fleeting quality. The body only acts as a vessel in which to live meaning it has no correlation with the soul on the inside. Dance in the context of CDP values the body as a part of a person's personhood. CDP to me sees the body as much more attached with the "soul" than Buddhism does. I would like to talk to more people in older age about how it feels to move with a body that may now work in the way it used to. In CDP the body is seen as holding the history of the ways it was taught to move. As with Aiden's idea of habituated movement, there are aspects of a person that only live in the body and that are less connected to the person's interiority. CDP requires the body to be able to connect with another, and in this sense the body comes first, and the internal "soul" comes second

# Bibliography

- Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955. Martino Fine Books, 2018.
- Chaiklin, Sharon, and Hilda Wengrower. *The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy: Life Is Dance*. Routledge, 2015.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. First Vintage books edition. Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1979.
- Hahn, Tomie. *Sensational Knowledge : Embodying Culture through Japanese Dance*. Music/Culture. Wesleyan University Press, 2007.
- Halprin, Anna. *Dance as a Healing Art : Returning to Health with Movement & Imagery*. LifeRhythm, 2000.
- Health & Medicine Week*. "Research from University of Antwerp Yields New Study Findings on Mind-Body Therapy (Mindful Apocalypse: Contemplative Anthropology Investigating Experiences of World-Loss in Deep Meditation)." August 11, 2023. Gale Academic OneFile.
- Health & Medicine Week*. "Studies from Aarhus University Reveal New Findings on Mind-Body Therapy (At the Edge of the Sensible: Cultivating Doubt In Radically Engaged Anthropology and Spirituality)." February 4, 2022. Gale Academic OneFile.
- "Hinduism III - Hindu Life - Religions of the World (S24)." Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://bardcollege.brightspace.com/d2l/le/content/14089/Home?itemIdentifier=D2L.LE.Content.ContentObject.ModuleCO-464583>.
- Huntington, C.W., Jr. "Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture." *The Journal of Religion* 96, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 300.
- Kim, Jaegwon. *Philosophy of Mind*. Boulder, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=665820>.

- Larson, Kay. *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012.
- Macaluso, E., and A. Maravita. "The Representation of Space near the Body through Touch and Vision." *Neuropsychologia*, The Sense of Body, 48, no. 3 (February 1, 2010): 782–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2009.10.010>.
- Mendoza, Zoila S. *Shaping Society through Dance: Mestizo Ritual Performance in the Peruvian Andes*. Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Nikkel, David H. *Radical Embodiment*. J. Clarke, 2010.
- Noland, Carrie. *Merce Cunningham : After the Arbitrary*. The University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Novak, David, and Matt Sakakeeny. *Keywords in Sound*. Duke University Press, 2015.  
<https://ezprox.bard.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b1810865&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Novack, Cynthia J. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison, UNITED STATES: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=3445456>.
- Pallaro, Patrizia. *Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999.
- "Religion and Normality - Religions of the World (S24) - Bard Brightspace."  
Accessed April 1, 2024.  
[https://bardcollege.brightspace.com/d2l/lms/dropbox/user/folder\\_submit\\_files.d2l?db=34148&grpId=0&isprv=False&bp=0&ou=14089](https://bardcollege.brightspace.com/d2l/lms/dropbox/user/folder_submit_files.d2l?db=34148&grpId=0&isprv=False&bp=0&ou=14089).
- Rice, Tom, "Listening" in *Keywords in Sounds* (ed. Novak and Sakakeeny), Duke University Press, 2015.
- Sklar, Deidre. "On Dance Ethnography." *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (April 1, 1991): 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1478692>.
- SPACKMAN, JOHN. "Expressiveness, Ineffability, and Nonconceptuality." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 3 (August 1, 2012): 303–14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6245.2012.01522.x>.
- Sutil, Nicolas Salazar. *Motion and Representation: The Language of Human Movement*. MIT Press, 2015.

Tietjen, Ruth Rebecca, and Rick Anthony Furtak. "Loneliness, Love, and the Limits of Language." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 3 (September 2021): 435–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12431>.

Taylor, Diana. *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Vionnet, Claire. "Touch in Contact Improvisation: Proximity/Distance under Intimate Circumstances." *The Senses and Society* 16, no. 3 (September 2, 2021): 320–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2021.1982000>.

