

I touch the question with my own sensibilities. I know that it has touched me when the question responds and provokes thought and personal associations -when it haunts me. Presently, everything I experience in daily life is in *relation* to it. The question has been unleashed upon my unconscious. In my sleep my dreams are imbued with the question. The disease of the question spreads out: to actors, designers, technicians and ultimately to the audience. In rehearsal we try to find shapes and forms to contain the living questions, in the present, on the stage. (Bogart 21)

### Accessing Vulnerability

The following chapter is comprised of the work sessions with the dancers in order to research and access vulnerability. The investigative/creative process was held from Monday January 18, 2010 and spanned until Friday May 7, 2010 -a day before the premiere of the piece. Most of the process was closely related to the concept of *trying*, which is defined in the following manners: “make an effort or attempt; examine or hear; test the limits of; give pain or trouble to; put to the test or give experimental use to; earnest and conscientious activity intended to do or accomplish something” ( “Trying” ).

These annotations can help the reader have a clear understanding of how and why I used this idea as part of my work methodology which was at all times concerned with testing ideas, practices, images and exercises that many times had no relation to one another. I worked with the concepts of *trial & error* and *non-likeness* -proposed in a composition workshop during the summer of 2010 by artists Lindsay Clark, HeJin Jang and Jesse Zaritt- which stated the freedom to investigate without having to meet expectations of accomplishment as well as the possibility of pairing up unlikely practices as alternative ways of research. I wanted to investigate the vulnerability of/within a creative process, to try to remain open and attentive to whatever might happen during the same and leave room for anything and everything; for change, accomplishments and failure -without having in mind the achievement of either. Vulnerability informed the process not only in its own research but on the way in which it unveiled itself throughout.

As stated before, one of my main goals was to bring together a group of dancers into a community of working artists to investigate vulnerability. I chose and invited eight students from the BFA in Dance at Universidad de las Américas Puebla to embark upon this project:

1. María Cecilia Cuesta.
2. Angelina Del Buey.
3. Marianna Escobedo.
4. Lucía González.
5. Cinthia Pérez Navarro.
6. Amira Ramírez.
7. Carolina Tabares.
8. Jimena Villegas.

Angelina and Carolina would not participate as dancers. The former would be in charge of costume design while the latter was to make a photographic register of the whole process. They would be able to participate in all the creative/research process by doing the exercises and having an active voice; they had the choice to refrain from doing certain exercises in order to observe and take notes. Carolina would at times step out of an exercise in order to take pictures.

This part of the document depicts the rehearsals in chronological order. It will however not address every single exercise and rehearsal since -for the sake of the document's length and of the reader's attention- I shall only focus on the most important aspects and exercises of the research so that the reader can get to the core of the investigation; because of this, the reader will eventually encounter leaps in the rehearsals' description.

The structure of the chronicle consists of:

1. the name of the exercises;
2. the description of the exercises;
3. the objectives of the exercises;
4. the inclusion of the dancers' comments and reflections;
5. the results of the exercises;
6. the annotation of my observations and commentaries.

The general objectives for the creation of the strategies and exercises intended to:

1. offer a deep inner work to my dancers;
2. open the body's sensitivity through emotion and physicality;
3. invite group interaction to support collective and creative exchange;
4. awaken and explore human qualities ranging from the subtle to the outrageous;
5. guide the dancers to access certain emotional and physical states through the use of images, words, concepts, music and their own experience;
6. break and go beyond emotional, physical and conceptual limits in each of the dancers;
7. expand the capacity to express, explore and release different energetic qualities that came from each dancer's personal background;
8. explore with deep consciousness to encounter personal limits, the origins of our creative impulses and, investigate both basic and complex personal expressive challenges;

Many exercises in the process were previously conceived and thought of, some were developed after observing what happened in rehearsals and some were simply invented at particular moments. Most of them looked for specific qualities -in terms of movement, emotionality and even performance- that would benefit the creation of the piece. Most of the exercises, had also been previously experienced by myself. The outcome of these experiences and my reflections about them are what made me link them to my own vulnerability. Therefore I chose to work with them with this notion and with the desire to try and access vulnerability in each of the dancers.

Having clarified this and hoping the reader can now relate in an easier manner the practices that will be presented to the goals and objectives mentioned in previous lines, I shall now go on with the selection of the most important rehearsals and exercises.

There are the movements, occurrences, tasks, tricks, and traps that constitute each dance. These actions take place in the experiential realm. Then there is a substructure, an exercise not unlike a meditation, that is applied uninterruptedly throughout a dance. The substructure is a set of conditions that exist in the imaginative realm. It unifies, through practice, the sequence and performance of the dance material. Without the substructure there is no dance. (Hay 48)

## 1. Monday January 18, 2010. Rehearsal No.1

### 1.1 Circle Meditation.

I asked the dancers to sit in a circle to have a meditation that would mark the beginning of the work. We all held hands and I asked each of them to make a silent offering as to what it was they wanted to work with in the process. We remained silent and with our eyes shut for several minutes. Afterwards, one by one opened theirs and waited until the last person had finished.

I decided to commence with a meditation so that the energy and excitement of the dancers would be appeased and focused in the work ahead. I also intended it as a way to make a physical, emotional and intentional connection with each other; the meditation gave the sense of community being created as we were all working towards a common purpose.

### 1.2 Guided Visualization: De/Construction of the Body.

This exercise was held in the form of a guided visualization in which one's own body slowly loses its layers -skin, muscles, organs, bones- until there only remains an essence -however each participant thinks of it. Afterwards the layers little by little are formed again until the practitioners of the exercise find themselves back in the room, each at their own time.

With this exercise I wanted to lead the dancers into a deep exploration, re-acquaintance and opening of their physical, emotional and mental sensibilities and awarenesses. I wanted them to find a kinesthetic response through the images, to explore intimacy together so that in time, the fact of having shared an experience such as this one would develop strong bonds and become the foundations of a group. I wanted to invite them to a journey, to a new way of experiencing life and reality.

The approximate length of the exercise ranged from 70 to 90 minutes. Throughout the whole visualization I played *Spiegel im Spiegel* by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. The use of this particular song was intended to invite a calm heartbeat in the dancers, a comfortable place in which they could allow themselves journeying into the exercise and, a space in which quiet introspection could be encouraged -both by the music and by a soothing tone in my voice.

They all started the practice standing except Jimena -since she was feeling unwell-; she started on the floor. The following is a transcription of the words I spoke when leading the dancers into the first part of the journey of physical de/construction:

Feel your body standing in this room... notice the way it looks... how your feet touch the ground and how gravity keeps your whole body weighed down to the center of the earth... sense your breathing without changing it... what does your body look like?... notice the color of your skin... of your hair... the way it falls... feel the wind in this space lightly caress your skin... see your naked body standing in this place... and start envisioning the tiniest dot of light right where you think your inner center is... it can be anywhere in your body... see this light inside of you... and come to realize it is the very essence of you... that which has always been there... that which is you... and little by little feel how your skin begins to peel away from your body... from the top of your head and down, all the way to your feet and toes... little by little you are losing the biggest organ in your body... your skin... that which connects you to the world... the interface between the rest of your body and your surroundings... and see yourself exposed, with no skin... see your muscled body, those muscular fibers, their color and the way they are shaped... the way the lines of your muscles run... just contemplate your body in this new state... how do you feel the wind now?... and once again, ever so slowly, start shedding and letting go of the muscles in your body... the muscles in your face, the ones that allow your frowning, that let you gesture, that let you smile... notice how some muscles fall away more easily than others... the muscles in your legs... feel how those enormous masses of muscles fall away... feel how you are losing your musculature... take your time, and always remember that tiny light in your center, always with you, every step of the way... your essence... and now you have no more muscles in your body... feel the water running through your body, feel your tissue and organs exposed... how do they look like?... how do you look like?... how does your heart beat now that you have no muscles and no skin?... and slowly feel how the water and other liquids start leaving your body... and as they do so, the organs also start dissolving from your body... they leave your body... they vanish, they disappear... and you're losing yet another layer... there's no tongue, no sex... there's no liver, there are no intestines... there's no brain anymore... there's no heart anymore... and lastly, there are no eyes anymore... what does it feel like to have no eyes?... to not be able to see yourself anymore?... you can only rely on your sensations, whichever they may be... and sense

your skeleton, that configuration of bones, the bony structure that you are... feeling how by this shedding of layers you weigh less and less with each passing second... what does it feel like to be so light?... and don't forget that little bright light, your essence still shining and pulsating at your center, keeping you company... and suddenly, a constant gust of light and soft wind starts dissolving each and every bone in your body, taking them away as if they were sand, as if they were dust... how do you feel as you're losing the rest of what you know to be your physical body?... what does that mean now?... and that tiny light is now there, all alone, floating at the place you thought it to be... pulsating... sharing its light with whatever is out there... your essence, that which is you, is still there... it always has been... there you are... light and energy... what do you feel by being just the essence?... by being re-encountered with your essence, with what you are, with the beginning of your being?... and you're there alone, in your space, inhabiting yourself, your essence...

Each dancer had her own physical and emotional reactions to the exercise and there were other reactions that they all shared. Their bodies responded from the very beginning, some of them were shaking and grew cold. Lucía continually touched her body, as if her hands helped her shed layers. Cinthia started standing very upright but as time passed, her back hunched more and more until she lost the strength to hold herself standing and fell to the ground right at the moment in which all her layers had disappeared (refer to video archive 'De/Construction of the Body' at minute 6:01). Cecilia was the only one who remained standing throughout the whole exercise; she cried constantly and her hands gestured as if trying to hold on to her physical body and at the same time as if she were helping herself let go of her body parts.

Lucía, Cinthia and Marianna shared that they felt they had lost consciousness of the physical space in which they were. Amira confided to have transmitted her whole experience to her imaginary body double, and therefore didn't experience it directly. Everybody agreed that it was important for all of them to have found a guiding light inside their bodies; they were happy to have had the opportunity to reacquaint themselves with their essence, something to hold on to at those moments of great risk and abandon, where letting go seemed to be a necessity. Marianna spoke of “...una sensación de apertura que fue naciendo-creciendo, cada parte de mi cuerpo (manos, pies, piernas, derecho-izquierdo, etc.) fue

tomando vida como seres independientes que no podían siquiera sentirse...<sup>1</sup>” (Escobedo) and Jimena carefully pointed out that “no somos nosotros debido a nuestro físico. Mi ser no está necesariamente definido por mi físico más superficial<sup>2</sup>” (Villegas). Finally, Amira recalled “...me sentí plena y feliz, sentí que todo estaba en orden, que el universo se había ordenado para mí. Que estaba en ese lugar por algo<sup>3</sup>” (Ramírez).

### 1.3 Meditation 1: What is vulnerability for you?

Before wrapping the day's work, I gave my dancers the task of meditating upon the concept of vulnerability and writing what it was and meant for each of them. The following is an abridged version of what some of them wrote.

Carolina wrote that “Se es vulnerable cuando se está expuesto... estar 'expuesto' implica no tener poder... tal vez finalmente todo se reduzca a una necesidad de aceptación. Aceptación primero hacia sí mismo y luego hacia los otros... la vulnerabilidad es algo que nosotros mismos nos creamos, para nosotros... y que sin embargo queda fuera de nuestro control<sup>4</sup>” (Tabares). Cecilia's thoughts also coincided with some of Carolina's, she said that vulnerability “es sentirte expuesto... Sentirte impotente ante alguna situación... La incertidumbre me hace vulnerable, la ignorancia me hace vulnerable... ¿Puede uno sentirse vulnerable a causa de uno mismo? ¿Es necesario que exista un entorno u otra gente para sentirte vulnerable?<sup>5</sup>” (Cuesta). Lucía's reflections were as follows:

Cuando te sientes dañado, minimizado, impotente ante algunas situaciones, ante algunas personas, puede ser algo emocional o físico. Me siento vulnerable cuando noto que alguien que me importa y quiero se encuentra en problemas y no puedo hacer nada... cuando alguien se ha decepcionado de mí, hay otras ocasiones en las que las miradas de las personas me hacen vulnerable y me hacen ceder ante sus deseos. No me gusta mucho aceptar que soy vulnerable y en ocasiones muy sentimental... muchas veces me encuentro vulnerable ante la belleza, la belleza de una nota musical, de un paso en un baile, del atardecer a las 4 de la tarde, de las gotas de lluvia especialmente cuando resbalan de las ventanas o de los coches y de los ojos de la gente y de sus manos. Y me

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1 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

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encuentro vulnerable ante el sufrimiento del otro... me cuesta trabajo el contacto físico, entregar mi peso y mi confianza a las personas es difícil. A veces siento que soy vulnerable a mí misma, yo sola me creo estas situaciones no porque sea masoquista, sino porque es mi forma de recordarme lo que es real, lo que tengo y lo que perdí, lo que me asusta y lo que me mantiene firme, lo que me hace ser<sup>6</sup> (González).

Jimena expressed her thoughts through an image<sup>7</sup>.



Angelina's words stated that vulnerability is

estar susceptible o desprotegido ante alguna situación específica que atenta contra nuestra estabilidad emocional. No lo considero como un defecto pero tampoco como una cualidad... No podemos estar siempre vulnerables ya que no sería nada sano para nuestro cuerpo el estar tan susceptible a todo lo que nos rodea y podría acabar por hacernos mucho daño. Por el contrario, hay situaciones en las que ser vulnerable despierta un grado de sensibilidad en nuestra persona y nos permite sentir y vivir experiencias que nos enriquecen como seres humanos<sup>8</sup> (Del Buey).

6 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

7 Please refer to Appendix for English translation of the words contained in the image.

8 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

Anne Bogart wrote that “it is more comfortable to feel similarities; yet we have to accept the terror of differences in order to create vital art” (87). After carefully reading the dancers' thoughts I realized that the actual differences in our ways of thinking would nurture the process in a broader way instead of just sticking to one single idea of what vulnerability was.

## **2. Friday January 22, 2010. Rehearsal No.2**

### **2.1 Plank 1.**

I was first introduced to this exercise in 2003 by actress and actor's trainer Citlali Treviño. In it, a person stands in the middle -with eyes closed and a straight spine- while the rest of the group surrounds her. The person in the middle has to eventually let go of her center and fall, with her body straight as a board, without bending the knees or opening the eyes in order to catch herself from falling. Once she lets go, the people surrounding her are responsible for catching and passing her on to someone else's hands.

With the Plank, I wanted the dancers to trust their safety and physical well being to their peers. It was also a metaphor in which we would always be supported by the others at all times, that we would always be aware of one another.

There were many different reactions to the exercise. Marianna was at first terrified to do it but as soon as she let go and felt taken care of, her body released more into the action and later she wanted to keep on doing it and allowing herself to fall more (refer to photo archive, Plank). Amira said she felt very good and that her trust in her peers had grown even more. Cinthia had a very difficult time when doing this exercise; at first she couldn't let go of her center and she would be very nervous, her voice trembled and her hands were clenching the fabric of her clothes; her sternocleidomastoid was very tight as well and throughout her body there was also a lot of tension (refer to photo archive 'Plank'). Cecilia had no problem engaging as a plank, from the very beginning her weight was fully shared and everybody was receptive and attentive to her openness to fall.

### **2.2 Blind Manipulations.**

This was an exercise that I learned from dance artist Mariah Maloney in 2009. In it, a person stands with her eyes closed and her body is available so she can slowly receive clear impulses -given with the hands of the fellow dancers- which are meant to invite a soft movement. Later, the rest of the group

can also guide and help the person travel freely through space -and always taking care of her-, while she still has her eyes closed.

The most important annotations after these exercises were how Cinthia had a problem in trusting her physical wellness to others as well as how she constantly holds herself together and how Lucía is discomforted by touch, whether when she has to touch someone or be touched by somebody else. These observations were helpful when developing other strategies for the girls to try out in further rehearsals.

### 2.3 Meditation 2: How much do I hold on to life?

I believe vulnerability is part of what make us who we are, it connects us in an unimaginable way, “to be alive is to be vulnerable” (L'Engle, 193). To be vulnerable is to feel life. I wanted to know if the girls were concerned with similar things and in so wondering posed the question 'How much do I hold on to life?'. Regarding this, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of Shambala International, wrote: “...once you have that experience of the presence of life, don't hang on to it. Just touch and go. Touch that presence of life being lived, then go. You do not have to ignore it. 'Go' does not mean that we have to turn our backs to the experience and shut ourselves off from it, it means just being in it without further analysis and without further reinforcement” (36).

How much do I hold on to life?, Carolina reflected:

Me aferro en cuanto soy conciente de su grandeza, pero creo que me aferro más a la vida de los otros seres que son compañeros y complementos de mi existencia por la forma en que su presencia me define. Me aferro, ya en un plano más intelectual (o quizá no tanto), en la medida que intento que mis acciones preserven la vida de la naturaleza toda. Me aferro todo lo posible pero *por* la vida, porque no me preocupa el momento, todos los momentos que vengan después de que la existencia de mi 'conciencia' termine. Me aferro a la vida mientras haya vida<sup>9</sup> (Tabares).

Jimena wrote: “Bastante, me alegra estar en vida, estar aquí. Pero a la vez sé que va a terminar, no voy a estar aquí mucho tiempo, y todo esto cada día va terminando. Mi vida vale mucho a pesar de los tropiezos, pero valen más los logros, el levantarme, cuidarme, hacer lo que debo y quiero hacer. Me aferro a estar viva<sup>10</sup>” (Villegas). In a similar way, Cecilia said she related holding on to life with “miedo

<sup>9</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>10</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

a la muerte. Estoy consiente de que en cualquier momento puedo dejar de existir... Me aferro mucho a la vida cuando mi espíritu no está tranquilo. Cuando me siento en paz conmigo misma, me siento tranquila de espíritu y cuando es así el hecho de dejar de existir no me preocupa... Me gusta vivir, disfruto la vida y por eso me aferro a ella<sup>11</sup> (Cuesta). Amira's and Lucía's writings, among other things, were also related to loss. Each of them wrote:

Yo nunca creí que me aferraba a la vida. Antes de que muriera mi mamá no le temía a la muerte ni tenía ningún sentimiento de aferrarme a la vida. Todo cambió cuando fui por ella a Vancouver y sabía que iba a morir... Sentí que el cuerpo era solo un medio. Vi la temporalidad, fragilidad y vulnerabilidad de lo que somos, que morimos y dejamos de existir, que nuestro cuerpo se debilita, se lastima, se enferma. Cuando la vi a ella me vi a mí... Soy escéptica, no creo en muchas cosas y la razón para mí siempre es más fuerte que la subjetividad... somos un cuerpo energético y físico que experimenta este mundo, que lo percibe y le da significado a su interacción con su propio mundo. Pero somos temporales. Tenemos un tiempo aquí. Y ese tiempo eventualmente se termina<sup>12</sup> (Ramírez).

...nos aferramos a la vida en aspectos materiales y emocionales... todos estamos muriendo, cuando perdemos sueños, inocencia, con el paso del tiempo... podríamos decir que eso es la vida, las experiencias ganadas y las batallas perdidas... no me gusta pensar en la muerte y creo que por lo tanto me aferro bastante a la vida, si bien formamos parte de una cultura en la que la muerte es celebrada y en ocasiones se hace hasta burla de ella, no me gusta pensar en la muerte tan cercana... el temor de perder el cuerpo es a veces muy grande, o al menos lo es para mí ya que es el modo de expresar que tengo<sup>13</sup> (González).

Marianna and Cinthia did not share this meditation. Meanwhile, Angelina said “Vivo en una lucha constante, siempre estoy tratando de diferenciar entre situaciones por las que vale la pena estresarse, entristecerse, etc. Y en realidad no he podido llegar a ninguna conclusión<sup>14</sup>” (Del Buey).

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11 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

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I also meditated upon the concept -as well as all the other questions that I posed to the dancers throughout the process- since it was of great importance to me. These are my thoughts:

What is it that makes us realize we are alive? That we are truly living and that every action we do -however small or insignificant- can actually alter the course of our whole lives and of the world? When I think and speak of vulnerability I do not feel that it separates me from the person standing next to me, rather it unites me. It makes me see how similar and connected we are, because at some point the thing that makes me vulnerable now has probably made that person feel vulnerable in the past. Probably, at the same time as it makes me vulnerable now, it might as well make that person feel vulnerable in the future. We are who we are because of the similarities we hold to each other, because of what connects and unites us. That is what makes us human. I hold on to life, to the life I am living and sharing with everybody now. I hold on to life in the present moment. I hold on to what I have right now<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. Friday January 29, 2010. Rehearsal No.4

#### 3.1 Meditation 3: Where I am is what I need / What is happening is what I need.

Deborah Hay spoke of the 30 minute practice of a performance meditation called 'where I am is what I need, cellularly'. I reflected upon the proposed idea and thought of it only as 'where I am is what I need'. I furthered the thought and developed a second idea which was 'what is happening is what I need'. When I applied these two phrases to my work and my everyday life, I seemed to be in a state of constant presence; I surrendered to what was happening at that moment. Seeing what practicing these concepts did for me, I decided we would practice them as a group, both as a physical investigation and as a constant meditation and appropriation of the concepts that could alter and inform the way we approached work. I wanted to see how these ideas affected them.

Having applied these throughout the whole process from the moment the practices were proposed gave us a more committed presence during our work, we engaged more strongly in it while at the same time allowed for moments of lightness -like goofing around and dancing to silly tunes before the day's work- that imbued the research with a much needed release, because of the themes we were dealing with.

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<sup>15</sup> English is the original language in which this reflection was written.

The dancers meditated upon these ideas. Carolina said that in her life “la consideración de algo como lo que condensan estas frases me ha permitido estar mas feliz y tranquila, aunque en los momentos cruciales no sea tan fácil de entender<sup>16</sup>” (Tabares). Jimena felt that practicing the concepts aided her development, “en todo momento me conviene mentalmente y físicamente pensar eso, así no me permito pensar en cualquier otra cosa. Más que nada lo tomo como una frase la cual me ayuda a hacer mejor las cosas y realmente siento que no necesito estar en ningún otro lugar en ese momento<sup>17</sup>” (Villegas). Cecilia's reflections speak of how she as a dancer grew more affected and committed to the work with the practice of such concepts; she wrote:

'Donde estoy es lo que necesito'. Me gusta aplicarla a diferentes cosas... Cuando pienso en esta frase me pregunto ¿por qué lo necesito? y lo curioso es que siempre encuentro una respuesta positiva que me motiva... Esto marca mi vida, esto me llena... donde estoy en este momento es hermoso... 'Lo que está ocurriendo es lo que necesito'. Lo aplico a mi vida diaria, desde la primera vez que lo utilizamos en ensayo pasó a ser parte de mi día a día y parte de mí, independientemente de lo que haga<sup>18</sup> (Cuesta).

### 3.2 Running between walls.

In 2005 I was working as an actor for the staging of a Molière play. Director Susana Wein aimed to elicit an emotional response that was not particularly related to the comedy that the piece asked for. She wanted us to find feelings such as despair, anguish and even anger with this exercise so we would later be able to access more easily the difference between comedy and the aforementioned emotional states.

The exercise is done in group. Everybody walks from one end of the room to the other; when you get to the wall you tap it. Little by little the walking develops into jogging and the tapping into hitting the wall and, before you know it, the jogging has turned into a frantic run and you push yourself off the walls in order to continue with the exercise.

I used this exercise as warm-up. Since they would be running for around thirty minutes, their bodies would be ready for the rest of the work ahead and, having experienced the exercise before, I knew that it would open an emotional door to many feelings -e.g. power, struggle, defeat, willingness to

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go on, despair, etc.- and help each of them unleash such sentiments. The following is a transcription of what I saw happening during the exercise:

Eight people standing. Quiet, silent and focused. Seeing where they are heading no matter how short the distance. In time, one of them decides to and enters the space, walking willingly and unknowingly of what was ahead. The rest start feeding in and the paths become clear. The energy at the core of each of them is deeply felt. They are together, walking, accompanying each other. They become a group, a tribe that heads towards the unknown. Breath is heard, panting is starting to happen and footsteps are sounding strongly on the floor. Eight gusts of energy feeding a larger one, going back and forth through the space. Drums in the near distance. The space is being moved by their bodies, air is created by their moving bodies and movement evolves into a whirlwind of emotions. There is despair, a struggle to keep on going, an enormous will not to stop, they are running. One of the walls is white and there they come in, push, scream and leave it only to return again, seconds later. There is a sense of a defeated defeat. A threshold is surpassed and tiredness no longer matters, or does it? One can no longer hear the drums, only screaming, panting, difficulty to breathe and footsteps. They are still running until they slowly fade into stillness.

### **3.3. Performance Practice: Pitiful Sensuality.**

I created this concept as the first performance practice they would do. Its creation was completely arbitrary; I found myself brainstorming, came up with many words and when I paired those two, I felt a strong resonance in me and imagined that it would represent an investigative challenge for the dancers. I wanted to see how they would react to this phrase. Performance practices are never fixed, they are determined by the practitioner and are thus always ever-changing (refer to video archive 'Pitiful Sensuality'). Therefore, I cannot offer a proper description of the exercise but the dancers' experiences.

Cecilia referred to her experience as “una seducción patética. Un rebajarse absoluto. Querer expresar el deseo a través del cuerpo sin lograrlo... El hombre por encima de la mujer; el hombre superior. ¿Y la mujer? Degradada, pisoteada, por él, por su indiferencia. Pero esa sensualidad lastimera tiene poder. Aunque eso implique ser menos, rebajarme, ser patética. Entonces, esa inferioridad de la mujer en relación al hombre, la mujer misma lo permite<sup>19</sup>” (Cuesta).

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<sup>19</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

Lucía's comments reflected one of the desired goals of any performance practice, as quoted in the previous chapter, the body becomes “a site of exploration to which the dancer must remain vigilantly attentive. Body does not succumb to the dancer's agency -striving, failing, mustering its resources to try again. Instead it playfully engages, willing to undertake new projects and reveal new configurations of itself with unlimited resourcefulness” (xvi).

Creo que el cansancio derivado de la corrida entre paredes ayudó a tener cierta concentración aunque al mismo tiempo no tenía mucho control de mi cuerpo y esto de alguna forma hizo más sencillo tener la sensación de sensualidad lastimera, el cuerpo simplemente fluía y los movimientos salían sencillamente pesados, lentos y eran movimientos que no esperaba que mi cuerpo pudiera hacer, sobre todo con tanto cansancio encima. Creo que el sentimiento se reflejaba bien en el cuerpo y éste se movía de formas inesperadas, siguiendo más que nada sus impulsos y no algo predeterminado<sup>20</sup> (González).

Cinthia actively participated in every live discussion that we had as a group, however she rarely shared her experiences in writing. This one is a rare exception: “Este ejercicio abatió totalmente mi ser, es una prueba donde es inevitable toparse con uno mismo y con tus propios límites. Fue muy incómodo, riguroso, tedioso; pero a pesar de todo ello, encontré una fortaleza en mí misma que no tenía idea de que estaba ahí<sup>21</sup>” (Pérez Navarro).

“The energy of individuals who face and incorporate their own terror is genuine, palpable and contagious. In combination with the artist's deep sense of play, terror makes for compelling theatre both in the creative process and in the experience of an audience” (Bogart 79). Through the dancers' reflections and through what I witnessed in rehearsal made me realize I was starting to accomplish a goal; I wanted them to try and confront themselves in order to access their vulnerability and create from a place of deeper honesty and knowledge of oneself, despite how terrifying or discomforting this confrontation could be. I presented them the situations and they willingly ventured into them.

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<sup>20</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>21</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.



### 3.4 Sculptures.

I reprised this exercise from Butoh dancer and choreographer Diego Piñón because of the strong emotional effects it had in me; I wanted the dancers to try it out and was curious about the outcome. I also knew it would be a strong practice for them and sensed that I would set a landmark in the research process.

The dynamic can be done in couples or trios and -in the duet form- is developed as follows: person A is the sculptor and person B is the clay. B stands with her body relaxed, with no fixed position and eyes open or closed while A readjusts B's body parts into new positions that B has to hold for an indefinite time. B has the choice to keep her eyes open until they are too sculpted. A is to take pauses to observe B and see if a particular shape has affected her. B naturally enters an altered state of consciousness and emotionality because of the physical alterations suffered. When this happens A can continue to shape B to see if new emotions are elicited and when A chooses to, she can leave B frozen in that position, perhaps making very small adjustments. A abandons B in that position. After several minutes, A slowly brings B back to the starting position.

This exercise aimed to open the body's sensitivity through emotion and controlled physicality, through work with personal background and energy to encounter one's own limits and emotions. An array of feelings, thoughts and emotions bursted out of everybody -both Sculptor and Clay- when we applied this practice to our process. Their bodies were in pain, the brain stopped thinking for a while and plain, raw emotion exuded “Intensidad. Cansancio. Desesperación. Vulnerabilidad. Fuerza. Rudeza. Calambre. Lágrimas. Tristeza<sup>22</sup>” (Escobedo).

The following transcriptions depict the experience of some of the dancers when it was their turn to be Clay.

...el tiempo no pasó tan lento como imaginé que sería... lo último fue la peor: mi cabeza se encontraba hacia atrás viendo el techo... me di cuenta de que no sentía nada más que el dolor físico, la desesperación de querer cambiar de posición... lo que más quería era que Jimena se diera cuenta de que no estaba bien y que se apiadara de mí y me cambiara de posición, pero no lo hizo. Cuando al fin pude romper la posición noté que mis emociones se desbordaban y mi primer reacción fue enojarme, no con Jimena sino conmigo. Sin embargo, no sé porque sentí ese enojo, fue extraño ya que me repetía

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<sup>22</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

constantemente que no era posible que fuera tan débil como para no soportar una posición incómoda, pero después me di cuenta de que sí lo había logrado, lo había soportado, tal vez no de la forma que yo esperaba pero al final me vi sorprendida por mí misma y mi capacidad física, aunque no me sentía realmente feliz. Creo que me cuesta trabajo aceptar la derrota o aceptar que las cosas no salen en la forma en la que yo las tenía previstas, de la forma que yo quisiera<sup>23</sup> (González).

On similar track, Jimena wrote:

Me sentí muy fuera de mí, sin poder hacer nada por mi bienestar, solo podía estar y respirar. Fue horrible ese sentimiento, es como que te quitan todos los derechos sobre ti, tanto poder observar, poder moverte, poder hablar, solo puedes respirar y pensar. No pude con ese dolor interno, desesperación, enojo, soledad. Mas bien pude pero no me gustó, te encuentras atrapada en ti misma, y en manos de otra persona. Me pude dar cuenta de lo poco que podemos llegar a ser... Me sentí mal, me sentí tan manipulada y pequeña. No logro entender por qué me sentí tan mal ese día pero no podía dejar de llorar y de sentir un latido muy fuerte en mi estómago y un hoyo en él<sup>24</sup> (Villegas).

Angelina had a different experience than the rest of the group; she found interesting “que algunas hablaban de haberse encontrado a sí mismas mientras estaban siendo esculpidas, a mí me pasó lo contrario, llegó un momento en el que perdí la noción de muchas cosas, incluyéndome a mí misma<sup>25</sup>” (Del Buey). Amira turned out to have a deep emotional connection to the exercise -as well as the rest of the group. When it ended, she excused herself and left the room.

Tenía ganas de llorar todo el tiempo pero no entendía por qué... era más un reto físico que psicológico o emocional. En una posición sí pensé que me iba a quebrar... Todo terminó, pero yo no me sentía bien. Sentí que estábamos todos trabajando con procesos complicados, personales, emocionales, psicológicos y profundos... era un momento de reflexión introspectiva... fue un momento fuerte<sup>26</sup> (Ramírez).

It was noticeable how all of them wrote and spoke of finding themselves mirrored in the person they were sculpting and how this also affected them, Cecilia and Marianna both spoke of being deeply connected to each other and how they felt that the things being done to one or the other were also felt

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23 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

24 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

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26 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

directly by them. Angelina reported a similar feeling: “Cuando a mí me tocó esculpir a Cinthia, sentí un tremendo conflicto por saber que de alguna forma le estaba haciendo daño, ya no la quería tocar<sup>27</sup>” (Del Buey). As Carolina's Sculptor, Amira wrote “...podía leer sus pensamientos, podía saber qué estaba sintiendo. Y sentí que recordó a su papá en un momento. Y lo que hice fue acomodar sus brazos como si hubiera alguien entre ellos. Y la dejé ahí. Es interesante cómo puedes sentirte que tienes el control sobre alguien más, que tú puedes decidir o guiar cómo va a pensar o sentir<sup>28</sup>” (Ramírez). What Lucía reflected made me think of the vulnerability within the manipulator and the voyeur. I related quite closely to this since I felt I was being both a manipulator and a voyeur in all this process, I presented them things to do and witnessed, but almost never took part in the practices.

...al principio no sentí que fuera a ser un ejercicio que realmente profundizara en las emociones y al comenzar, no mentiré, me sentí bien al poder manipular a Jimena de la forma en que yo quisiera... Sin embargo, después de la tercera posición comencé a sentir cierta incomodidad, sobre todo porque tenía que colocarla en formas en las que ella no estuviera cómoda y esto me causaba cierto desagrado y preocupación por ella. Así que comencé a acelerar el proceso para que estuviera lo menos posible en una posición; mientras hacía esto podía darme cuenta y reconocer ciertos patrones de mi mismo cuerpo en los de ella, como si fuera un reflejo de mis debilidades, mis fortalezas... Al ver a todas las demás en sus esculturas me di cuenta de que todas habían desarrollado una conexión interna y emocional muy fuerte... muchas de las posiciones eran bastante simples pero muy poderosas en intención y otras eran muy fuertes también en apariencia; de cierta forma todas eran fascinantes y a pesar de saber que no estaban muy cómodas, no podía dejar de verlas y observar<sup>29</sup> (González).

I believe this was one of the most important days of rehearsal. It allowed all of them to access frightening states of physicality, emotionality and risk. Excepting the 'running between walls' exercise, the rest of the strategies were quite subtle but held a very strong energetic demand and they all met it fully, they engaged in the work and I can say that they accessed deep emotional and physical spaces that they don't visit often -as some of them affirmed. “Vulnerability is very much about internal courage and strength. It is about knowing oneself and understanding that in order to relate to the external world we

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27 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

28 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

29 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

must allow others to live inside of us” (Putman); sharing and experiencing this together helped them realize that it was safe and good to confront oneself; they had connected as a group and they saw into each other, “though we cannot share the pain of others' bodies, or the body itself, souls can find sympathetic resonance, reverberate with each other, and in so doing create a bridge” (Amagatsu I), a connection as human beings and as a community of working artists that helped them support each other throughout these and all the other exercises. They said it was a very strong rehearsal day but admitted that it had been necessary. Later, Cecilia commented how she thought repeatedly during the whole rehearsal of 'what is happening is what I need', that it helped her lose all diverting thoughts and stay engaged in the work.

#### 4. Monday February 1, 2010. Rehearsal No.5

##### 4.1 Performance Practice: Pleasure in Discomfort.

I was introduced to this practice by artist Jesse Zaritt in 2009. My research led me to arrive to a place of constant risk and surprise in which my body followed strongly its impulses and was guided by this paradoxical concept. My body discovered new ways of moving and put itself at risk experimenting difficult or unlikely physical scenarios and forms; somehow I knew there would be no harm in risking because I had learned to trust my body's innate wisdom; there was however such a big sense of excitement and possibility. I felt free in my movement and for the first time in many months I felt that my capacity for improvisation had changed completely; I no longer repeated the known movements and common physical places in which I fell every time I improvised, this time new movement was being born and my mind was constantly surprised at all the possibilities my body unearthed.

I gave my dancers this concept and they each approached it as they understood it. Some tried apparent forms of physical pleasure and even fell into cliché acts of pleasure or discomfort. With the passing of time, those first clichés disappeared and they found new strange ways in which their bodies moved them. They put themselves in awkward physical positions and tried out movement, tried to find some sort of ease or enjoyment in it. Some were discomforted because of the practice, because they couldn't find how to access it,

¿Cómo sentir el placer en poco espacio? Eso es incómodo. Y qué tal cuando el placer llega, lo sientes y lo quieres disfrutar pero tu mente te dice que no. ¿Tu mente... o tu conciencia, tu moral? ya no quería más placer, prefería sentirme cómoda. La

incomodidad que sentía más que física era como emocional. Sentía angustia, sentía preocupación. Cuando me libré de esas sensaciones me sentí mal. Sentí remordimiento, me arrepentí... Mi cuerpo se sintió incómodo y rechazó lo que lo causaba; entonces lo correcto fue eso. Lo que dijo mi cerebro fue un razonamiento afectado por las reglas de la sociedad. Pero mi cuerpo en realidad es el que tiene razón porque es el que experimenta las sensaciones<sup>30</sup> (Cuesta).

The results of this practice were somewhat different from what I expected. What was an extremely joyous and eye/body-opening practice for me, for most of them it seemed to have become awkward. What seemed at first to be a failed practice was a successful one in my point of view. Comfort disappeared altogether and though they felt limited by the concept they experienced a very satisfying exploration. The practice threw them off their tracks and out of their accustomed way of working on things known and feeling comfortable. Lucy remembers:

Creo que cuando la incomodidad es física es más soportable, uno no sabe lo que el cuerpo es capaz de soportar hasta que lo hace, pero la incomodidad emocional no es tan sencilla de manejar. Existe la relación corporal y emocional y que nuestra corporeidad puede afectar nuestro estado emocional. La verdad es que a mí me costó mucho trabajo poder encontrar ese placer<sup>31</sup> (González).

## 5. Friday February 5, 2010. Rehearsal No.6

### 5.1 Visualization & Improvisation: The 75 trillion-celled body.

I structured an improvisation that departed from the idea of our bodies being composed of 75 trillion cells -an idea I found in Deborah Hay's writings. I wondered, if every cell in my body had the capacity to speak and show that through movement, if every cell would speak at the same time, how would my body react and show that multiplicity? (refer to video archive '75 trillion-celled body')

I wanted this exercise to present them with an opportunity to let go of their rational thinking so their bodies could lead them through the improvisation. I wanted to see how this freedom showed itself in their moving bodies and I wanted to see if they would experience an inner connection with them. How would this alter their movement, perceptions, their awareness of their bodies, of the space inhabited and of the others?

<sup>30</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>31</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

They all chose to start on the floor and Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* played throughout the whole improvisation. As the music progressed, each of them started to experience movement. At one point Amira resembled a worm who had been sprayed with drops of lime; all her body moved uncontrollably on the floor, twirling, twitching and rolling itself around, sometimes it even seemed as if she were battling under water, “guié mi cuerpo por puros impulsos... No me sentí a partir de una separación sino de una unión... Fui consciente de todo y cada parte de mí. Mi cuerpo energético, emocional y de sensación, así como mi cuerpo físico. Todos se volvieron una enteridad...”<sup>32</sup> (Ramírez). Cecilia lay with her face on the floor and suddenly her hands repeatedly hit the ground while the rest of her body remained quite still, she then sat on her heels and she rocked her body as a pendulum, “hubo mucha voluntad y deseo a lo largo de toda mi experiencia”<sup>33</sup> (Cuesta). Jimena was on the floor and she managed to stand following the impulses on her body, she became a moving picture and the unpredictability in her movement evidenced how all cells were awake and guiding her to unknown places, “me di cuenta de todo lo que se mueve cada vez que decido bailar, caminar, respirar. ¡Quise moverme como loca! Me comparé con una bola de adorno de Navidad que debes agitarla y salen brillitos o bolitas”<sup>34</sup> (Villegas). Cinthia's movements constantly reached out and then spiraled inwards, resembling formations of DNA chains; her whole body appeared to be caught inside a bigger cell that contained all the rest, “me pasó que sentía espasmos, una quietud y luego histérica. Mis pies estaban en el piso pero el resto de mi cuerpo era incontrolable, hasta llegar a un punto intolerable de vértigo, de mareo”<sup>35</sup> (Pérez Navarro). Marianna's hair resembled the movement of ocean waves as she jumped and contorted on the floor; there was a moment in which she was jumping and she suddenly burst out running around the whole studio, “los 75 trillones de células fueron luz... en todo el cuerpo era una burbuja brincolina, felicidad en todo, invadía mi cuerpo... correr, admirar, disfrutar y sobre todo sentir, sentir el aire en mis brazos, mi cabello disturbado”<sup>36</sup> (Escobedo). Carolina remained on the floor with her arms open wide to each side, and the only movement taking place was that of her head moving very slowly while her cheek appeared to sense the texture of the floor, “Trato de llegar a un movimiento partiendo de la imagen de que todas ellas estén hablando al mismo tiempo... es bastante complicado... me imagino como una sola gran célula... ahora no siento los movimientos por separado. Siento un solo

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32 Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

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gran flujo, una armonía. Pero esta no dura mucho... cuando se logra estar en un estado donde el movimiento 'no se piense', entonces se llega a situaciones, a formas, que de otra forma no pueden alcanzarse<sup>37</sup> (Tabares). Lucía's body trembled, shook, fell lower on the ground and recovered itself, her eyes were closed and when she moved in a stronger, less controlled way you could see her eyelids open slightly, only to showcase how they were blank; her body breathed and took its time to feel sound, space and inner sensations while at the same time it burst in new movements that made her travel on the floor and in space, “fue como si todo mi cuerpo pudiera hablar. Ocurrió como una explosión y al mismo tiempo una implosión<sup>38</sup>” (González).

Amira and Carolina both said how perfect the music had been and how it instantly brought them in touch with their cellular selves; the rest also agreed and commented how music helped each of them and benefited the exercise.

The biggest achievement with this improvisation was that the dancers attained a stronger connection with their bodies and how they related to them and paid heed to what their bodies were teaching them. The exercise also succeeded in having them forget about mind and reason and allow impulse, sensation and body to move them. (refer to photo archive '75 trillion-celled body')

## 6. Monday February 8, 2010. Rehearsal No.8

### 6.1 Performance Practice: Abject Virtuosity.

I had several email conversations about this work with fellow dancer Jesse Zaritt. It was he who invented this performance practice and gave it to me to try it out on the dancers; in return I gave him the practice of Pitiful Sensuality to try on his dancers.

For most of the girls, the concept was very difficult to understand. Jimena and Cecilia both agreed that they had a hard time but that they invested themselves in making shapes that were considered pretty or physically virtuosic -e.g. raising the legs high or moving their arms in beautiful patterns and trying to accomplish many pirouettes-; they also commented how they ceaselessly repeated the shapes they developed and how that gave them a nauseating feeling; they both concluded that these shapes became unbearable, they hated them.

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<sup>37</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>38</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

## 6.2 Sensitizing: Observe & Touch.

This exercise consisted of one person standing with eyes closed and in a relaxed position. The rest would scrutinize and examine the body of that person. First, they just stared at her from a certain distance, carefully seeing how that body was composed, how it stood, how it breathed, its skin color, etc.; later, they could get close and look for nuances -like freckles, moles...-, smell it and see if it smelled the same in all its parts, etc. After some minutes of just observing they had the opportunity to touch that person's body anywhere and investigate it however they wanted. At any moment, the person being touched could call out a 'boundary' when someone touched her in an area she didn't want to be touched in and everybody would have to refrain from touching her; she would take a moment and then the exercise would resume. The touch didn't necessarily have to be soft and considered, they could perhaps pull the skin or pet and slap certain parts. Each person was touched for around ten minutes.

I wanted to see how much they could engage in touching another person if that person's body was completely available for them to touch anywhere. I wanted to try and heighten their physical awareness. I wanted to see how they touched and was very curious in finding out what kind of emotions and/or physical responses the touch itself would elicit in them -knowing that all these responses and emotions were subjected to that particular day.

I also wanted to see if Lucía -who previously admitted having a difficulty in touching and being touched- would invest herself into the touch and surpass a barrier. When it was finished, she commented “Me sentía extraña pero no de mala manera... al principio me dieron muchas cosquillas pero era rico y me relajé... Nunca había sentido que tantas cosas le ocurrieran a mi cuerpo al mismo tiempo, me gustó... Es muy extraño que te toquen por todo el cuerpo, solo estamos acostumbrados a que nos toquen partes específicas... Cuando solamente me observaban, sentía mucho calor a mi alrededor, me quemaba<sup>39</sup>” (González).

Carolina remarked that the exercise “...me ayudó a tener una percepción simultánea de muchas partes de mi cuerpo<sup>40</sup>” (Tabares). Jimena's tears started to come out when she was being touched, “Me sentí muy triste y también quería tocarlas mientras me tocaban... hoy era el día en que en verdad necesitaba ser tocada... sentí que me querían mucho y las quería abrazar a todas<sup>41</sup>” (Villegas). Meanwhile, Cecilia thought that “...al tocarme varias partes de mi cuerpo pensé que eso me haría sentir

<sup>39</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>40</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>41</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.



rara pero nunca pasó, al contrario, quería que me tocaran cada vez más<sup>42</sup> (Cuesta); Cinthia agreed to the same experience and Amira's physical sensation was described as “me sentí super maleable, sentí que mi cuerpo se doblaba<sup>43</sup>” (Ramírez).

They all affirmed that they wanted the exercise to last longer, they were very pleased with it and wanted to keep exploring more to see what other emotions would come out. The goals I had were met and I decided to lengthen the time of the exercise attending to the needs my dancers expressed when we reprised it in further rehearsals. There was never a 'boundary' called out. (refer to photo archive 'Observe & Touch')

## 7. Friday February 22, 2010. Rehearsal No.9

### 7.1 Performance Practice: The Broken Body.

When reading some of Kazuo Ohno's words, I found the following teaching:

You won't engage our attention unless you demonstrate a willingness to disjoint your entire body. Try to dance in the spirit that every single joint in your body could unhinge itself at any moment. You've never done so before, so how about trying to break new ground today. Please just do it, there's *nothing* I can teach you (219).

These words inspired me to develop another performance practice, The Broken Body. I wanted to help them access the practice in an easier way and gave them the image of their bones being made out of glass. What would happen if at any given time, that glass structure would shatter? I believed this practice would lead me to a specific physical movement quality I was after -somewhat intuitively- and wanted to discover if their bodies could access a more physical vulnerability that I felt could be found in the practice.

Arvo Pärt's *Miserere* accompanied their research. Jimena's body was on the floor in a fetal position, she experienced sudden unexpected contractions from the abdomen while she slowly spun around herself -while still on the ground- and the joints in her arms gave the impression of dislocating themselves and rotating into new possibilities of movement; she contracted and extended abruptly throughout the research. Meanwhile, Cecilia's body violently rolled on its back, came back, stretched out her limbs, she was dancing a constant falling/traveling/recovering all around the studio; it appeared as if her cervical vertebrae were shattered and the head was just free to flail at the top of her body, as a

<sup>42</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

<sup>43</sup> Please refer to Appendix for English translation.

consequence of the rest of her movement. There were some brief seconds in which all of them at the same time were moving in slow motion, only responding to very subtle electric impulses emanating from their bodies and being exteriorized as sudden bursts of energy through their backs and limbs. Lucía's body moved as if she had an endless number of joints; at one point she was sitting on her heels while her spine was arched back and her head loose, her elbow joints were just allowing her forearms to go back and forth and her hands remained in a relaxed position, with her fingers also loose. (refer to video archive 'The Broken Body' at minute 2:16)

## 8. Monday February 15, 2010. Rehearsal No.10

### 8.1 Reflecting upon rash decision-making and a breakdown.

It was rehearsal time and I had planned the day ahead of us. Once we were about to start, I chose to not go through with the plan and decided to show them a video of a real-life woman who had cancer and who was portrayed in what seemed to be a Butoh-esque physical exploration of a warehouse space in which she described how her body felt when sick. Three of my cast members -Amira, Carolina and Jimena- had had experiences in which family members suffered from this illness. With each passing second I realized how much the video was affecting the three of them particularly. Fifteen minutes through the video -which was approximately 45 minutes long- I chose to stop the projection since it was evidently disturbing them deeply.

Jimena asked me the reason for showing them that video and I answered that it was related with the exercise I was going to propose afterwards, I told her it had to do with inhabiting particular physical and emotional spaces. I also responded that it related to the fact that all of them wrote about death in their meditation 'How much do I hold on to life?' and thus chose to investigate illness more closely and how it related to death -as I answered this, it made no sense in my head whatsoever and all I could think of was 'I'm messing things up'. Amira had to step out of the room for some moments and Carolina was silent. The rest of the dancers were aware of how affected Amira, Carolina and Jimena had become and remained silent, waiting for further instructions. Jimena just nodded to my silly answer that made no sense whatsoever. I discovered the fine line I walked in terms of rehearsal as a place for exploring vulnerability and in terms of rehearsal as a place in which I could easily make them feel disturbed.

The exercise they were to do after the video was the following: I had taken photographs of stones when I was at New York City's American Museum of Natural History around August 2009. They had each previously chosen a rock. I asked each of them to imagine that the studio space was actually the rock they had chosen and that they were in it. I asked them to envision being an inhabitant of that place/stone and to discover it -whether with physical actions or to just imagine the whole experience in their heads. The whole request seemed senseless to me and as I watched them do it, I felt very bad for having changed the original rehearsal plan.

Cecilia was sitting with her eyes closed and her hands slowly extended out to touch her stone space. Marianna and Cinthia each lay on the floor and just imagined their stones. Lucía also had a quiet introspective exploration; she was sitting on her heels and reaching with her cheeks, as if sensing the air around her. Carolina was lying on the floor, in a fetal position and her body unfolded very slowly, reaching, until her whole body was arched. Jimena explored with her eyes open, her hands touched the floor while she sat as she discovered the place in her imagination. Amira just sat on the floor, with her arms wrapped around her legs for almost all the exercise.

I became aware of the power I had at that moment and how my inexperience in exercising this power made things go awry. The choice taken became a catalyst for their breakdown and unearthing of very strong and sorrowful emotions and memories. I felt that I had violated Amira's, Carolina's and Jimena's trust by bluntly accessing their personal background -as opposed to inviting them access it to create work, to work out of who they were. How thin can this line be in which you touch emotions that are connected throughout your whole body and in which the past and your experiences go hand in hand?

I felt that I had not what it took to lead them through this process. I walked to the dressing room and I cried. It was Cinthia's birthday and I had brought cake. As I continued to cry, I saw the cake and thought of lit birthday candles. After what felt like thirty minutes, I went back out. They were still there, working; some had already finished their exploration and were talking to Angelina. I saw them and smiled and went towards the music box, I was going to fade the music out and tell them they could stop when they were done but I couldn't. I cried again, and tried to hold back every possible sign that could reveal the state I was in, as I tended to do. But my efforts and all the energy I invested made it all the more evident, and suddenly my body started shaking. I felt steps coming towards me in a very fast way and I was suddenly held by Amira. My body felt like a rag doll. I asked her to go with me to the dressing room, I wiped my face clean, we lit the candles and brought out the cake.

Once out, I excused myself with the dancers and expressed my feelings and fears, being unable or inexperienced to lead them and create a piece. They heard quietly and then reminded me of their support and how we were all learning in this process and how none of us had the answers to everything. Afterwards, we sang 'Happy Birthday' to Cinthia and had cake.

I realized that the investigation had taken over all of us. That vulnerability is something you cannot fully control. It can be at times toned down and handled with care and even with a certain measure but when it meets you, it does it ever so fully and there is no chance to escape it. You have only to embrace and live it fully, without ever knowing the consequences and outcome of its appearance. The fact that vulnerability took over all of us meant -at least for me- that we were all entering deeper and deeper within the investigation.

The staging of the piece was being constantly informed by the images that were being born in the process; this day offered some moments that I decided to incorporate into the scenic work, i.e. the image of Amira sitting on the floor holding herself later evolved in a whispering scene, where all of them sat holding themselves with their heads collapsed to the back and suddenly broke into whispering thoughts to the audience. I also had the intention of using an unexpected hug in one of the scenes; we rehearsed it by having Carolina performing a movement score that focused on her back's movements -which intended to reflect physical and emotional pain- when at the climatic point Marianna would run from the other end of the stage in order to suddenly hold her in her arms; I chose to not use this hugging scene because I wanted the audience to crave for one in the end, and kept it for the rain sequence -when Jimena holds Cinthia.

## **9. Monday, February 22, 2010. Rehearsal No.11**

### **9.1 Tight-Rope Walks.**

In earlier rehearsals we had started working on the creation of a solo for each of them, using images from painter Jeannie Lynn Paske. We continued to work on the solos and they used improvisation to build them. Lucía created movement while standing on her tiptoes. The image of her body in such a position jumped in my head and I decided to explore with it at that moment.

The exercise proposed was done one by one. To each I gave an obstacle or physical restriction. They would have to cross from one end of the room to the other, always on their tiptoes and very slowly, through a ten minute time span. Eventually I could ask them to a)go back, b)hold, c)go faster, d)break out of the slow walks and improvise movement only to go back to their tiptoes at my call.

Lucía was the first to walk the path, she was the only one to do it without an obstacle or restriction. Marianna was next and she had to hold a wooden bar with her arms stretched out over her head. Jimena had a book on her head and she was never to let it fall. Both Cecilia and Cinthia were hand-tied with a string. Amira had to hold up a chair high above her head. Carolina and Angelina didn't do the exercise. (refer to photo archive 'Tight-Rope Walks')

They all witnessed each other's passing and commented that they liked the image, that it maintained their interest throughout the whole exercise. After that, I played around with all of them reprising the pass at the same time but with different orientations in space.

Later that week, I talked to Carolina and she accepted to also become a dancer in the piece. She admitted to some insecurities regarding her level as a performer and as a technician, but I encouraged her to work on it and reassured her that the rest of the group would be always helpful, supportive and happy to have her join the ensemble.

That weekend, I sat at a cafe and worked out a first draft of the piece<sup>44</sup>. My mind was constantly nurtured by what happened throughout rehearsals and little by little I put ideas down into paper to be tried out; some were new exercises that were inspired from the things found in rehearsals and others were new ideas I simply wanted to explore and work with.

## **10. Monday March 1, 2010. Rehearsal No.14**

### **10.1 Improvisation: The Hive.**

It was a simple exercise in which they would all walk in a line -one behind the other-, the person leading the line would do movement and the person in the back would copy her and so on. I originally intended this just as a warm-up, but later was interested in the possibilities the dancers found and -as with the tight-rope walks- decided to investigate it more in further rehearsals to see if there would be some choreographic value to it.

### **10.2 Blows & Pillows.**

I was interested in investigating touch and turning the action of physical contact with another body into violence. I played by intuition in trying to find something that I wasn't quite sure what it was. I brought pillows to the rehearsal.

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<sup>44</sup> Please refer to Appendix to see the First Draft "Liminal" .

I asked the girls to try out the exercise. It consisted of one person standing in the center with eyes closed. This person had the task of finding ease through a very slow improvisation; this person knew she would be hit sooner or later with a pillow and this represented an obstacle in her task. The people outside would just watch and when they felt like the person in the center had reached a place of comfort, one would approach the person and hit her strongly with the pillow and then leave. The person in the middle was not allowed to retaliate. She could only take the blows and then continue to try and reprise the place of comfort only to be hit once again.

I wanted to see how they would respond to the aggression and, if they would be able to remain present in their quest for a comfort zone even though they knew that they would be hit. Most of them had a difficulty with the exercise. They felt that they were harming the person who stood in the middle. Marianna cried both when she was hit and when she hit a person. Cecilia was nervous about doing it and she could only say 'oh no, God, no no no'. The only ones who didn't have a problem at all with both being hit and hitting were Amira and Carolina. When it was Amira's time to be hit, she just felt nervous and laughed; when she was actually hit, she laughed uncontrollably and this gave a lot of ease to the rest of the dancers and in turn, helped them in relaxing and taking the blows too. (refer to photo archive 'Blows & Pillows')

#### **11. Friday March 5, 2010. Rehearsal No.15.**

The studio was having the ceiling fixed and so we met at the football field in campus. It was a great opportunity to apply what dance artist and professor Ray Eliot Schwartz advised me when discussing this work. He recommended trying to make them find the capacity of a double awareness between what they were doing and how they were connecting to their environment. So I decided to continue working on the slow tight-rope walks. I asked them to imagine they were surrounded by a lot of people in the field and that their energy and presence had to call for their attention every step of the way; at the same time I asked them to keep focused on their path. I wanted to try to find this double awareness that Schwartz talked about. It was mostly a performance/performer exercise/research made for them to experience, to try and find out if they were able to achieve these requests. (refer to photo archive 'Outside').

Perhaps the original goals of the exercise were not fully met. What happened was that all of them found a great sense of commitment to the exercise and to their trying to achieve these objectives, in spite of the circumstances (i.e. the sun burning them and eventually blinding them, as well as the hot field burning the soles of their feet). They all commented that it was hard at first to keep focused but that they did it for themselves and also as a practice of staying present in what they did.

## **12. Friday March 19, 2010. Rehearsal No.18**

### **12.1 The History of My Body's Scars.**

I stood in front of a mirror and observed my body. I noticed the scars it had and remembered how each of them had a particular story. All these stories related to very vulnerable moments in my life -both physical and emotional- such as having my appendix taken out or falling flat on the floor during a theatre performance because of having tripped with a log. I remembered that Cecilia had a scar on her chest and that Amira's knee underwent surgery. I was curious in finding out if the others also had scars and if so, which were the stories behind them. Would the reprising/retelling of such stories bring out old emotions or memories?

The exercise I invented was as follows: one person would stand and start telling her story with as much detail as possible. A second person would intervene and start slapping and moving the teller around the space in order to stop her from telling her story. Nobody seemed to have a problem with this exercise but Marianna. She would have many difficulties in speaking out, her voice would tremble; she wasn't able to tell her story and that made her feel very exposed and she cried. I realized that she didn't bring back old memories but that she found herself in a new state of discomfort and that this was what made her open and vulnerable in the eyes of the ones who were witnessing her exercise. Later, she commented that the apparently simple fact of speaking in public represented a big challenge for her, both as a person and as a performer and that, at the same time, it represented a boundary that she wanted to work on in order to surpass it.

### **12.2 Tearing Fabric.**

This exercise was more focused to achieving an image I had for the creation of a scene. This departed from the exploration of 'The Broken Body'. Angelina and myself were scouting for fabric at a store when I heard the sound of fabric being torn. It made me think of muscles and bones breaking.

The exercise I presented them was done in pairs -it somehow reprised what happened in the 'Sculptures'. One would stand in a neutral position -feet parallel, relaxed and straight legs, torso, arms and shoulders relaxed too, spine straight, head facing front- and the other person would sharply alter the neutral shape of the person by moving that person's limbs, head and other body parts. While this happened, I imagined the sound of the fabric being torn and so decided to actually use fabric to pair the sound with the movement and so they could have an auditive impulse to manipulate the other person's body.

I found a quality of violence and at the same time of detachment. It felt cold since the manipulated dancers kept their facial expression neutral. The dancers coincided in that they felt power over the other person and that it was at time joyous. The manipulated persons said to have felt like rag dolls or puppets. They also stated that the sound of the fabric tearing was very helpful for them in order to find the sensation of torn muscles and broken bones.

### **13. Monday March 22, 2010. Rehearsal No.19**

#### **13.1 Leeches.**

This exercise aimed to explore the vulnerability one feels when constrained by an external agent -a rope, weight or a person in this particular case. It was also intended for the development of a scene in the piece. I was first acquainted with it in 2007 by dancer and teacher Luis Villanueva.

In the dynamic, a person was a leech and she would have to wrap herself around her partner's body. The partner would by all means try to get the leech off of her body and it was the leech's task never to leave that body. It was a very physical and even violent exercise since they would actually fight each other in order to get rid of the leech or stay attached to the body -depending the case.

The exploration was purely fun. They all laughed at their admitted weakness and inability to get rid of the leech. They discovered how helpless they felt due to their lack of strength and also because they got tired quite soon when trying to take the person off of their bodies. Carolina was attached upside down to Cinthia's body while the latter was concerned with not dropping Carolina. Marianna and Lucía both had a hard time in attaching themselves to each other's bodies; they could not stop laughing and they would fall off quite early in the practice but always give another try at it. Amira and Cecilia both figured out quite soon the exercise which in turn made them more tired, since they were able to hold the fight for a longer amount of time. (refer to video archive 'Leeches')



#### 14. Rehearsal No.20 – Rehearsal No.25

During these rehearsals, I worked with the dancers in the staging of a piece. I fed from all the strategies attempted throughout the past months and structured what would later become *Aquellos Silencios*. On Friday April 16 2010 we had a first run of the work.

## 15. Reflections regarding the Methodology.

After these months, I have come to realize that the premise of investigating the concept of vulnerability is much more extensive and rich than I ever would've imagined. There's much more to research than just one aspect of it -which is what I originally believed. There are many aspects to vulnerability than most people believe -as I have mentioned earlier on in the document. I believe that the methodology employed for this research has presented great outcomes in all ways -not just in terms of the quantity of good material for the creation of a piece based in movement; it has also presented us with the opportunity of learning many new things about being dance, design and direction. It has opened new doors and possibilities in terms of movement and performance research as well as for inner work.

I had a clear notion of wanting to unleash and access vulnerability. Aside that concept, I wasn't after a completely specific thing. I never thought of arriving somewhere in particular -in terms of physicality, emotional connection or other possible results. I was more into researching than achieving. I did have the clarity of wanting to work with what happened and with what was developed during the research process and not with an idea of something that never came to reality. There were moments in the process that gave me images and helped me develop other ideas and I worked towards them, but never with the mindset of achieving them but more of trying them out to see if they might work; it was always a process of trial & error and, it was after all the results and findings that I would feed from them and ultimately structure and make a piece.

This process has meant change with every passing rehearsal. Many things changed from day one. My perception of things, the way I approached work and the way I focused my energy in order to become a director and a creator, my creativity and capacity to direct and guide was broadened and I grew more humble and more observant. The awareness of the role I had in the process changed and I discovered the responsibility one carries as a director and guide. I feel that if I had more time, I would just devote it to continuing exploring concepts and ideas related to vulnerability. I could also be able to go deeper into performance research, I would be able to work more with my dancers in terms of performance and not only as collaborators.

I'd love to extend the process as a laboratory to keep researching vulnerability and continue with the creation of a larger work -having this first 'piece' as a draft. Ideally I would be working with the same people; this would also be a laboratory to continue trying out ideas and concepts and it would become a space for training and not just researching a specific thing.