

DANCING THROUGH A FIELD OF BINGING AND STARVING:
DISRUPTIVE EATING AS SUSTENANCE

by

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Introduction

Dancing Through A Field

I'm so excited about the aboriginal worldview, because it's so close to Process Work. Aboriginals would not think for example that you are an anorectic. A person cannot be anorectic from that point of view. You have little eating dreaming. There is a dance that is being danced, a deeper intent that is being expressed through you. Instead of thinking, 'I am bulimic,' you think, 'I am me dancing a dance called bulimia or singing a song that for some is called bulimia.' Ancient Chinese society might have called it fundamentalist Tao living, or the tantric might call it enjoying the extremes of life. There are a whole bunch of different ways to refer to it. . . . We are dancing through a field, and as we dance through the field we experience all the spirits known to speak in that field, we get acquainted with all the spirits that dance in that field, and eventually we may dance out of that field again. But in the West we think, 'I had a problem. It created anorexia. I worked through it and then I got out.' The aboriginal viewpoint says, 'No - you never had a problem. You never worked anything out, you just danced through it, experienced what it was like in there, got to know that part, and now you're out, or not, or whatever.' In our own Western concepts, we frame things as problems that we need to work through, and there is a spot when you might want to actually call it a problem and work through it as a problem. I don't want to marginalize that perspective, but if you make the problem an all-dominating program, then it may not be a very successful approach. (Schupbach, 2002, quote)

I begin my contextual essay with this quote because the spirit of the aboriginal philosophy inspires my own views on disruptive eating patterns, and it also informs my theoretical approach to this entire project. I have a tendency to binge and starve. Binging is the act of eating a lot of food in a short period of time, often to the point of not being able to lie

down because I'm so full. Starving means eating nothing and only drinking water for 24 hours. I binge one night, starve the next day, eat normally for a day or two, and then repeat. That's my pattern, and within this pattern is a dance wanting to emerge and be known. My project and performance are a reflection of this pattern – this dance through the field of binging and starving – and they are designed to introduce the audience to the spirit figures I have discovered there, danced with, and attempted to integrate.

Project Topic

My project is focused on the topic of eating issues as they relate to my own binging-starving pattern, and the ways in which I have used Process Work to understand and work with my eating patterns in creative and nonpathological ways. I was inspired to focus on this topic because my own relationship with food and eating has been the source of ferocious inner battles for most of my life, and Process Work has offered me concepts and tools to connect with the creative potential contained within these disturbing experiences. Working with my eating patterns in a process oriented way has been a rich, exciting, challenging, puzzling, and exhilarating experience, and this project is designed to explore and express that experience as fully as possible so that my learnings can be integrated and shared with others.

Purpose and Goals

Through the exploration of the above topic, my goals are threefold: to deepen my personal growth by bringing together insights, experiences, and challenges from several years of therapy and inner work; to offer others the idea that disruptive eating patterns can be a source for creativity and transformation; and to prepare a professional springboard from which I can begin working therapeutically in the field of eating disorders.

I also want to bring evidence to the Process Work concept that experiencing the deepest nature contained within disturbances can relieve suffering and shame, move awareness toward meaning, and provide maps, models, and patterns for living. This idea has helped me to claim and integrate elements found in the dreaming level of feelings, atmospheres, and body experiences instead of trying to eradicate them. Over time dancing with characters such as chocolate cream pie, my belly, and the kitchen counter, I have come to know their qualities and perspectives. The roles and figures in the field have their own rhythms, movements, and approaches to life, and when I notice and tap into these, the creativity starts! Suddenly I'm thinking, feeling, and relating in new ways, and find surprising answers to my challenges. In the same way that leftover meats, grains, and vegetables can be slowly cooked and made into a tasty stew, I want to show how my unwanted, marginalized, and ignored layers of experience were cooked down within the container of Process Work until they transformed into a source of deep sustenance. In this way, I want to illustrate how creativity takes a disturbing eating pattern out of a pathological context.

Structure and Approach

A Multidimensional Project

This project is a multifaceted expose of my personal work with a binging-starving eating pattern using the Process Work paradigm. My project includes a multidimensional performance that combines movement, visual arts, creative writings, and spoken word. The movement performance pieces were co-creatively choreographed with Kate Jobe, and the titles of the pieces are *Belly*, *9.00 PM – The Binge*, *Starve*, *The Measurer*, *Reclaiming 9.00 PM*, *Chocolate Cream Pie*, and *Kitchen Counter*.

The visual art pieces will be on display the night of the performance and consist of sculptures made with Sculpty™ and drawings made with oil pastels on paper. Many of the visual art pieces were created using the Open Art Studio format which Suzette Payne taught me. The techniques of this approach are outlined in *Art is a Spiritual Path* (2005), but the basic steps are as follows: set a time frame for your art, write an intention for your art, create the art, witness and write about the art you created, and share the art by showing it and reading your intention and witnessing to others. The visual art work used in this project were all related in some way to an exploration of my binging-starving pattern, and the titles of the pieces are *Broccoli and Avocado*, *The Binge Force*, *Blue Face*, *Pleasure*, *Heavy*, and *Belly*.

Many of the creative writing and spoken word pieces were also done in the Open Art Studio format, but instead of drawing or sculpting, I would create through writing. In these writings I expressed my experiences personally and in sensory-grounded language, drawing from Proprioceptive Writing techniques developed by Linda Trichter Metcalf (2002). In this style of creative writing, you notice and focus on words and phrases that especially catch your attention, and then ask, “what do I really mean by that word or phrase,” which helps you go more deeply into the details, feelings, and creative aspects of words and language. I also liked this approach because it so closely mirrors Process Work’s focus on sensory-grounded material.

In addition to the performance piece, my project includes this contextual essay which is designed to explain the theoretical background that informs my approach to the overall project and to my personal learning and growth.

The live performance aspect of the project is intended for the audience of my study committee, the Process Work community, friends, and family, but I will also create a DVD so that others who are interested can view it at a later time. The DVD, creative writings, art work, and contextual essay are intended for anyone who is personally or professionally interested in learning more about eating and food related issues.

A Self-Study Approach

My project is a self-study in which I applied the tools and methodology of Process Work to my own version of binging and starving. I originally intended to conduct case studies and write a research paper, but decided instead to focus on myself because I became fascinated by what I was discovering as I unfolded my experiences. By exploring these in depth, I hope to touch on universal struggles that can be recognized and understood by others because, as Sherwin Nuland (2009) states, “the more intimate you are about the details of your life, the more universal you are.”

Focusing on self also allowed me to express my experiences through art, which a theoretical research study would not have permitted. I began with visual art, added creative writing, and then included short movement pieces. I finally decided to put them all together in a performance. Making art opened an unexpected way of knowing myself, which I describe in Appendix IV: Learning and Experiences While Developing the Movement Pieces.

I also wanted to conduct a self-study in order to deepen my own personal growth. The stage will act as a supportive container and platform where I can bring forward the more shy aspects of my process and myself. A great deal of my personal process is about flowing back and

forth between going deep inside myself and expanding outward. When using Mindell's (2007) earth-based psychology techniques, I often visit two earth spots that embody this back and forth process. The first is a cave formed within a mountain ledge that is surrounded by the night sky, and the second is the southwest desert and mesa areas with their wide open spaces, huge expanses of sky, and ochre rock formations. With this project, I have used my inner cave energy to explore, self-reflect, and create, and I have used my expansive desert energy to perform those creations outwardly and publicly.

Out of Pathology and Onto the Stage

One important reason I decided to create a performance is because problems with eating and body image are so often hidden, kept secret, and surrounded by shame. A performance about disruptive eating patterns helps take it out of the shadows by saying, "This is who I am! This is my eating pattern!" Showing my eating difficulties publicly will bring the topic into the open and into community and relationship where it can be interacted with instead of just being isolated, pathologized, and unloved. One strong learning I had about the power of displaying what is usually hidden came in a session that I once had with Jytte. I had just told her about my latest binge and explained that I was out of control and couldn't stop myself from eating everything in the kitchen. Suddenly Jytte got up and said, "Come into the other room. I will play opera!" She took up half the couch. She sang, hummed, spoke poetically, leaned back in the couch, talked about roses, and life, and pleasure, and relationships. I didn't know what had come over her. She looked at me and said, "I have no idea why I'm doing this," and continued. Jytte was showing me, *in broad daylight*, the crazy woman who reigns in me during the night. She exposed my nocturnal binger as a character of excess and allowed me to see her with all shadows removed. By performing publically, I am allowing my inner characters to be seen and known by myself

and by others. I am dressing up in their clothes, entering their worlds, and changing into their identities so that I can live and embody those characters and powers more directly.

Bringing these characters out of the shadows also allows me to transform disturbing aspects of my binging and starving pattern into fun, weird, and surprising expressions. The creative aspects help to move my eating pattern out of a pathological context. For example, in attempting to represent the force of the thing that makes me binge through a piece of artwork, I drew a large colorful mask inspired by a museum exhibit I once saw of South Pacific art. While drawing the mask and then looking at it, I felt excited and moved by its force and vibrancy, and an internal shift started to happen away from the “bad guy” energy that causes suffering to an energy that was genuinely curious about the force and what experience it was trying to create.

Process Work Theory and Personal Applications

Process Work offers a method of working with eating issues that focuses on noticing the process occurring in the background of the disturbance. Process Work is a therapeutic approach that uses what's found within a troubling experience as a source for expression.

Primary, Secondary, and Edge Theory

As I worked on this project I returned again and again to the basic Process Work theory that people experience primary and secondary identities, and that there is a psychological edge separating the two. The concept is that we have parts of ourselves with which we identify more strongly (i.e., the me or the more primary identity), and parts with which we identify less strongly (i.e., the not me or the more secondary identity). Between them is an edge, which Diamond and Jones (2005) describe as “the limit of the known identity as well as a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities. An edge is often felt as discomfort, nervousness, or excitement because it is an encounter with something new or unfamiliar” (p. 20). When I look at myself using this structure, I see that my primary identity has largely focused on being a “health food nut,” on keeping my body weight and shape within certain limits, on being a quiet person who keeps her thoughts and ideas to herself, on following rules, and on choosing to be responsible and reasonable. And then there's another, secondary identity, that is a huge, out of control, pleasure seeking, unstoppable, crazy woman who eats and eats and eats and then drops to the ground! The belief system at the edge that separates these primary and secondary identities says that to be successful, happy, worthy, and well thought of in the world, I must adhere to strict standards. It implies that being tough on myself, staying small in body and expression, and finding outer authorities to tell me the right ways to do things will get me admiration, respect, and love of others.

This Process Work structure helped me to realize that my forays into the kitchen were a way that my secondary nature jumped over the edge and got to live! The rule-maker at the edge said, “Eat only healthy foods. No sweets or fats allowed and certainly don’t eat too much,” and my primary process congruently went along with this – I follow the rules. However, these rules somehow dropped away in presence of the force that drove me to eat everything in sight. My secondary process (this incredible force!) said, “Eat everything and anything! I’m out for pleasure and I won’t be held back until I’m done!” During the height of my time binging, I felt like I was going crazy while in the midst of a binge, but actually I was binging because I was afraid of going crazy! I was afraid of the energy within my secondary process and involuntarily turned to binging. Going to the kitchen was a way of avoiding a direct engagement with my secondary process, but ironically it was also a way of indirectly accessing some of what wanted to live in my secondary identity.

Valuing The Disturbance and The Ally Principle

Process Work suggests that our mistakes, absurd experiences, and unwanted behaviors contain value. According to Mindell and Mindell (1992), “I look for the absurd, the nonsensical thing in an individual or group, the thing which others ignore. I look for the spirit of the incomprehensible statement, gesture or error and then care for it and let it unfold. . . . The gold lies in the messages which we do not intend to send.” (pp.19-20). In other words, Process Work believes that the solution to a problem is contained within the symptom itself – “that inherent within even the most difficult problem lies the seed of its solution.” (Mindell, 2002, p. 6).

Before I was introduced to this Process Work theory, I could only see my binging-starving eating pattern as a pathological process. There was ordered eating and disordered eating, and I wanted to eradicate the disordered eating in my life. I believed that if I could solve this one problem and eradicate this one thing, the rest of my life would be a “piece of cake” rather than

the “stale crust of bread and water.” However, my beginning encounters with Process Work blew me away because my ideas about how things “should be” were turned topsy-turvy. I read the book, *Riding the Horse Backwards: Process Work in Theory and Practice* (Mindell and Mindell, 1992), which takes its title from a Native American trickster figure who did everything differently. “His horse went forwards but he rode it sitting in a reversed position, facing backwards. Riding the horse backwards means saying to life, ‘Yes, it’s impossible’, but also, ‘How interesting this disease might be.’ You go forwards in a backwards way” (p 20.). The notion that my binging and starving might be a backwards way into new worlds of experience was an exciting and radical idea. It took my eating pattern out of a pathological model and repositioned it as an experience containing important information that was actually helping me move forward. This was definitely mysterious!

In this way, Process Work allowed me to envision that there might be an ally principal within my binging-starving pattern that could offer me useful information about myself.

There is an old shamanic principle that says part of an initiation into life on this planet is that you have something like a totem animal, meaning you have a special power, a special path, and it begins to show itself through a problem or a difficulty. The problem is actually an ally because it connects you to your special power. One way of finding your ally in a shamanic or indigenous culture is to go out into the forest on some sort of a vision quest, and during that time have a scary encounter. For instance, you meet a dangerous animal that puts you in touch with a power that you never knew before. A woman sees a white tiger, but she is courageous and she goes and touches the white tiger and it transforms into a beam of light. The idea is that if you have a problem, it is actually a power, a piece of universal power that says your path is to get to know more about this. Your path is to become an expert on this thing, and in that respect you’re going to be different from the rest of society. (Schupbach, 2002, quote)

The concept of the ally principle touched me deeply, and allowed me to not only value my symptom, but also to see it as a guiding power that was unique and special. From a young age, I've somehow been motivated to explore the various characters inside of me, and as a child I liked to play dress up and dramatize stories with my sisters and friends. Combining this natural childhood tendency with the ally principal allowed me to explore my disruptive pattern with an eye towards the characters and spirits that live within the experience. The entire binging-starving pattern and all of the roles and characters in its field are my allies – they are like my totem spirits challenging me to unfold and bring forth my deepest nature through an interaction and relationship with their numinous qualities. This new perspective was monumental to my psyche, and over time it has allowed me to approach my symptom with interest, respect, and reverence.

Addictions Theory

Process Work is not the only paradigm to view disruptive eating patterns as an addiction process. In her book, *Hunger Pains*, Mary Pipher (1997) describes the addictive aspects of eating disorders, including obsessive thinking, using food to cope with life's stressors, a loss of behavioral controls, rationalizations for eating behaviors, remorse and hangover, and vows to never indulge again.

Like most addictions, eating addictions can have an impact on a person's health over time. Organs, bones, and other parts of the body can be damaged. Depression, shame, panic attacks, and other psychological states can interfere with job, family, and social responsibilities. Feeling that life has no meaning can lead to suicidal tendencies, and continuing an addictive cycle does not support a sustainable, healthy body and life.

I consider my own experience with binging and starving as an addiction process because I felt so out of control and taken over by my desire to eat. If I didn't binge, I became agitated, out of sorts, and irritable, and I would get into such a state of discomfort that I would withdraw from

my relationships. I couldn't control myself and my behavior affected my life negatively. I thought obsessively about food, what to eat and not eat, and I felt great shame every time I binged and vowed never to do it again.

Process Work takes a unique approach to working with addictions (including eating addictions), which builds upon the primary, secondary, and edge structures described previously. From this perspective, addictions and addictive tendencies are doorways to unknown parts of ourselves. According to Mindell (2004):

Addictions are linked to your one-sided identity. You have somehow decided that you do not have the same power as whatever you crave. Of course, you do have the power of that thing but instead of accepting that power, you unwillingly give it away to the substance. In a way, that may be hard to accept, you and the substance (or object or act) you are addicted to are one, or better yet, you share the same essence. The essence is a field that unfolds into your one-sided nature and that of the substance – but is neither. The essence is beyond polarization, beyond attachment; it simply is. It is not bound to any thing or person. (p. 181)

In other words, Process Work views addiction as a behavior that seeks out essence-like states of consciousness missing from the addicted person's everyday life. An addiction is at the boundary of the known self, and its essence state wants to be lived and integrated. The substance of the addiction may help someone cross the edge and enter into that secondary state, but the state itself is not dependent on the substance and can be accessed in other ways. When a substance is used to jump over the edge it is not satisfying in the long-term because the secondary experience ends when the effects of the substance wear off. I learned early on that eating helped me with life and relationship edges, but it only offered short-term gains because in the long run I didn't learn how to relate to life and people in more sustainable ways. If a person

simply stops using an addictive substance, it may be an equally unsatisfying experience because the secondary state is denied and excluded before it has even been unfolded or known.

The Process Work method of unfolding and integrating the experience we yearn for when reaching for an addictive substance is a more sustainable and satisfying way to work with addictions. The more you live the secondary experience, the more you become the essence energy of the substance, and then the substance becomes less attractive to you because you have learned how to integrate and relate more from that state. This, of course, is a long-term process! Developing and practicing awareness of the deep layers of an addiction takes time. It also takes a generous, compassionate attitude that supports and encourages you to study yourself and all your hesitations, relapses, discoveries, frustrations, and joys. One way to love yourself through these challenges is to apply the ally principle to your addictive behavior. Like a symptom, an addiction is a pathway by which the ally can make itself known. Through the addiction, the ally chases you – it draws you into a dance with your mythical fate, unlocks your deepest potentials, reveals your life myth, and encourages you to become your full self.

Process Work looks at addictive tendencies and addictions as keys to your deepest potential. It's actually a mythical endeavor to live the state sought in the addiction. It's fate, not failure, to have an addiction, and it needs to be nurtured and brought out. It's part of your nature that wants to be lived. Not knowing the secondary state of the substance or behavior means that the addiction keeps going. Discovering what you are yearning for when you eat, drink, smoke will help you get on with the wholeness of your life. The substance is the messenger; the challenge is to get the message and integrate it into your life rather than stay with the messenger. (Emetchi, 2005, notes from her class)

For example, once I had a strong craving for a tuna fish sandwich and a cup of hot chocolate, which was mysterious because I'd never actually consumed those two things together. What was this longing arising in me? I could have walked into a restaurant and ordered the

sandwich and hot chocolate and had the experience that way, but somehow I knew that I would never be able to find the experience I was craving in the actual food, so I went into the dreaming instead. There I found that something wanted to be put together in *just the right way*, a combination of tastes and textures. A bite of the tuna and mayonnaise mixed to create a thick, soft, chewy concoction followed by a sip of sweet and light hot chocolate – the strong taste and density of the tuna grounded me, the sweet taste of the chocolate lightly swirled me upwards, and together the two created a soft, full force. Embodying this “soft, full force” without having to actually eat the food made my body feel lighter, and I moved effortlessly, skipping ecstatically along the street. I had become the essence of the tuna and the chocolate, and the craving had disappeared. The craving had gotten me in touch with an inner potential and taking this “soft, full force” into my day allowed me to approach my afternoon work openly and with vitality.

Following The Tao

Process Work is partially based on Taoist theories that suggest following the flow of experiences rather than aiming for the achievement of a particular goal or static state. According to Diamond and Jones (2005):

Practicing Process Work involves understanding “process” as the flow of experience in oneself and in the environment and following this flow in a differentiated way. The Taoist masters taught that aligning oneself to nature (the “Tao”) as it changes is the key to a balanced and happy life. Resisting change or struggling against the Tao creates tensions and difficulties. Transformation occurs naturally once a person is able to trust nature and go along with what is happening. . . . Following the flow of process also involves going with what is happening in a given moment, rather than resisting it. This does not mean just letting things happen, or passively accepting oppression or harm. It means that when an obstacle or difficulty arises, we face it in order to find out what

changes are meant for us in that challenge. This is a spiritual attitude that is interested in discovering how our innermost being attunes itself to whatever arises in everyday life and how this prevents us from being victimized by our experiences. (pp. 17-18)

Learning to follow and believe in the Tao within my own eating patterns has been an important ongoing learning process for me. Initially, the idea of following what was happening in my binging and starving pattern was scary! I was much more in the mindset that I had to fix myself, not follow myself, and that I needed to strive for a particular state of eating that was epitomized by “normal” amounts of healthy foods and having a certain type of body shape. It was both frightening and relieving to think of *going with* the binging and starving. This approach was not about giving in to the disruptive eating pattern as a victim, but was instead about allowing myself to follow and respect the binging and starving process, so that I could notice with awareness what was actually happening within that process. Moving with the Tao in this way allowed me to free some of the energy tied up in trying to constantly control myself. When I was goal driven, I was always obsessing about food, or obsessing about my large tummy after binging, or searching endlessly for the outer expert that would tell me exactly what and how to eat. By following the Tao, some of that energy could now be directed towards getting to know my allies, and, by getting to know my allies, I developed more inner authority and creativity.

Learnings and Experience

Through the application of Process Work theories and the creation of this project and performance, I have furthered my personal growth by embodying my primary, secondary, and edge aspects in creative, new ways. By flowing with and valuing the addictive symptom and the allies that reside there, I am beginning to more consciously dance with, know, and embody the energies contained within my binging-starving pattern. I now have stronger awareness muscles that allow me to be with myself when those powers show up and want to be lived. I have a better understanding of my disruptive eating and how to use it as a resource and guide.

I'd like to draw a parallel between Process Work awareness techniques that value what is already happening and what I've learned from my acupuncturist. In the Five Element system that he uses, my major challenge is to believe in and absorb the chi (life force) that is readily accessible all around me. When I don't tap into that abundance, which in this system is the earth element, I become depleted and lack vitality. He uses needles to unblock the flow of chi to enliven the earth element. In a similar way, by bringing awareness to and unfolding what happens to me within the world of eating, I'm tapping into a deep, continuous source of sustenance.

Now I can usually catch the feeling of being driven to eat and ask, "What's going on? Who wants expression?" For many years I would wake up every morning and immediately begin fantasizing about chocolate cream pie because I wanted more sweetness and smoothness in my life, but, as I practice finding and embodying the sweetness in other ways, I now wake up and think instead about my night-time dreams, feeling world, relationships, interests and creativity, or the day ahead.

My process with a binging-starving eating pattern is an ongoing, long-term project that has more than one answer. There are many processes and allies embedded within this behavior – many voices and energies that want to be expressed – and this project along with my Process

Work therapy have helped to know them all in more loving and useful ways. It hasn't been a linear process – in fact, it is more of a spiral swirling round and round certain themes, and with each swirl I get to know and dance with the themes a little more deeply. Some aspects drop away as the deeper experiences take hold with a bit more permanence, but I know I'm not finished and that the learning will continue.

Contributions to Process Work

Because there has been little done on eating issues in Process Work, this project will contribute to the field by offering a personal exploration of how Process Work concepts and methods can be used to unfold disruptive eating patterns in creative and useful ways. The project can therefore be used as a starting point for further explorations into the effectiveness of Process Work as a method of working with disruptive eating patterns in non-pathological and creative ways. It presents a model of how to expand on Process Work theory through the modality of movement, visual art, and creative writing.

Appendix I:
Creative Writing Pieces

Introduction

I have written five pieces describing some of my experiences while dancing through the field of binging and starving. The first four, *9.00 PM – The Binge*, *Reclaiming 9.00 PM*, *Chocolate Cream Pie*, and *Kitchen Counter*, are spoken during the performance. The fifth, *The Crazy Woman*, is not used in the performance but is referred to in the contextual essay on page 13.

Below are brief descriptions of the history behind each piece and my intentions in writing them. The creative writings themselves follow on page 28.

9.00 PM – The Binge is about my binging experience and my goal in writing it was to express my actions, states of mind, and inner turmoil in vivid sensory-grounded language. I wanted the reader to feel the power and strength of both my desire for and abhorrence of my binging states.

Reclaiming 9.00 PM describes taking back that particular time of the night. Over the years, most of my binges have occurred at 9.00 pm or after, and, from the standpoint of my personal history, that's the time of night I felt lonely as a child and chose food as a way of comforting myself. From a dreaming point of view, 9.00 pm is a special time for me, and I have worked in therapy on what I wanted to do, feel, and be at that time of night. I have discovered it is a good time to meditate, watch the night sky, write, and draw, and through these activities I've deepened my connection to my inner world and the universe.

Chocolate Cream Pie was inspired by my repeating early morning fantasy of eating chocolate cream pie. Actually, I had only it a few times in my life, but I was still obsessed with the light whipped cream, smooth chocolate custard, and crisp graham cracker crust. As I unfolded my food cravings over time, the fantasy lessened, and now I wake up thinking about

many other dreams or projects instead. The character speaking in *Chocolate Cream Pie* reflects my growing self-love.

My favorite binge stance has been standing at the kitchen counter, and since I've moved homes often, I've hung out next to quite a few of them! *Kitchen Counter* brings out a deep unchanging nature to which I'm gaining more access.

Jytte Vikkelsoe was my primary Process Work therapist for about five years, and *The Crazy Woman* describes one of our therapy sessions in which Jytte spontaneously and mysteriously seemed to become another person. This was an event of suspending the primary identity and allowing in a figure we affectionately came to call "the crazy woman." I wanted to write about it because it was a key moment in my therapy; Jytte/the crazy woman demonstrated for me a love of being alive – an experience that I was shy about but nonetheless craved, and that carried within it my tendency to binge.

9.00 PM – The Binge

It's 9.00 pm. The transformation can begin.

The woman rises from her living room chair, pauses to check for sounds from the children, the husband. Nothing. Time to go.

To the kitchen. No effort. Momentary suspension at the door. Enter. Two long, silent, fast strides to the refrigerator, out with the frozen bread, open package, two slices into the toaster, push down. Put the rest back in freezer. Wait. Impatience. Quick turn to the fridge for butter and jam. Silently lift them out. Open silverware drawer. Knife to counter. Close drawer. Knife, butter, and jam ready. Hard stare at toaster. Quick lift to handle. Not done. Back down. Body tense. Ears sharp. Mind racing. Are we going to eat? Can we stop? We'll feel awful tomorrow. We can not eat tomorrow. We need to keep up our strength. This is the last time. I just want something delicious, just a few bites, I'll really enjoy it. You know you'll eat too much. Breath quiet and shallow. Only these two pieces. That's all.

Done. Toast up and out. Butter and jam on. Into mouth. Ooohhh..... Eyes close. Body relaxes. Toast soaked with butter, sweetened with jam fills the pores of the mouth. How is it possible for anything so delicious to exist? Soft, rich, sweet. No more. That's it. NO! You can't do that to me. Back to the freezer, the bread, the toaster, the knife, the butter, the jam. Blurred. Fast, repeating. Frenzied. No stopping. Over and over again. No space between. Tearing the frozen slices apart. Take me to the mental hospital. No – eat. No time to toast. Hard butter on hard bread, jam sliding off the side. Hand to mouth to bread to knife to mouth. The mouth filled again and again, faster and faster to avoid the nay sayer and find the pleasure. Finally the belly cries out in pain. Finally the hands can put everything away. Finally it's over.

The woman returns to the living room chair. She sits motionless until the pain subsides. She walks heavily and slowly up the stairs to bed, her mind dull and dismayed.

Reclaiming 9.00 PM

I organize, get ready for tomorrow, tidy, pick up and come across a phrase I've written. I take it, along with bread and almond butter, upstairs and light candles. I reread the phrase, letting the words, images, ideas rock in my brain. They take whatever form they want, no censoring necessary. I make a quick sketch with the pastel crayons, and then another from a few lines in the first. I watch things I never drew before emerge on the paper. I smile and bite into dense, sweet, chewy, moist sprouted rye bread and creamy almond butter. I float in the pleasure.

I am with myself in the most intimate places listening to the faint voices.... I wanted to connect but was too shy... I panicked when I realized what I'd done... I was embarrassed after making that mistake... I felt hurt when she didn't like what I said.

Another voice down in a quiet, clear space, listens and helps me know what I yearn for.

My mind and muscles loosen and expand. There are so many possibilities. I wander through the choices. Let's start with the sky. Stars in the deep blue. Twinkle, twinkle little star.... I'm small. The universe goes on and on. And I do too.

You again!?

Universe, stars... Boring, trash, everyone says that stuff...can't you be original? You are so uncreative, just so ordinary.

Twinkle, twinkle big bad critic. How did you get to be such a cynic?

Chocolate Cream Pie

I love being looked at, admired, dreamed about. Cooks everywhere recreate me daily.

People try to resist me but very few can. To have a bit of me, they skip meals, sneak a bite, eat from someone else's plate.

Some consume me slowly in tiny bites. Others come after me ferociously, mouths wide open. A number circle me several times before taking the plunge. And those who actually resist, gaze at me and fantasize.

I am the center of attention. Everyone adores me. I am dense, sweet, soft, strong. I have depth and lightness, substance and delicacy. My purpose is to satisfy. At my best, I induce feelings of oneness with the universe.

Kitchen Counter

First you stand in front of me and place your hands lightly on my level, cool, tiled surface. Then turning quickly you search out bread, jam, and butter. Your hands and mouth move non-stop. Chewing. Chewing. Willing the chewing to last forever. When the chewing inevitably stops, you feel lost and alone and can't stand that. Your mind jumbled, you again touch your hands to my surface, boundless as the vast, wide western sky at dusk.

I witness your moment of frantic self-criticism and frenzied over-eating. I'm quiet, detached. You stick to me like glue, lean into me for support. I never go away.

The living room beckons with its light and spaciousness but you move closer to me. Pressing your belly against my side, you feel my strength and remember me from your grandmother's house, your parents' kitchen, Rangeley, Farmington, Portland, Maine and now Portland, Oregon. Over the years I have provided a silent presence to your freak outs.

We both know eventually you settle and become solid like the Rock of Gibraltar, unmoving in your being and connected to the deepest parts of your self. When you're nourished enough you'll move beyond me and step into the world.

The Crazy Woman

"I can't stop myself. I ate everything in the kitchen." Sitting a bit morosely in Jytte's study, I tell her about my latest binge. Suddenly she gets up. "Come into the other room. I will play opera!" In with the disc. Explanation of the artist, and off we go. Jytte takes up half the couch. I squish into its opposite corner leaning against the arm, my legs together tightly, hands in my lap, eyes glued on her, not moving a muscle or making a sound. I have no idea what she's doing. She sings, hums, speaks poetically, leans back in the couch, talks about roses and life and pleasure and relationships. Looking at me, she says "I have no idea why I'm doing this." and continues. The crazy woman reigns. Jytte and I recede into our unknowing and let her show herself.

When the nocturnal binger plunges me into an indecent world of excess, she is actually on the right track. Jytte shows her to me in broad daylight.

Appendix II:

Visual Art Pieces

Introduction

I have created four small sculptures from Sculpty™ and two drawings using oil pastels. Both mediums helped me identify more viscerally with qualities represented in the images I created. Shaping the Sculpty™ with my hands into three dimensional figures was satisfying because of the tactile feeling of bulk and visual sense of substance. The colors of the pastels had depth and vividness that gave life and vibrancy to what I drew.

Following is a photograph and brief description of each piece.

Broccoli and Avocado

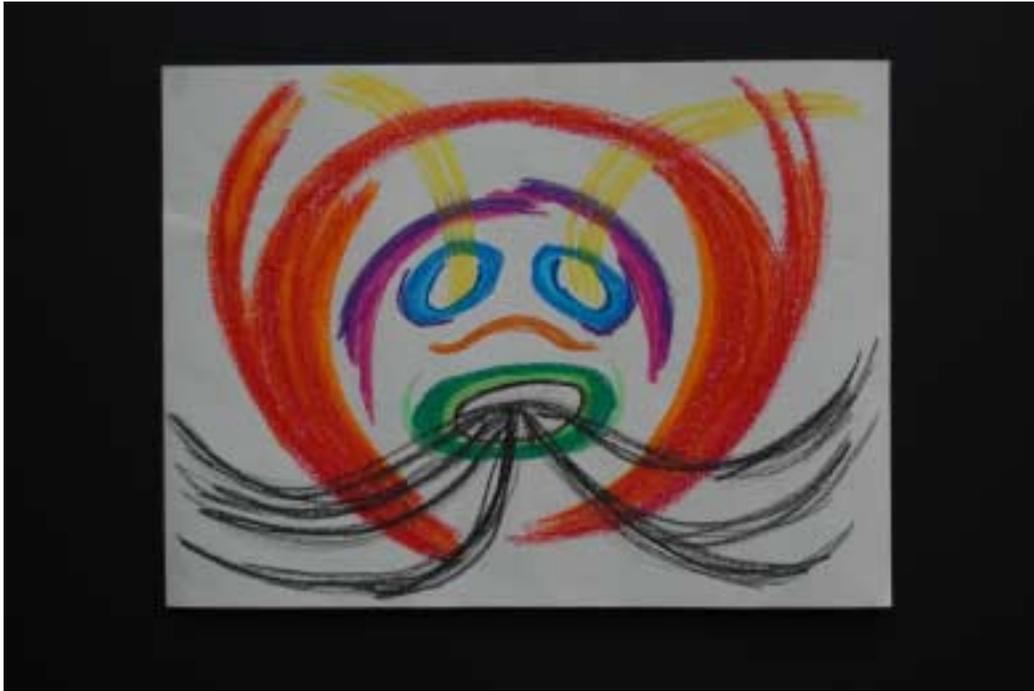
Scupty™, 2” high



Broccoli and avocado have become the two foods that represent a range of polarities in my field of binging and starving. This started when, after about 12 years of eating broccoli one to three times daily, I realized I hadn't eaten ANY for a week and at the same time had been eating LOTS of avocados. At that moment, broccoli represented my more primary process of linearity, responsibility – “eat your veggies before dessert” – and avocado stood for my more secondary process of softness, dreaming, eat what tastes good right now. I've come to appreciate both in myself. I used both to do this project – broccoli has been incredibly useful in setting goals and completing tasks and avocado lets me loosen and experiment.

The Binge Force

Oil pastels on 18" x 24" paper



This is the mask I refer to on page 14. When I dream into the spirit expressed by these colors, movement, shapes, and way, it fills the paper, and I feel something that wholeheartedly embraces whatever life offers. From the white areas I also sense a capacity to be spacious, have no shape, be unknown. For me, this image holds all that has been expressed and will be expressed in my field of binging and starving.

Blue Face

Sculpty™, 4" x 4.5"



I made *Blue Face* as another depiction of the binge force, again inspired by the South Pacific exhibit. As I've lived with this character, I've come to feel it as a secondary, more unknown aspect of that force. It (I don't think of it as either male or female) reminds me of a hero's sidekick. It doesn't have the hero's larger than life energy that can do and be anything and everything. Instead, it bumbles along a bit mystified by what it comes across, and then through mistakes and synchronicities it comes to an unexpected and deeply satisfying resolution to a problem. It's part human and part something else – the black rolled pieces of Sculpty™ remind me of plant vines or a sea creature's tendrils. It reflects the ordinary – exotic experience I've had while working on the movement pieces as I write about on page 52.

Pleasure

Sculpty™, 4" x 4"



Feeling pleasure is one of the motivators of my over eating and this makes my primary identity nervous! I wanted to explore the sense of pleasure I felt when yearning for bread and butter or fantasizing about chocolate cream pie and so made this sculpture. Making it, I worked slowly with acute attention to details in order to create very small dabs and twirls. Softening and bending the clay into folds and curls, I became absorbed in a miniature world of flower petals, fairies, and tiny caterpillars. When I look at the bright, candy like colors and curving, delicate shapes, I melt inside, breathe more deeply, and feel smooth and light like whipped cream.

Heavy

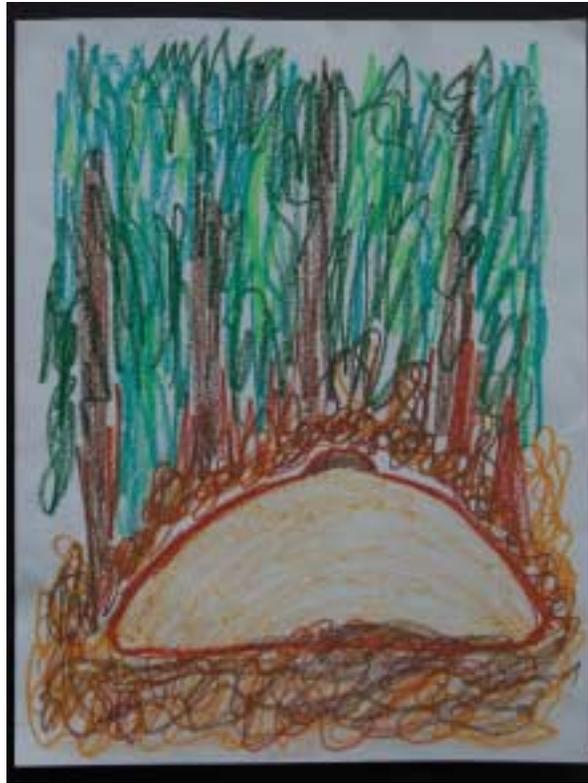
Sculpty™, 5" x 5"



This sculpture depicts my uncomfortable, weighted down, heavy feeling after a binge. I enjoyed making chunky shapes and using a definite force with my hands as I stuck them together. I even liked using the duller, less vibrant colors that I often avoid. They had a place and purpose in this piece and I feel satisfied looking at the result. It reminds me of an experience I had while working on this project: walking down the street one day, I suddenly felt as though I had landed in my body and was seeing through my own eyes. I felt I was inhabiting the area inside my skin and skull and sensed my body as a defined mass in contrast to the air and space around me. One integration of this experience has been creating this project and performance in that I'm giving substance to my ideas, thoughts, and experiences.

Belly

Oil pastels on 18" x 24" paper



During this project I wanted to befriend my belly because I had disliked its size most of my life. One day I meditated on its round, protruding shape. Lying on my back on the floor, I experienced my belly rising up out of the earth in the middle of a forest. She was clear and calm, letting every inch of her be there, even her belly button. I experienced it as an open feeling of being part of nature.

Appendix III:
Movement Pieces

Introduction

Kate Jobe and I created a performance of seven pieces that express aspects of my experience with binging and starving through movement and spoken word. The transitions between each piece involve food related to the next piece. The titles are *Belly*, *9.00 PM – The Binge*, *Starve*, *Reclaiming 9.00 PM*, *The Measurer*, *Chocolate Cream Pie*, and *Kitchen Counter*. The performance took place on September 7, 2009 at Kate’s studio.

Below are brief descriptions of each piece and the transitions. Appendix IV has details about Kate’s and my work together creating the performance. Appendix V has reflections on doing the performance.

Scene as Audience Enters the Studio

I sit on stage right with my back to the audience eating bright green jello that is decorated with marshmallows. Seven other plates of food are lined up against the back wall. Projected on the wall behind the plates is a slide show of photos of me in daily life.

Transition

I stop eating and begin to look at the jiggly movement of the jello on my plate. I put the plate down and slide it across the floor crouching down to watch the jiggling. When that completes, I put the plate at the far front end of stage left.

Belly

This piece uses three qualities of my belly as resources for improvisational movement. They are jiggly movement, squishy tone, and protruding shape.

Transition

I pick up the next plate which has bags of chips, cookies, and candy bars on it, and I sit in the center of the stage. I gobble the food, offer some to the audience, and then put the plate next to the jello.

9.00 PM – The Binge

For this piece, I perform a choreographed dance while Kate reads my written description (see page 28) of binging. I show the scene in the kitchen and express my pleasure, pain, frenzy, and inner debates.

Transition

I pick up the next plate which has six peas on it. I sit center stage, pick up and eat one pea, then cut one pea in half and eat that – enjoying each bite I take. I offer one pea to someone in the audience and then put the plate next to the chips and candy.

Starve

This piece expresses a state of emptiness and lightness when I don't eat for a day or two after binging. The basic structure is set: I start lying down and move to sitting, kneeling, and traveling through space. The movement quality is light, delicate, and soft but the exact moves are not choreographed. To amplify the movement, Kate has given me directions such as, lead with different body parts, make the movement one fifth as big, let your pelvis and feet own the space. While I move, there is a slide show of desert landscapes on the wall behind me.

Transition

I pick up the next plate which has colored hard candies. I spread them on the floor and ask the audience who would like one green, three blue, two purple, etc. and toss the candy to them. I put the plate next to the peas.

The Measurer

This piece is improvised within a structure of counting the number of gestures and movements I make, counting foods, and counting myself. As we've developed it, certain movements and images have stood out and so we've kept them while at the same time leaving room for surprises each time I do it. The idea behind it comes from my constant search for the exact foods and amounts of them that I should and shouldn't eat. The delight of discovering and counting myself came unexpectedly in a movement exploration of stiffness.

Transition

I pick up the next plate, which has slices of bread with almond butter, and begin eating it and expressing my pleasure in its taste. I offer it to the audience and then put the plate next to the candy.

Reclaiming 9.00 PM

In this piece, I speak what I have written (see page 29) and perform a choreographed dance. It is about reclaiming binging time as a creative time for myself.

Transition

I ask, “What is your favorite food?” and wait for responses from the audience. I tell them mine is chocolate cream pie, which is on the next plate. I place it on a pillow at stage right and push the pillow to the center of the stage while admiring the pie. I dip a spoon into the whipped cream as if to eat some, then offer it to someone in the audience, and put the plate next to the previous one.

Chocolate Cream Pie

This is a choreographed piece in which I move while speaking what I have written (see page 30) as the character of chocolate cream pie. The character is a 40s type flirty woman who believes in her own attractiveness. She transforms an obsession into the state of ecstasy which is behind the yearning for the pie.

Transition

I pick up the next plate, which has colorful fruit and garnishes, and I eat a blueberry while walking diagonally downstage. I place the plate next to the pie.

Kitchen Counter

I watch a slide show of kitchen counters projected onto the back wall. Then I speak what I have written (see page 30). After the last phrase, “step into the world,” I move diagonally from down stage far left to up stage far right. My intention is to depict the kitchen counter as a metaphor for an inner support with which I am now identifying.

The Last Plate

At the end of the movement, I pause and then pick up the last plate, a variety of small fancy tarts, and walk to center stage. As I start to take a bite the lights go out. This represents feasting on life and is a moment that holds all that has been expressed in the performance.

Appendix IV:

Learnings and Experiences While Developing the Movement Pieces

Overview

Kate Jobe helped me develop the movement pieces and create the performance. I asked her to assist me with this not only because she is a Process Work diplomate with a special interest in secondary movement, but also because she is a dancer, choreographer, body worker, and Laban movement analyst. Kate has played an important part in my Process Work learning as a member of my study committee and my main supervisor, and I feel a kinship with her through our mutual enjoyment of and fascination with movement.

Similar to what I had done with the visual art pieces and creative writings, my intent with the performance was to express in movement the energies, qualities, and allies I had found unfolding within my binging-starving process. Kate and I developed the movement pieces together using a variety of methods, including:

- using my creative writing as a starting place
- unfolding a dream figure from secondary movement during a warm up
- giving blank access suggestions to fill out movement already happening
- amplifying movement that I found disturbing

The choreography happened in the following overlapping stages:

- improvising to find qualities, movements, characters, and feelings
- developing sketches of the basic flow of a piece
- setting particular movements and writing improvisation scores
- bringing out the inner life of the piece

I recorded all but a few of our sessions with an iPod and video camera.

Art and Psychology

About five months into this work, Kate expressed her experience of what we had been doing:

What are we doing here? Are we just making art? No. Art is secondary in a way. It's not really supervision. Somehow we're working together. Another level of therapy? More of a movement therapy. But it's almost unintended. . . . We've started with already unfolded addiction experiences and taken them further in movement. From there we've made art in the form of movement pieces. In a way we're using the addiction material as a source for art, but we're not working directly with the addiction process. (Conversation with Kate Jobe, April 26, 2009)

How *were* we working together? In my perspective, Kate and I were weaving art with psychology as we created the movement pieces. We weren't directly unfolding the binging-starving pattern as I had done in therapy, and yet we were deeply influencing it in ways that surprised and touched me. I experienced being inside the addiction. Even though one of my goals in choosing this particular type of creative project was personal growth, I had no idea I would start to live my addiction from the inside out. These are some ways it happened:

- Rather than develop the movement totally by myself, I chose to work with Kate. Part of what drives my addiction is my shyness to relate to other people; feeling lonely or isolated increases my tendency to binge. Over the nine months that we worked on this project, I experienced myself in relationship to Kate in many intimate and satisfying ways: as a student, as a person with an eating disturbance, as a fellow human being, as a colleague, as a co-learner, and as a co-creator. We talked, moved, experimented, laughed, cried, analyzed, planned, and improvised.
- Deciding to create a performance has taken me into unknown territory where I've learned about choreography, body mechanics, combining movement and spoken word, and

transforming feelings into movement. I feel alive and engaged when I'm learning something new because of the exhilaration of meeting, negotiating, and/or going over edges. When I'm unconscious around edges, I get depressed and choose to eat food rather than find out what's stopping me from exploring outside my known world.

- A major intention of this project has been to express rather than marginalize experiences that disturb, mystify, and intrigue me. Creating an atmosphere of permission has relieved the rebel in me from having to binge as a way of fighting the restrictor. Going deeply into the essence of the spirits contained within the disturbances and mysteries has introduced me to new aspects of myself.
- Identifying as a creative person has brought out an experimenter and one who can follow her own inner authority. These roles are similar to the crazy woman character that Jytte brought to life in our therapy session (see page 31).
- What was most surprising and hopeful was that I felt ordinary and happy while creating the movement pieces. In other words, I felt a sense of going in the right direction for myself, of following the Tao. There were times when my monsters of impossibility rose up saying, "You know nothing about choreography, you're a dolt with technology, you don't have enough tenacity, and you'll NEVER do this in FRONT of people" – but even then, I figured out how to take the next step, whether it was to ask for help, practice new ways of moving, or do inner work.
- I developed new perspectives of the initial disturbances and created art. This experience planted a seed in me that is beginning to grow: a new identity as a creative person who carries an inner freedom to experiment and wrestle with finding satisfaction. I feel this as a deep inner weaving of art and psychology.

Co-creating a Performance

I have had a delicious experience of organic co-creation while working with Kate. I brought my eating experiences, project ideas, and movement background to her, and she shared her skills as a dancer, choreographer, and director. Together we experimented with themes, movement, characters, and feelings.

At first, I approached the work mainly as a student coming to a teacher for assistance and guidance. Quickly I began to feel I had entered a joint exploration. Kate has been the main choreographer and director and I have been the performer with a desire to bring my personal experiences to life on the stage. As a choreographer, Kate noticed, encouraged, and enticed my movements into life, helping me develop and complete what I was trying to express. As a director, she held a vision of the whole performance, thinking about transitions between the pieces, visual additions to support the movement, and the overall theme, lighting, and the audience.

At times I picked up the choreographer role. As I watched videotapes of our sessions, I noticed what pleased or disturbed me. I would bring my observations to the next session and we would build on them. An example is the piece titled, *The Measurer*. When I didn't like seeing myself move stiffly, Kate suggested starting our session with those movements and out of that came a figure that was measuring. Unfolded further, it transformed into a kind of rap dancer who had a mysterious experience of delight when I tapped my chest with the flat of my hand.

Postural Embodiment as Integration

My theory is that integration is happening through the art process because of the embodiment. You are embodying energies and moving them fully, posturally, and more or less completely. I've been looking to see if the core of your body is engaged in the movement that you're doing with your arms. At first, your

movement was all gestural and your core didn't change. Now your core gets engaged with the changes. I think that's important because it's a special kind of congruency that integrates your whole body. (Conversation with Kate April 26, 2009)

I can see and feel what Kate means! I experienced a fuller and more dynamic movement, surprises in my spine and pelvis, and elation at waking up unused muscles moving in unusual ways. A kind of confidence results from this integration; a confidence rooted in having access to a larger portion of who I am, a feeling that I have more to draw from, that I have dropped into this body and am knowing its capabilities.

Trusting the Disturbances

A key Process Work concept is that disturbances are actually resources. Over and over, Kate supported me to trust the movements I *didn't* like and the ones that *didn't* go along with my primary intention. This was a wonderful way to understand the concept viscerally, because I could feel and see the unique movement that emerged from valuing the disturbance.

Effect on Eating

While working on this performance, I've noticed changes in my eating patterns. There's a different sense of proportion – in other words, eating and food have become a smaller percentage of my daily focus while the rest of my life, including the project, has become a larger one. Food and eating have also taken on a new status in my day-to-day life. Rather than only representing the polarities of good/bad, freedom/rules, success/failure, and friend/enemy, they are increasingly part of the flow of my life, sustaining, pleasing, and challenging me as they come and go throughout my day.

My inner attitude towards my urges to binge has had a “make-over,” and more and more often, I can be resourceful, curious, and experimental when I’m challenged with deciding what to eat, when to start eating, and when to stop eating.

Completing Movements

Kate used her dance, Laban analysis, and Process Work training to notice when I didn’t complete a movement, and then she gave blank access verbal directions, such as, “Notice what you’re doing and go all the way with it.”

The one who binged on food in my every-day life was after something and was never quite satisfied. This kind of experience was giving that particular ally the tools and directions to go completely for something that was emerging through my movement. Achieving the experience of complete satisfaction for part or all of a movement piece took many attempts. However, along the way were many smaller satisfactions such as bringing the experience into my face or eyes, taking a two dimensional shape into a three dimensional movement, and repeating a movement in different parts of my body until all were involved.

Satisfaction came when I felt a surge of excitement at doing something I hadn’t imagined ever doing or being capable of doing, and this sense of satisfaction occurred not only during the sessions themselves, but also while watching the videotapes later.

Ordinary or Exotic?

Looking back, I realize that when I began the choreography process, I fantasized showing a more flamboyant side of myself and of finally becoming an extrovert. I had an idea that my movements would somehow be similar to the extreme, frantic states I got into when I binged, and that I would transform into an exotic, colorful creature. In a way, that has happened, and yet in another way it has not; during the creation of the performance there were times when I

transformed into an exotic creature, but there were also times when I accessed something deeper than that. By unfolding these states, I developed a full expression of deep feeling experiences. Over and over, Kate helped me to combine techniques, feeling qualities, core intentions, and complete movements, and the result has been that I feel I'm fully expressing my own ordinary self.

My tendency was to try to get away from feeling ordinary and to instead access something exotic, but what I found is that the more ordinary I am, the more surprised I was by the depth and subtlety of the experience that came out of me. Now I can see that my "ordinary" self *is* my own uniquely exotic and colorful nature.

Going Into New Spaces – Going Beyond Known Boundaries

One of the processes in my belly is to go beyond limited boundaries – to invade, intrude, impinge upon, and take up space. This project has pushed me beyond the protocol of my internal limiter, who insists I must be perfect before showing myself: "don't make anyone uncomfortable; don't disturb others; and don't put yourself in a position where you might get criticized." The other part of this process is an erasure of myself: "be invisible, don't have impact."

Instead of just falling into these known dichotomies, the process of creating the performance has also been a joyous feeling of freely expressing myself in a variety of awkward, funny, ugly, smooth, silly, and beautiful ways, as well as a discerning attention to developing and shaping that expression for a performance that considers both me and my audience. This is the first time I've participated in this kind of process, so my experience of the difference between dancing by myself, dancing with others in an informal setting, and dancing for an audience is limited. However, from Kate's teachings and my experience as a member of an audience, I do understand something about length, timing, repetition, use of stage, etc. These parameters, rather

than feeling limiting, actually gave purpose and brought relationship into the belly process. It's not about perfection or not disturbing others – it's about bringing something out into the open that I feel deeply about – it's about sharing something of myself with others in a from I feel good about, in the hope that it may affect them in some way.

State Orientation, Process Orientation, and Body Image

While watching one of my sessions with Kate on tape, I saw my belly sticking out as I stood in profile to the camera. My first reaction was, "I'll never be thin enough!" But as I continued to watch, I saw myself shift and change, stretch, curl, speed up, slow down, and reveal many expressions. I looked thin, thick, straight, hunched, long, and short. I had a visceral experience of state orientation and process orientation. I was seeing my body as a process and realized that my usual feelings about my body are state-oriented, meaning I only usually see it as either an acceptably thin shape or an unacceptably fat shape.

I was especially excited when I first saw myself move in curves and spirals. Talking about it with Kate, we realized I was seeing myself go from more two-dimensional to three-dimensional movements. The inner vision of myself as a shape (i.e., thin or fat) was crumbling, and a new vision of myself as a dynamic, ever changing, three-dimensional being was emerging. This helped me have a kinder attitude toward my belly, one that sees it as being in flux and going from sticking way out to laying flat and every place in between. It is an attitude that appreciates wherever my belly is at in the moment.

Babette's Feast

I came to appreciate Kate's amazing wealth of experience, knowledge, and skills, which she generously and wholeheartedly shared with me. For me, it was a rare and exhilarating

experience of co-creation with a mentor. Kate loved and believed in me; she understood my dance, both figuratively and literally, as my spiritual path.

In our work together, something magical happened for me. The experience reminded me of the movie “Babette’s Feast” which takes place on a cold, remote Danish island. In this movie, many of the inhabitants belong to a conservative religious sect that advocates plain clothing, bland food, and contained behavior. Babette, a refugee from the French Revolution, arrives on the island by ship. Unbeknownst to the Danes, she is a famous chef. She has no money, home, or family and is taken in as a servant by the two daughters of the deceased founder of the religious community. One of her jobs is to prepare food for the island’s elderly and homebound citizens as well as for the daughters. Quietly, she prepares the food they ask for but it tastes different, and people perk up when they eat it. For ten years, Babette continues respectfully cooking and caring for the community, which continues in its stolid ways. At one point, she unexpectedly wins the lottery and comes into a large sum of money. She asks the sisters for permission to cook the meal for the annual celebration of the founder’s birthday, and orders special supplies from France for the feast, including a live tortoise, partridges, cutlery, and tablecloths. She prepares a sumptuous multicourse meal with many unusual, complex, and varied dishes and flavors. As the parishioners are served and eat, they soften and relax and start expressing long held feelings for each other. After the dinner, everyone leaves the table and goes outside to dance. Babette has spent the entire ten thousand francs that she won, and so she has to remain on the island, but she appears satisfied. It’s a spiritual task for her to nourish people in this way.

I share the story of Babette’s feast because it is a good analogy for what I’ve experienced with Kate during the process of creating the performance. Kate has been my Babette, introducing me to some of the subtler, unusual, and complex flavors and textures of my process, which allowed me to unfold the depth of some long held feelings and experiences. Through this process, I felt deeply touched by Kate’s “cooking,” and it helped me to learn to care for and

express something deep in myself. When I present the performance publicly, then it will also be my turn to pick up the role of Babette – to offer my community the meal that I have been cooking up my whole life and hope that it may touch people in a deep and meaningful way.

Appendix V:
The Performance
September 7, 2009

At Kate's Studio

Before the performance started, people gathered in the wide hallway outside the studio. My artwork was displayed and my friend, Anusuya Starbear, had prepared a beautiful table of food and flowers in vibrant, welcoming colors, textures, and shapes creating a festive atmosphere.

Inside the studio, Kate led me through a warm up, Kalpana Tanwar stood by the video camera, and Midori Hirai set up the slide projector, while Holly Jobe and Suzette Payne organized the programs and reserved seating.

Just before people entered, I started to settle and go inside, remembering what both Kate and Matt Stella (a fellow student who also did a performance for his project) told me separately – enjoy yourself and let IT happen. I invited in my ordinary self and began.

And I did enjoy myself! I settled into the moment, feeling I was simply showing who I am, and let that take all the space it wanted. The audience's response was warm and interactive, helping me relax into my movement and expression. I felt satisfied and pleased when I came to the last bite!

Afterward, Kate and I answered questions and then people ate and chatted. I had a wonderful time receiving hugs and hearing people's reactions and comments.

Reflections on Performing

I feel a new inner sense of both spaciousness and fullness. The combination of using painful experiences as a resource for making art and showing it publicly has cleared out feelings of shame and suffering, leaving more space inside myself. At the same time, rather than wishing

the binging-starving tendency would just disappear, I now have a sense of identifying even more strongly with that pattern and celebrating it in all its manifestations, giving an inner substance. I realize I viscerally have experienced what I theorized on page 13 under *Out of Pathology and Onto the Stage*.

Reflecting on my experiences during and after performing, I feel a new inner complexity in residence. During the performance I was myself, Annie, and also the characters I had created. At the same time, the characters were rooted in “Annie’s” disturbing experiences. Through the process of creating and performing, I’ve brought the marginalized parts of myself home, which makes my inner life richer and more diverse. Embodiment through movement and speech contributed to the depth of this experience, and the memories of how I felt when I danced and spoke are inner resources going forward.

Reclaiming disavowed parts also has affected the addictive binge-starve cycle by allowing me to more clearly differentiate between that cycle, rooted in an outer authority about “right” and “wrong” foods, and an ability to care for and track my own needs and wants moment to moment. Again, the embodiment has strengthened my inner eating authority giving me more fluidity in what I choose to eat.

I’m thrilled to end this project with the performance that has affirmed my learning and given it an extra boost through moving and speaking in front on an audience.

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