



Photo: A message on the wall in Esalen's art studio

LUTSF REPORT - EMILY JENKINS 2019

31st July - 17th August: San Francisco and the Big Sur

I was awarded the LUTSF in order to travel to California and take part in a course at the legendary Esalen Institute led by Daria and Anna Halprin, entitled *Empowering Creativity through Movement, Dance and Life Arts Metaphors*. My reason for pursuing this opportunity came from a desire to connect with Anna specifically about her work relating to dance and cancer, as her writing on this topic had been a source of inspiration for setting up *Move Dance Feel* - a project I run which offers dance to women affected by cancer. I was keen to meet and dance with Anna and Daria directly to see if there were elements of crossover between the 'Life Art' approach of Tamalpa Institute and my own dance practice. Now in its third year, *Move Dance Feel* is growing in momentum and bringing with it considerations around artist training and emotional resilience. I entered this experience with the aim of setting aside some much needed time for myself, to be a student again instead of teacher, and creating space for reflection and inspiration.

Before travelling to Esalen, I spent four days in San Francisco and attended two very fruitful meetings. The first was with Cynthia Perlis, Director of the *Art for Recovery Programme* at the UCSF Helen Diller Comprehensive Cancer Centre. I found Cynthia to be a true inspiration for the way that she has managed to acquire a great deal of public recognition and financial support for the programme, which has enabled her to thoroughly embed the arts into UCSF - its patient care model as well as its architectural design. She began the programme 30 years ago running it out of a small office, and now there is provision across three different hospital sites, the largest of which has a whole floor dedicated only to the *Art for Recovery* programme. In one of the corridors on this floor the walls have been decorated with sentences extracted from letters written between medical students and patients with life threatening illness. One sentence reads;

Learning to embrace the opportunities that present themselves, to transform mistakes into lessons and to recognise the limits of our own power, each of us has the potential to cultivate greater self-awareness.

In meeting Cynthia I was reminded that anything is possible when you have enough passion, perseverance and patience. The positive outcomes for people who have participated in the *Art for Recovery* programme are remarkable, and it is an excellent example of why the arts deserve a firm place within cancer care services.

The second meeting I arranged was with Dr Anne Krantz, a Clinical Psychologist and Dance Therapist who for 25 years led a programme called *Healing Through Dance* for people affected by cancer. Anne and I spoke in depth about her approach, and the similarities and differences between community dance practice and dance movement therapy. It was very comforting to speak to another practitioner who understood the highlights and challenges of this work, and I found that our exchange helped me to refine the language used when discussing a place for dance within the context of cancer recovery.



Photo: Esalen Institute at sunset

Two hours South of San Francisco on the Big Sur coast sits Esalen Institute. Upon arrival I was awestruck, silenced by its overwhelming beauty and panoramic view of the ocean. I felt a rush of gratitude for LUTSF, and for all the other contributing factors that had helped me reach this place. My instinctive response to Esalen turned out to be quite significant, for the week I spent here opened up my capacity for silent introspection, which I found to be extremely valuable. I took time to be still, to rest in my breath and attune to the surroundings. This growth in self-awareness was in part a response to my participation in the course, as well as to my experience of Esalen.

I found elements of the course intriguing, though confess that overall I felt quite disenchanted with it. In some ways this is not a surprise, as it can happen when one has high expectations, but I had hoped for a more enriching experience. Primarily I was longing to dance and indulge in having a whole week in the studio exploring and creating, yet I found that the focus was more on talking and drawing without equal time spent being in the body. That said, I enjoyed the movement experiences when they did occur, and developed a newfound appreciation for writing after dancing as an additional means of expression. Unfortunately, due to poor health, Anna Halprin did not attend the

course so I was unable to dance and talk with her as planned. Despite this, an unexpected highlight was that many of her followers - other dancers from California and around - did attend, and I had memorable conversations with them about how Anna had influenced their work. In hearing of Anna's teachings from her participants, I was able to gain significant insights into her approach and learn about what had made the greatest impression on them. I found that this triggered me to reflect on my approach to facilitating dance experiences, and question what it is that my participants take away from them. As I was attending the course, led by Daria, as a participant whilst asking such questions I felt that I gained clarity in determining what it is that I need, to have a positive, creative and connected experience, and subsequently what it is that I offer to my participants. This duality of purpose came to be incredibly rewarding and I discovered a renewed sense of confidence. I realised that whilst I had gone in search of external resources, I have everything I need within.

The LUTSF gave me the gift of time and space away from my everyday thoughts and routines, which enabled me to gain meaningful insights into both my personal and working life. Further still, after the course at Esalen I travelled to Santa Cruz to meet with a fellow dancer and old Laban peer. In talking to her about my experience at Esalen, and relating it to my work in the UK, I crystallised my learning and felt greater assurance about my artistic identity. This has been of tremendous benefit, and is helping me to refine and strengthen my working processes - informing how I facilitate dance experiences, train other artists and communicate the value of what I do. I continue to reflect on my LUTSF trip, and when I do I revisit the feeling of renewal. As community dance artists we tend to give a lot of ourselves to others, and the main conclusion I drew from this trip was that it's hugely important to give back to yourself. In pursuing opportunities for self development you allow yourself room for growth, which will ultimately support the growth of those around you too.

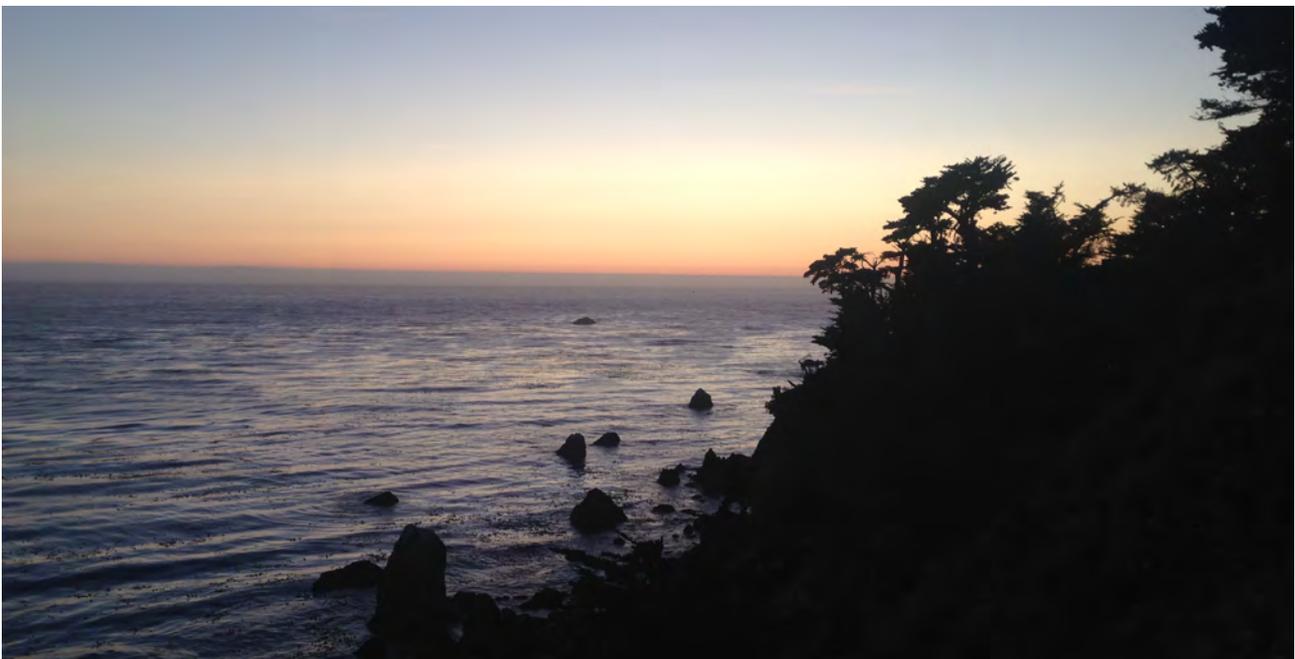


Photo: Big Sur coast at sunset