

WALK THROUGH THE FIRE

Project Paper by Angela Ai – May 2013

The Inspiration:

I came up with the idea of doing a one-woman show about 4 years ago. I thought it would be a show about my life – as many solo shows are. Then, one night, I had a very detailed specific dream about being a 10-year old girl forced into sexual slavery in China. Everyone was speaking Chinese in the dream, including myself, which was highly unusual since, although I am Chinese, it is not my first language and I had never dreamt in Chinese before. When I awoke, I was completely shaken. Though I had never had this experience before, it felt like it was from a past life. I wasn't sure how to process it. A friend of mine suggested that I write a monologue and so I did and then I wrote a song – in the voice of the young girl. And then, I began to write a series of monologues and songs about girls and women who were, for some reason, unable to speak for themselves – but the strange thing was that they were all already dead and speaking to me from the afterlife – this included my cousin, Wendy, who had committed suicide, and my maternal grandmother. They had all been subjected to some kind of abuse – emotionally, physically and/or sexually – and wanted me to hear and feel the pain that they had endured.

When we were asked to come up with a project idea, I had already thought about doing this show for my project, but wasn't sure how I would incorporate a Radical Aliveness Core Energetics process into it. At the time, I was already facilitating Artist's Workshops and a weekly Artist's process group using Core. People had naturally assumed that my workshops and groups would be my project. But, that didn't feel like a risk for me. It felt easy to support other artists in doing their creative work and helping them work through their resistance using Core. What was a risk for me was to do my own creative work and work through my own resistance to allowing all of my creativity to flow through me.

And so, I decided as my project, I would perform a one-woman show followed by a group process that I would facilitate with the audience.

The Vision:

My vision for this project was ambitious. When Patricia and Ann asked us to fill out a project description, my intention read:

“To create a dynamic, inspiring, provocative, illuminating, powerful and radically alive solo show that will bring up a whole host of feelings from the viewers, and afterwards, help those who are willing to process through whatever comes up. My intention is to give voice to those who don’t have a voice, people who are marginalized, abused and abandoned – those who are on the edges of our society and other societies, such as sex slaves, rape and ritual abuse survivors.”

I saw it in a big theater, with musicians, lights, my Director in the audience – an audience of mostly women sprinkled with a few men, Women’s groups, Asian communities, sexual abuse survivors, domestic violence organizations, and sex trafficking organizations. I imagined doing this in Los Angeles, New York and other major cities in the U.S.

The Process:

That vision completely freaked me out. And so, I did nothing for about a year except to go to the project meetings with Ann and Patricia and say that I wasn’t really doing anything around my project. They suggested that I speak to my mentor, Anna Timmermans. Anna’s first assignment was to do a weekly “Go On Strike” meditation. This meditation was for 10 minutes a week, sitting with my eyes slightly open. “That’s it?”, I thought. Basically, she was giving me permission to do nothing! I had a very difficult time with the assignment of going on strike. To actually give myself permission to do nothing, to just be, was much harder than actually just doing nothing.

I decided to try one of my fellow classmates’ Core Workshops. Jamie Stein created a Writing Constellation Workshop – it was powerful and helpful – and in the end, I learned that these women who were wanting to have a voice through me just needed me to be present – for whatever pain they needed to express through my words, my body, my voice. I had huge resistance to this.

By module 2 of the 4th year of training, in another meeting with Ann and Patricia, I let my group know that I still hadn't performed my show and didn't have any of the 15 hour requirement completed. I had the thought that perhaps I would not graduate – or perhaps just get the Personal Transformation certificate and not the Professional one. Ann asked how my group could help me and in my typical form, I said, "I don't think anyone can help me." It was an old story for me and I knew it. Then, I opened up and received real help from my group when Steve Maher asked me the question that changed everything, "Why don't you perform it for one person?"

One person? Not an entire 500-seat theatre? I hadn't even thought of that option. It was the first time that I really thought, "Oh yes, I can do that. I can perform it for one person." I even knew who it would be.

The 1st Show – December 14, 2012 – 4:30-6:30p

I asked my friend, C, and she agreed to be the one person. I told her it wasn't going to be a performance - that I would simply be sharing my writing with her – what had come up for me so far - and then afterwards would facilitate whatever came up for her. I let her know that if nothing came up, we could just talk and hang out. I did it in its very imperfect form – 2 monologues and 3 songs, playing behind a keyboard and a music stand, reading my lines from my paper, completely nervous and shaking throughout, having absolutely no idea what was going to happen. I did it (and the rest of the project) at my office where I hold my Artists Workshops and Groups. It took about 20 minutes and then I was done. To my surprise, C just sat there and cried. For about 5 minutes. I sat with her while she cried unsure if there was something more I needed to do. After that we just talked. Later, when I asked Anna if there was anything else I needed to do, she said no – that C was discharging through her tears and that's all that needed to happen. All I had to do was just be. Present. I was relieved.

By doing that first performance for 1 person, I received a lot of information, but the main thing was that I could do it. And that I was excited to do it a second time for more people. Also, I learned that this was not about me being a performer. This was about allowing whatever wanted to come through me using all of my gifts – as an actor, singer, songwriter, writer, and channeler. My intention was still the same but it somehow got clearer and I felt less afraid because I realized that by letting go of all demand of myself – to have to be perfect or even good – and the demand

that the audience like me or my show – I was now free. I was free to allow whatever wanted to be expressed through me in song and monologue and others were free to feel or not feel whatever they wanted to. This was a huge revelation for me. I could see that this was going to be very healing for me as an artist. I spoke to Anna and I shared this and told her I was still scared of having more people come. She said, “The more you dare to step into the unknown, the more profound it will be.”

The 2nd Show – March 2, 2013 – 2:00-5:00pm

The second time, I had 3 participants. Two of the people were from the RACE training and 1 person was someone who I did not know well and had never been part of a Core process. I had written a third monologue and song and the performance was now 40 minutes. I started with an introduction letting them know they would be watching a 40 minute performance which would be followed by a group process. I told them my intention was to gather information about my show and my project and that I had no idea what was going to happen. Though I now called it a performance, I was still on-book and behind my keyboard. When I was done, 2 of the 3 people were crying. I was surprised by their reaction. Even though I had experienced that reaction with my friend from the first process, I had spent so much time preparing for people to have a negative response or no response at all. Just as one of the women, M, was about to go into a deeper process, another participant, S, said that it felt strange to go from being an audience member to having the light now be directed on him as a participant. I was grateful for S’s truth and in that moment, I let the group know that I had no demand that they have to do anything and that they were in fact, free to go. I told them I simply wanted to offer the space that if anyone wanted to go deeper into a process I would be open and present to facilitate. Then, someone else asked if I needed anything. I checked in with myself and realized that for the first time after a performance, I didn’t. I did not need any validation whatsoever which was completely freeing for me. The moment they realized that they didn’t have to take care of me and that there was no demand to have to be any certain way, the group was free to go into a process that turned out to be far beyond anything I had imagined would happen. What began to happen was a channeling of ancestors and relatives. M said that when she looked at me, she still saw Wendy, my cousin. That was the last monologue and song I had performed and I realized that I had not de-rolled. That would become a more important piece in my next 3 project sessions – the transitioning from performer to facilitator. But, from that place, M was really triggered by Wendy and my Grandmother in the

performance – I got the cube for her and she began hitting and stating her demand that they feel something. I was continuing to channel the role of these women (as I had done in my show) and I could feel in these roles as Wendy & my Grandmother, I did not have to feel anything. And then, that brought a huge amount of feeling from M. The process went on and she began to connect with her own grandmother. I stood in the role of her grandmother. Fortunately, since there were two people from the Core training there, one of the participants began to facilitate this process between this woman and me (her grandmother). It seemed that everything that I had learned up to that point two weeks ago from my Radical Aliveness Core Energetics training was of use – letting go of all demand, naming things, slowing things down, going all the way into an energy, asking the group for help, following impulses, and mostly, to not know what's happening and to say yes to it.

At some point, the man who had never been in a Core process before felt her mother and took on that role and began to have a dialogue with her as her mother.

We used the cube and the racquet and the mattress. It was quite an intense process. Both of the people from the Core training helped out at various times. I had fortunately worked in this realm with Jonathan Godfrey several times and with George Hunter once, but at a certain point, one of the participants realized that they needed either Jonathan or George to go further and I agreed. I was limited – and it felt good to recognize my limitations.

At this point, I decided that I needed more support and guidance. I Skyped with Anna and she said that it was time for me to get bigger – to have a bigger audience. I was thinking that I would expand to 5 people and she suggested that I just put it out and see who would want to come. I then had several supervision sessions with George Hunter who helped me enormously in dealing with my fear and my shame around channeling and working with the ancestors. He was very honoring of my gifts and at one point, he asked me if it would be alright if he sang a song in honor of them. I began to laugh and as he sang, I continued to secretly laugh. By the end of the song, I was no longer laughing and I saw that someone outside of myself was honoring something in me that I was not honoring. He let me know that in my work, the ancestors were already coming. He told me that people would be drawn to this event because they needed to learn something. That helped me to let go of trying to control who would be coming. I had already asked Steve

Maher to assist me in the next 3 performances. But, after speaking with George, I realized it might be good to have an additional person who could help facilitate the ancestors as well! So, I asked Jonathan Godfrey to assist and he agreed.

The 3rd Show – April 6, 2013 – 2:00-5:00pm

George Hunter had suggested that I really set things up during the project – to have clearly delineated: an introduction/ my show/a transition/ the group process/ the ending. Both George and Anna really stressed the value of intention and so I set my intention: *to continue gathering information for the show and to allow what wanted to come forth through me and also help facilitate what wanted to come through the participants and to be open to what this process wanted to be.* Jonathan Godfrey brought stones to put around the room – as a way to protect the space and also create an opening valve for the ancestors and energies to enter the space. He was very intentional in this ritual. I also created an instrumental transition where, after finishing the show, I improvised over chords that I felt grounded by. These rituals helped me to really honor what it was I was doing and also honor the people and the ancestors who were coming in a very conscious manner. It also helped me to really step into the women I was channeling in my show in a much deeper way. It also helped clarify things for myself and my audience.

When I was done with the show, I played the transition piece and then invited everyone to take a break. There was no applause at the end but it felt good - again, I did not need the validation. We rearranged the room to be a circle and then, as everyone returned, I invited people to share whatever had come up for them. Some had intense emotion come up and some were shut down – they didn't want to feel. People shared about mother/daughter relationships; feeling the pain of the women in my show and women suffering in the world; the joy of their daughters; wanting to work on their own art. Throughout the sharing, I questioned myself. I was unsure of how this was going to go. Though I had felt confident in the performance, this was the first time I would be facilitating a group of 10 people with two assistants and ancestors. Also, most of the participants were people from the Core training and from my class! I didn't have any need to be good or perfect in my show – but suddenly, in this process, I was aware that people were watching how I was going to facilitate!! I felt scared. After everyone had shared, a woman, L, immediately got up and said that she had a lot of energy and that she wanted to work. I suddenly realized that there were still a few people

who had never done a Core process before. I said a few things about what it might look like but realized that I needed to inform people more than I was about this process.

I immediately stepped into a role as L's niece and Steve helped to facilitate our process. I was grateful for his help but I also wondered if it was okay that there was now another facilitator for the group. At some point, I felt the energy of L's deceased father come in but I didn't say anything. Jonathan had also felt the energy of a male presence and did say something, but because I held back, the process didn't go that way. It was a powerful process nonetheless with another woman, D, stepping into a role as her other niece. After that, two other women worked. The feedback I received was really good, but ultimately, when the process group finished, I felt I had done a perfectly fine job of facilitating a Core Energetics process - but, it was not radically alive and I felt frustrated by the withholding of my impulses. Still, I knew that I was in a learning process and that I didn't have to get any of this "right" on the first try - or even on the third. I had a debriefing with Steve and Jonathan where we talked about what happened, our roles and how we felt about them. It was enlightening and helpful to hear what was said. From that, I felt how I really wanted to learn how step in as the leader while giving space for the gifts Steve and Jonathan were bringing. And more importantly, I also felt my desire to consciously work with the energy of the ancestors and other healing energies that wanted to come through. I realized that I had an image or idea of what I should or should not be doing in this Core Energetics process and that people would judge me if I were to bring in any kind of channeling. But, I didn't want to hold back anything in the next process group! In my group therapy session I had for myself with Ann Bradney the following week, I asked for support around my channeling and then I held back again!!! The pain that came up for me was so intense. Ann supported me in feeling all the pain of holding back and I really felt it. And it gave me the courage in my next two shows to not hold back and allow people to have their skepticism or judgement or whatever feelings came up - part of the point of my project!

The 4th Show - April 27, 2013 - 2:00-5:00pm

I worked with George Hunter again after my 3rd show on developing the container for the show/process group and continued working with healing my shame around channeling. This time, determined not to hold back anything, I brought my own stones - George said that the stones would make my job easier and define the edges of the

container. He said it would give clarity to where the ancestors entered and to keep spirits that don't have clear intent from being in the space. He suggested that I set them in places with intention. I was learning the power of intention. Jonathan taught me how to open and close the valve using one of the stones which would allow the ancestors to enter.

I included in my introduction a detailed description of what Core Energetics was and stated that there might be some channeling of energies that would happen in the group process. I performed my show. And ironically, though I had a strong intention to not hold back in the group process, I noticed that there was still a way that I wasn't giving myself full permission to fully embody the women who were speaking in my show. I then transitioned the group and felt my transition was smoother than the previous time. I explained in more detail what might happen in the Core process (though again, I knew that I needed to get stronger in this area). Each member of the group shared what came up for them, except for one person, N. I was very aware of N but did not feel a need to push her in any way. She was a friend of a friend and I had not had any contact with her beforehand. Later, during one of the processes where someone was hitting the cube, N left. I learned from that that I would really need to be in some kind of contact (email or phone) to let people know that there might be powerful emotional release work. I had spent so much time imagining that people were going to hate the show or feel indifferently that I did not prepare for the deep, intense emotions people might have and how that would affect them and others. From this, I learned that I need to really own that what I am doing with this project has impact on people – sometimes strong impact. In retrospect, I could have kept checking in with N to see if she needed anything.

There was growing trust and comfort working with Steve and Jonathan. Steve was naming and teaching things that kept making the room safer. He was also such a wonderful grounding presence. In the first process with a woman, M, I asked her what she needed and she said that she needed to be held. The group lifted her off the ground and rocked her gently. In that process, Jonathan brought her dad in (her dad had been deceased for many years). She felt Jonathan's gentleness and felt safe around him.

Then, in the second process, a woman, H, went into her rage. It was a deep powerful process complete with ancestors, chanting and channeling. But, ironically, I was not channeling. I was facilitating the energies! It was a radically alive process with ancestors!!

The 5th Show - May 4, 2013 - 2:00-6:00pm

Two days before the show, I received terrible news from my sister in Hong Kong. A childhood friend of ours, Livia, had jumped from her apartment building - exactly the same way my cousin, Wendy, had committed suicide. I reached out for a lot of support and received it. Some suggested that I cancel my show, but it didn't feel right. In fact, it felt really important that I do the show - as a tribute to Livia. In a conversation with my best friend as I was grieving, I suddenly remembered that the second anniversary of Wendy's death was on May 4th. I was scared to perform but I realized that I was scared that I was going to have a lot of feelings. And I received guidance in writing to my Guides: *Do not be ashamed of your feelings - you will allow others to feel when you allow yourself to feel.* I was grateful for that and thanks to Steve and Jonathan, I was able to have a lot of feelings before the participants came.

I performed all of my rituals with a strong intention to allow whatever wanted to come through me and through others. My introduction included an even more detailed description of Core Energetics and I felt confident in what I was saying. I allowed myself to go all the way with the women in my show - to embody my Grandmother, the Young sex slave girl, and Wendy. It was a 40 minute performance. When I finished, the audience applauded. It almost felt strange to receive that. The transition felt strong. There were 10 participants - 3 of them were people who had come to a previous show. I gave a detailed explanation of what to expect in the process - I felt very confident and in my leadership. There was a lot of strong feeling in the room as each person shared. Steve named how strange it is to be coming into a group with big feelings but not knowing anyone and the trust not being fully there. It was such an important thing to acknowledge and again, Steve's acknowledgement of this made the room safer.

I asked people to stand and feel their feet on the ground and to move their bodies. And then, we held hands. I felt the vibration of the man, H, standing next to me and asked him if he wanted to go deeper into a process. I had worked with him in previous Artists Workshops and he was practicing vibrating daily. So, he, with his vibration, led

the group into an amazing process that ended with him and another man, T, vibrating together and thrusting their pelvis's on the cube – allowing all of their aggression. Then, T started to cry and H & T held each other. It was a beautiful thing to witness - two men allowing their aggression freely and then T opening to his vulnerability. The women in the room were very moved.

The next process, I noticed a woman, Y, who had been quiet and reserved but had spoken about her need in her share. So, I gently suggested that she could get a need met today in the group. She agreed to do some work. Her work involved Jonathan stepping into a role of the gentle, kind man and that she wanted a relationship with someone like that. Four women started to come up and stand next to her to support her – and I noticed that they were all different aspects of herself and named that – the woman who represented her need and want; the woman who was scared and wanted to protect her; the woman who felt ugly and fat; and the woman who believed that she deserved what she really wanted – a gentle, kind man who loved her. At one point, Jonathan turned to a man, S, who was sitting in the corner – Jonathan had felt something from him. S said he felt like a father - Y's father. Y then said that her father had died when she was a baby. She had never had any contact with him since. I had S just say what he was feeling and that touched Y. She eventually allowed her need and want for a healthy relationship to be louder than all the judgemental and fearful voices and stepped all the way towards Jonathan.

The final process was a woman, R, who allowed her rage towards her father to come up. She, like Y, had never done any Core work but went right into it.

Steve did some of his amazing teaching about Core. When the process was over, I had everyone come into a circle and did a gentle closing – a thank you to all the ancestors and healing energies that had come in – and I spoke about contraction to the group.

I felt wonderful afterwards. I had not held back anything. Steve, Jonathan and I now had chemistry! We worked beautifully together, respecting each other's gifts and leadership. I was so grateful to both of them. Later, one of the

women came up to me and said that she felt like she had received a message from Wendy and the other women thanking me for allowing their voices to be heard.

Interestingly, I never really did any channeling myself – except in my show. But, I noticed that, as George Hunter had said, the energies of Spirit will come everytime I choose to let it happen – even through others who have never done any channeling before. I was connecting people to the Other Side – the other side of their pain, the other side of their pleasure, the other side of Life – and I felt connected to my greater purpose.

The Feedback:

“When I do Core with you and when I see your artistic work, the invisible subtle realities become more real. You are such a light and gift to the world, and such an inspiration to me.”

“I just wanted to thank you again for an incredibly amazing experience at your performance yesterday. First of all, your performance was beautiful... your songs, they were absolutely beautiful. I can't put it into words, but I feel like all the stories really touched upon so many core issues that many people struggle with, especially shamed-based people. I just hope you know that your performance spoke volumes to me, as well as others. I also wanted to thank you for taking the time to take me through that exercise. It truly was transformational for me and so very healing.”

“Angela's project to reveal atrocities against Asian women based on gender is truly remarkable. I was deeply moved when I participated. Angela has the ability to shift attitudes held for thousands of years in cultural memes: she uses her gifts to relate through story and music. I hope you have the opportunity to experience her "act of grace." “

“Something big shifted in me from that process...a strengthening of my self-esteem I think. Acknowledging and feeling the women in my family enabled me to feel myself in a way I didn't realize had been missing.”

“I'm still percolating on the notion of my ancestors knowing or caring about me...I could definitely use the extra support!”

The End:

This is not the end. This is, to my enormous surprise, the beginning. I have already been asked to perform my show with the process after graduation.

I am noticing with my individual clients and in my groups and workshops that there is a greatly increased connection to people who have died in their lives – without me saying anything that I'm doing.

I am having an increased connection to my ancestors and my Guides.

And, I am feeling incredibly grateful these days for everything that has come before and everyone who has been part of my life – especially Ann and the training. I thank everyone who helped me in the creation and the carrying out of this project – especially Anna Timmermans, George Hunter, Steve Maher, Jonathan Godfrey, Patricia Haman, Patricia Pfost, Jamie Stein, Cynthia Sophiea, Cindy Cheung, Sherri Brown, Marielle Taylor, Matt Hoverman and David Sutcliffe. I thank everyone in my class - and the Radical Aliveness community - for your incredible support. And of course, I thank my husband, Ferdinand Poon, for going through it all with me.

In the Project Description that Ann & Patricia had us fill out at the beginning of all of this, there was a question that asked: “What excites you most about your project?” I wrote: *the idea that I am clearing up and out something for myself, in this and past lives, and for my ancestry.* I had forgotten that I had written that until I was preparing my oral presentation. That is exactly what it feels like...a clearing. As Anna had said, we had all dared to step into the unknown and it was, indeed, profound.

The Appendix:

I want to say to those who are experiencing project anxiety, I have struggled through almost every single part of this process. This has been one of the most difficult things I have had to do – artistically, emotionally, spiritually.

I hope that this list of questions that I would choose from to ask myself almost everyday for the last year and a half will help someone out there who is struggling: WHAT am I doing? How am I going to write this? Who’s going to want to come watch this? Who would want to stay and participate in a project like this? Is there something else I should be doing? Will I help anyone with this or am I being selfish in my project by doing a show? Why didn’t I do something easier? Can I change my project at the last minute? What happens if I’m in the middle of a process group and somebody is going really deep and I don’t know what to do? What if I don’t get this done and don’t graduate? What am I doing? WHAT AM I DOING?!

You can get the real help and the support that you need. It is there.