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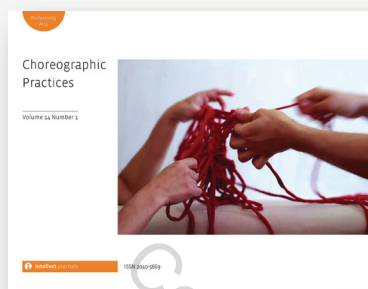
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Choreographic Practices

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Choreographic Practices explores the expanded field of choreography. The journal emphasizes processes and practices over products, and is focused on work at the borders and edges of what is known, understood or assumed. We publish essays, documentation, blogs in print, visual essays, dialogues, interviews and debate, and welcome submissions throughout the year.

We also offer three different types of peer-review depending on the needs of the author: open peer-review, collaborative peer-review and traditional double-blind peer-review. Full submission guidelines are available at: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/choreographic-practices#call-for-papers>.

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Dance, Movement & Spiritualities

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

JULIET CHAMBERS-COE

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We are delighted to offer this Special Issue on ‘Voice as Movement and a Spiritual “in-between”’. Each contribution has been carefully crafted by the authors within, led by a heart-centred approach that co-guest editors Elisabeth Laasonen Belgrano and Mark D. Price offered – and insisted upon – at each moment on the journey to creating this Special Issue. We apologize for the slight delay in releasing the issue, but as I am sure you know: heart work takes time. I feel deep gratitude to Elisabeth and Mark, and to all the authors who have so generously and bravely contributed their voicing–moving–thinking practices so articulately in the often shaky and uncertain space of embodied-spirituality-in-academia. That is what this journal does best, and this issue is a shining bastion of that aim. Until now the Journal has not fully attended to the spirituality of voice and so what is offered here forges new desire paths into exploring voice as immanent spirituality as it inheres in the moving body, since, ‘the spirits of heaven and earth [...] are the inexplicable, the unfathomable in nature. The sound of the human voice and the movement of the human body, can alone bring us near to glimpsing these worlds’ (Laban 1975: 49).

Heartfelt thanks to Zoë Katsilerou, Cia Sautter, Marie Hay, Andrea Rushton, Misha Penton, Xueting Luo, Franziska Boehm, Serena Ruth, Mark D. Price and Elisabeth Laasonen Belgrano.

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EDITORIAL

ELISABETH LAASONEN BELGRANO
Independent Researcher

... voicing as loving as living as writing as moving: overflowing knowledge *through* a sacred rite of passage ...

eyes and ears open prepared ready
attentive to allow ripples and waves to pass through self
to let to let the will of all be done
to let thy will be done.

Standing in a small room. Preparing to dance, to move, to allow self to act. To follow. To learn. To relate. All words appearing in the room are either spoken aloud by the teacher of the class or emerging from within self through the moving body, as a response to what is experienced in the room. All words emerging give impulses, inspiration and new directions for movement, which begin *through* a sense of *conscious control* AND, at the very same time, a *letting go* of the body, *allowing* for continuous breathing and expansion. Academic writing

KEYWORDS

voicing movement
diffractive praxis
moving *through*
letting go
allowing
sacred/performative
acts

1. See Gaga (2018) at <https://www.gagapeople.com/en/>. Accessed 27 January 2025.

has entangled with a diffractive praxis of voicing and psycho-physical moving (Laasonen Belgrano 2020; Laasonen Belgrano et al. forthcoming 2025). Writing and expressing have merged with living, thus becoming equal to a ritual of moving as a sacred and performative act. Performing artistic practice-led research has become a spiritual act of caring, observing, witnessing, receiving, giving, searching, meditating ... always as continuous never ending moving

The primary aim of this Special Issue is to allow participants to begin with and *stay close* to their closest engagements with their specific *vocal-movement-writing-praxis*. Everyone has been encouraged to catch the invisible and the uncertain *within* self, to make mindful connections of any sort while articulating, expressing and making visible to others both the smooth and beautiful, as well as the sometimes 'raw' and uncomfortable aspects of moving vocally and somatically.

After a year of studying biblical Hebrew and rabbinic exegetical traditions, I was longing to engage with other researchers experimenting with ways of caring for words as part of everyday living; re-searching words – coming through performative praxis – as if sacred in their essence. The opportunity of guest-editing this Special Issue offered an academic space allowing writers to explore their texts not only as standard academic chapters *explaining* its content in a restricted form but also to become consciously aware of *how* words may develop into significant sensuous knowledge of praxical processing. I wanted to encourage writers to move deeper into their first drafts, into the raw, untouched and unpolished meanings potentially hiding unknown openings. I encouraged everyone to keep as much as possible of their first drafts in order to methodically unfold the untouched *sacred* articulations through sidenotes – as a way of collecting and archiving scattered and fresh thoughts. Thinking, which might lead to new directions of moving, without losing the often poetic and spiritual writing which emerges from a first close reading of one's own inner rhythm and movement.

The opening of this introduction derives from my research into dancer and choreographer Ohad Naharin's Gaga-language.¹ This language is performed as part of a teacher's instructions while movement emerges in class, thus allowing individual participants' bodies to interpret and transform words and movements into their own performative praxis based on each individual's understanding. The Gaga-language suggests a paradoxical mind-set in which *falling* (more or less) always accompanies a sense of *extending* and *expanding*, where plasticity is both about *letting go* and *becoming clearly aware* and *in control*. Guest-editing this Special Issue granted me the graceful gift of appropriating the Gaga-movement language in relation to my co-authors, a means for exploring academic writing as a spiritual praxis.

The process of creating this Special Issue has not only been to write *about* vocal praxis as spiritual movement but to actually write academically *through* moving, to experience growth and movement *through* intra-action with peer reviewers, allowing for something to literally grow out of *nothing* (Laasonen Belgrano and Price forthcoming 2025). Here I am also referring to *nothing* as a paradox that may be perceived as synonymous with love, with God, with divine presence, with philosophical concepts and not least with a sense of a spiritual *in-between* (Barad 2012, 2017; Belgrano 2011: 213–14, 2016; Calcagno 2003; Hanaoka 2008; Heisig 2013; Irigaray 2002; Keller 2008; Ward 2022: 260–86).

Training to sing vocal baroque music made me aware of the importance of allowing for words and vocal sounding to merge into common conscious

meaning. A musical ornament should be performed with a sense of *grace*, always serving the meaning of a word, aiming to touch the listener's soul through its sonic expression. This ornamental practice could be done by holding onto a note in order to create a momentum, extending a note into the next measure to create a sounding bridge which could lift specific meaning, letting a tone slowly and softly *die* at the end of a phrase and disappearing without a final concluding harmony, but rather open-endedly leading into a sensation of being left in a void, and so forth. In the process of mastering the *art of embellishing* (or ornamenting), a seventeenth-century musical phrase incessantly calls a performer into deeper awareness *through* words and *through* somatic mattering.

In 1602, Florentine composer and singer Giulio Caccini wrote about *grazia* ('grace') as a way of performing conscious musical and psycho-physical awareness. Caccini's words about grace have created a beautiful connection in me where *grace* – as a spiritual and theological term – relates to overflowing divine love. As a singer and a priest, *grace* becomes both the spirit that enters my bodily self, as much as it is expressed *through* a meaning-making over-vocalizing expiration.

Around 1630–40, when opera became a public event in Europe, creative and explorative laboratories emerged within intellectual and artistic circles in the form of academies and salons. In many of these bustling think tanks, words and bodies restlessly searched for new ways of acting and communicating through grace, new ways of forming languages, and expressing musical and relational understanding through scores and texts. In the midst of these events, there were female voices assuming the form of symbols for all kinds of mad and unexpected relations onstage. These voices were often described as full of grace and even equal to the voice of God.

Artistic performers and biblical prophets could be placed together as guides with a common quest for teaching humanity about close and intimate spiritual relations, just as much as endless, borderless and open ones. In this Special Issue, eight such prophetic performers are *writing* the readers into new dimensions: opening with Zoe Katsilerou leading us in-between narrow tonal intervals in order to cultivate presence; moving into Andrea Rushton's tonal presence as mournful grief and tender lamentation; continuing – guided by the *Sounding Sensation* duo, Franziska Theresa Boehm and Serena Jane Ruth – into experiential knowing of in-between as a sounding-sensing and practical score; allowing the reader to fall into Misha Penton's universe of multi-layered poetical contemplations of a vocal artist as a disciple of the Muse; opening another door for the ontological art of Speakingdance as developed by Marie Hay; taking us into the space-time of Xueting Luo and her words *on* and *through* tradition and modernity in-between spiritual Chinese poetry and Kunqu dance; making ready the reader's ear for the Voice of God as spiritual *Ruach* performed by Cia Sautter as singing and dancing; then finally and collectively gathering all what has been learned so far into Ilona Krawczyk's voice performing as a vessel, filling it with new shapes and waves of performative, psycho-physical and spiritual aspects ... allowing all to overflow into yet unknown forms and contents. These stories may all be perceived as fragments and embellishing ornaments, *as part of* an imaginary musical manuscript, and thus create a much-needed structure for this rich and extravagant collection of sensuous knowing.

Returning to my Gaga online class – where all is relation, a desire for continuous and generous openness towards the other and to be touched by

what moves around in the room. What I read and write is movement, persisting as dancing through the narratives and stories told. Not simply because stories tell of something but because stories are collections of words and meanings, all dependent on receivers and listeners. Even a single note can cause a sense of wonder in someone who is open to the unknown and aware of what there is.

The aim of this Special Issue is to share imaginative expression and consciously controlled modes of living(s) and breathing(s), making visible and heard that there is no end to movement and voice. It is about letting you, dear reader, become aware of even something as seemingly simple as your back, your spine or even a collarbone, in order to let these parts tell you of new sounds within your body; to make you aware that there is no end to vocal movement, but rather a surging fountain of longing for more. And since voice has no end, it will continue to flow, also here: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3287736/3287737>.

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FURTHER READING

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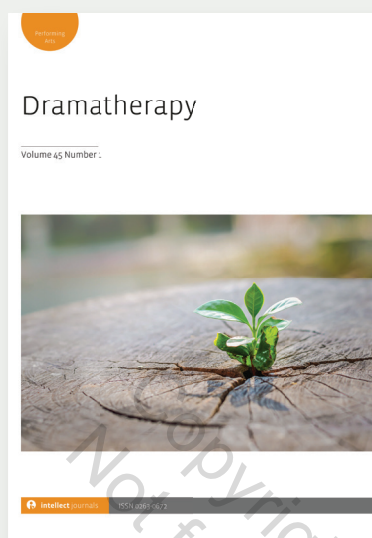
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From 2024 onwards DJ will be published as Diamond Open Access, with funding provided by BADth. It will not charge APCs or submission fees, and all content can be accessed via the Intellect Discover platform free of charge.

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In between the harmonies: Reflections on relationships between the experience of singing close intervals and the cultivation of presence within movement training for performers

ABSTRACT

This article reflects on relationships between sung close intervals and the cultivation of presence within movement training. Drawing on my experiences of facilitating the Moving Voice Laboratory (2016–20), and using voice, movement and improvisation as contextual frameworks, I reflect on the spiritual, practical and interpersonal significance of inhabiting dissonance, and the positive impact this can have on a performer’s presence. This article combines academic writing with poetic reflections of practical, in-studio work. All participants remain anonymized. I use this writing to discuss the learning that embodying semitones can offer with regards to cultivating presence as a spiritual, performative practice.

KEYWORDS

actor training
attention
breath support
dance and spirituality
dance and voice
dissonance
embodied knowledge
voice training

1. The Moving Voice Laboratory is a workshop environment for researching relationships between movement and voice. Find more details on the below section Moving Voice Laboratory.

What can embodying semitones reveal about our conditioning around inhabiting discomfort and dissonance? Expanding on embodied understandings and notions of presence and dissonance, this article offers a new framework for practitioners and scholars and aims to inspire further investigation into the possibilities of semitones, presence and movement within training.

INTRODUCTION

In his book *The Life of Lines*, anthropologist Tim Ingold writes that in ancient Greece harmonies were described as ‘the way things [are] held together by the tension of contrary forces’ (2015: 12). The tension that Ingold is referring to has been one of the main interests throughout my training and performance career. The pull between musical intervals of close and far proximity fascinated me, the possibilities hiding in the spaces in between, as well as the impact these can have on a performer’s movement qualities and presence.

When sung, intervals or harmonies as they are widely known, can evoke a range of sensations including joy, ease and discomfort. Each musical relationship carries distinct stories, songs and movements and impacts on the singer’s body both through the sonic vibrations and the imaginative experiences which may arise from the melodic lines. In my early years as a vocalist, my embodied experience of vocalizing specific intervals correlated with the ways relationships between two notes were described within my classical piano training. They could be harmonious or dissonant. Building on my training and work on folk singing, improvisation, somatic practices and dance, these experiences have shifted. In this writing, I wish to challenge, move beyond and recontextualize dualistic understandings of relationships between notes. In doing so, I will refer to dissonant intervals as close intervals. The choice of these words is informed by my ongoing research in the nuanced physical experiences that singing can facilitate. Considering the complexity of the embodied sensations singing can offer, I hope to reframe associations around dissonance within western performance training and to inspire further research into polyphonic song and movement training.

Using my own practice within the Moving Voice Laboratory¹ as a framework for reflection, I aim to offer a fresh perspective on bodies and their relationships to dissonance, whether that is sung, felt, imagined or performed. Through open questions, I reflect on the significance of embodying close intervals and on the possibilities present for cultivating presence within movement and voice training. These questions serve as a frame for my thinking and a metaphor for the precise, mobile and subtle experiences I am reflecting upon. My questions are doors to your own questions, specific to your practice and life.

As well as words, my exposition of these ideas involves recorded vocal elements which give a sonic body to the process I wish to present here. You can choose to listen to these as you read or separately. Whichever you prefer, I would invite you to allow them to act as an embodied input into the enquiries of this article.

Whilst I have done my best to include as much research relevant to my work as possible, it would defy the word-limit to include all of it. I acknowledge the work of those whose practice has had a significant impact on my thinking and practice, and I want to express my gratitude for all colleagues delivering high-quality, meaningful work in our sector.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

Observing and reflecting on the impact sung intervals have on bodies in motion and the stories they carry have formed a significant part of my research and work. Over the years, I have become increasingly fascinated by close intervals and the imaginative, energetic and performative potential hiding in the small spaces between notes. Whilst often described as unpleasant, I have found richness in the sense of conflict close intervals can create, and a spaciousness that has contributed to the growth of my performance skills and presence.

Directing my attention into their seemingly tight spaces and using the relationships proposed by the melodic lines as a framework for exploration, I have found a stronger embodied connection to my imagination, my creativity and others around me. This connection has felt distinctly different from previous experiences; it has felt fuller, electric and alive. It has felt 'profound' in the specific sense which Deikman (2000) gives to the term, and has highlighted the interweaving relationships between presence and spirituality.

When I am present in the ways close harmonies allow me to be, I find ease in connecting with others around me and feel part of a whole. Through shifting the ways I pay attention to close harmonies, I have recognized that '[a]t its most basic, the spiritual is the experience of the connectedness that underlies reality' (Deikman 2000: 84). Deikman proposes that connectedness is the main ingredient of a spiritual living and this proposition speaks to my experience of singing, dancing, being with others in performance spaces that feel like oceans. There is a unique fluidity, listening, profound connection and a newness to each moment and whilst these qualities require rigorous training, these moments feel at ease with the flow of the world. These qualities are often specifically explored within performance environments, but they are transferable to my everyday life. When allowing myself to be present and listen, I notice a shift in the qualities of my everyday life. In this sense, Deikman's proposition highlights the significance of relationships as spiritual pathways to a more present everyday experience.

UNDERSTANDING ME

Having studied the piano since I was 6 years old and moving on to study further at the Macedonian University in Greece, I found myself trapped in westernized understandings of music. As a student, I felt a strong need to move to a musical world in which the tension created by close harmonies would not be swiftly resolved but celebrated and encouraged. Just before the end of my third year, I drifted from the classical and joined the folk department to study northern Greek polyphonic music. The shift in soundscape significantly impacted on the ways I have since been perceiving and making music and movement work. The more I exposed myself to the tension offered by sung close harmonies, the more I was able to direct my attention to the spaces between them and move away from a narrow, tense experience of that friction. As I practised embodying close intervals, I noticed a shift in my listening.

Whilst initially the space between the harmonies felt concrete, two notes with clearly defined boundaries vibrating closely to and pulling at each other, they transformed to an open-air playground of frequencies and potential. The boundaries of the notes remained clear but became porous. Perhaps finding myself in a world in which perfect tunings and defined resolutions were of little importance lifted a significant amount of pressure and allowed this shift

2. Nahuatl is the language of the Nahua peoples in Mexico. The thought used by Núñez was:

We have come to get to know our faces. It is not by chance that we are here today. To be a perforated mirror. To read ourselves like a piece of writing. To converse with our own hearts. Here and now to look at the stars. My heart is a flying bird.

(2019: 94)

3. This is a sound file to accompany this writing. It is a safe link that you can click on and be redirected to my website, also found here: <https://zoekatsilerou.com/intervals/>. To play it, you must be connected to the internet. You can choose to play it whilst you read or to listen to it at a different time.

4. The augmented 4th and the diminished 5th are intervals of further proximity that are also considered dissonant.

to take place. Perhaps my existing preconceptions of harmonies had become a boundary to paying attention to the quality of my sound and the impact it had on the present moment. This shift offered a rich space of possibilities and reflected Heidegger's view of a boundary as that from which 'something begins its presenting' (1971: 152). In this sense, inhabiting two notes of close proximity becomes a beginning to new possibilities.

These personal reflections clarified how the process of meeting close intervals anew had required me to retrain my attention. Rather than thinking about the notes and the tension they produced, I focused on the subtleties of the space between them. Rather than pushing to sustain the notes I had to sing, I imagined my body expanding and letting go. Similar to meditation practices, I conditioned my body to return to the present and to experience each moment anew. Rediscovering the reality of two notes vibrating together anew brought a profound connectedness to something which felt bigger than me, a whole which included other bodies, frequencies and possibilities.

Using a Mexican Nahuatl² thought as a guide for theatre training, theatre director Nicolás Núñez presents the metaphor of a perforated mirror as imagery for a performer's commitment to seeing each present moment anew and to rediscovering themselves. Relearning to be present with the relational qualities of each interval is a unique, embodied, spiritual experience that underpins our fundamental need to be connected to others. Intervals can become a 'perforated mirror' (Núñez 2019: 94) of the individual qualities of our being in relation to the world around us both within and out of performance contexts.

INTERVALS

SOUND FILE³ (click for sound)

Twinkle, twinkle little star...

When singing Twinkle, twinkle little star, you might notice a shift in tone between the first and second twinkle. Twinkle, twinkle... This shift, space, distance is a musical interval.

Intervals can have a lot or very little space between their notes. The smallest interval used in classical western music is a semitone. A tone is two semitones next to each other. A semitone is one step, a tone is two steps. A tone and a semitone can be created by playing or singing two notes simultaneously. This sound is considered dissonant in western classical music contexts, with a semitone being 'the most dissonant interval' (Wikipedia n.d.). Whilst there are other dissonant intervals⁴ which are further apart in terms of instrument mechanics or frequency, this writing will reflect on experiences of embodying tones and semitones.

UNPICKING DISSONANCE

Within my classical piano training, intervals were defined as harmonious or dissonant. The use of the conjunction or highlights the sense that these two words contain two completely different sonic textures and experiences. A harmony would mostly consist of what was called a pleasant sound, and a dissonance of a disharmonious or unpleasant sound. This distinction might have emerged due to the direct link of the Greek words for harmony and dissonance with the words agreement and disagreement.

Harmony or *armonia* in Greek derives from the verb *armonizo* which means to fit together. Dissonance or *diafonía* translates as disagreement. Within

western classical practices, dissonant intervals are often perceived as inherently unpleasant. The above definitions limit intervals to the qualities of pleasantness or unpleasantness and fail to recognize the breadth of experiences one can have from listening to and embodying these sounds. Dissonance in western music is built upon the assumption that the notes creating it will move to a harmonious resolution. So much attention is given to resolutions that it is as if the sole existence of dissonances is to be resolved to a beautifully sounding harmony. There is little space for relationships that remain in conflict for longer than what feels comfortable, or ones that remain unresolved.

Through coming into contact with dissonance, finding constructive ways of relating to it and developing strategies for 'surviving' these moments, growth is inevitable. As within Feldenkrais Method®,⁵ one might discover new ways of being 'through the process of confusion' (Diaz et al. 2008: 88). Whilst not always easy, feeling confused, challenged, lost, scared and angry can lead to life-changing growth and transformation.

Can safe contact with discomfort support our sense of self, presence and resilience?

Theatre director Anne Bogart reflects on the significance of encountering discomfort and writes that exposure to 'discomfort and dissonance is as vital to our development as our need for food and water' (2021: 5). By meeting discomfort, we develop strategies and tools for resolving conflict, we grow and we are given opportunities to understand our individual ways of relating to these experiences. Like children playing we learn through the doing. This learning is embodied, often subconscious and informs our whole being. The journey to resolution requires time for internal and interpersonal exchange, an openness for encountering the unknown and a learning that goes beyond our cognitive, conscious thoughts. It is a deep process of self-discovery and growth.

How do the spaces in between what you understand as dissonant or harmonious qualities feel in your body?

Considering an interval's lack of intention and emotional specificity, western characterizations mostly reveal a narrow understanding of disagreement that places the emphasis on its uncomfortable nature and its immediate resolution. Whilst a disagreement or a close interval might contain elements of discomfort, it can also contain joy, surprise, unexpectedness and playfulness.

If we consider dissonances part of a wide spectrum of relationships, can our embodied experiences of singing, moving and being shift?

Within eastern music practices, close intervals are more common and there is more space for close harmonies to unfold the breadth of their qualities. Ingold's definition of a harmony as the way things are held together leaves space for a multiplicity of experiences. It makes no reference to the emotional impact a harmony or dissonance can have on the listener but focuses on the tension between the forces creating the experience whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.

For me, fitting together does not rely on any specific qualities of tension, it simply contains the possibility of all of them. Fitting together is finding ways of co-existing that acknowledge and respect each of the parts' distinct qualities. Each relationship is seen as unique and is listened to carefully. Each part is experienced anew and is not restricted by past ideas or future expectations.

The practice of fitting together is simultaneously complex and simple. It requires an attention that is specific to the now and an openness that is soft, compassionate, curious, alive and present. It requires knowing the points of

5. The Feldenkrais Method® is a somatic practice that uses gentle movement and directed attention to support people in developing new and effective ways of moving and living.

tension and surrendering into them, with surrendering here suggesting a willingness to follow and to discover a way through, rather than a loss of agency and self. For me, fitting together is acknowledging and existing within the wide spectrum of the nuances beyond harmonies and dissonances.

Working alongside this fitting together, I have found richness in encountering dissonance. Both within my movement, theatre and music practices I have experienced shifts in the ways I embody, perform and communicate material and an endless curiosity to dive deeper into the spaces of close harmonies.

How can movement and voice training support performers in developing tools for using dissonance as a ground for growth?

As my teaching and investigation into close harmonies deepens, I observe repeating patterns. In an attempt to sing close harmonies, a majority of performers initially tense. This tension manifests predominantly on the neck, eyebrows, shoulders, collar bone, jaw, root of the tongue and the hips. It also impacts on their energy, relationship to other bodies and qualities of listening. I notice that their breathing can become shallower and that they can find it challenging to sustain notes, to connect to other performers and to find a creative flow.

This tension often reveals which parts of the body I, as a teacher, need to tend to more closely so they can return to a more homeostatic state. Recognizing that muscles 'do not work in isolation' (Bartoskova 2021: 205) but in synergy with each other through the nervous system, this tension also directly impacts on the ways participants move, embody and tell stories. Their bodies seem trapped. The range of their movement qualities narrows, and they fall into more habitual ways of moving.

The tension that Ingold refers to has a physical manifestation which feels as if the body pushes away from the conflict of the sound whilst the sound aggressively pulls the body into its vibratory sphere. Those singing often stop and begin laughing or sometimes cry as a result of the stress the tension of the notes cause them. I observe that the unnecessary tension caused by this experience is a manifestation of a performer's relationship to discomfort.

Interestingly, this is a much more common phenomenon in one-to-one sessions, while in group contexts, this anxiety can be less identifiable. It is, however, still subtly present. Do participants feel that they could hide their response to close harmonies amongst the other bodies? It is curious that it is often easier to access a more expansive sense of listening when embraced by a collective mass of bodies and sounds. It is as if we can use others as protective shields of our fears and expectations and as support for moving beyond these.

What might this reveal about our communal nature as humans?

Some performers transform their discomfort to a judgement of the quality of their voice or ability to sing/vocalize and move. In these moments participants are at their most vulnerable. The closer the notes are, the more vulnerable performers can feel. These observations raise questions about the relationship between the closeness of the notes sung and the performers' sense of agency. The semitones and tones, the most intimate of intervals, come with a pull so strong that it can unearth fears, insecurities and vulnerabilities, and can make the performer lose their ground. The strong pull of the notes deprives the performers of their sense of familiarity, and they lose control of their breath. It is as if close harmonies are so intimate that those singing can lose themselves in them.

How can singing two notes have such a strong impact on people?

It is important to note that I have only observed this sense of loss of control when working with singing. When working with instrumentalists, and whilst the strong pull of the close harmonies is still there, the physical repercussions noted when singing are not present. This is perhaps due to the nature of the voice to communicate who we really are, to convey thoughts and feeling and reveal our cultural background and heritage (Berry 1973).

What do I, as a pedagogue, need to do to support participants in developing a spacious embodying of the notes and a listening that will encourage a strong sense of self?

This research has brought new perspectives on my pedagogical practice and performance making and has inspired a passion for creating spaces where presence and resilience can be nurtured. It has also challenged engrained western preconceptions of dissonance and has raised questions around cultural understandings of dissonance and discomfort.⁶ My curiosity around close intervals led to a commitment to developing a practice that allows me to experience their relationships anew and one that will offer insights into the ways I use my body.

This work has shaped the MovingVoice Laboratory within which exploring dissonance is key in uncovering the potential of each performer.

MOVING VOICE LABORATORY

The MovingVoice Laboratory is a series of workshops which provide space for performers of all disciplines to explore relationships between song, text and movement. Founded in 2016 and facilitated by me, it takes place in a variety of contexts within the United Kingdom and Europe.

Combining movement and voice technical training with improvisation and independent tasks, this work prepares performers and ensembles to tell stories through movement, text and song and supports them to develop creative agency, cultivate presence, deepen their listening and grow their resilience. Drawing on the principles of the Russian Laboratory structures established by theatre directors Konstantin Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold in the late 1800s to early 1900s, the MovingVoice Laboratory is an environment within which new embodied knowledge can be generated (Brown 2019). The training is interdisciplinary and moves away from body–mind and voice–mind dualisms, working with the body as a whole.

Following the essence of the laboratory spaces, it creates a contained space within which ‘intertwining practices, territories, pedagogies and ideologies’ (Brown 2019: i) can meet and grow. It is a space of exchange, experimentation and transformation. Drawing on their personal stories, participants build upon and utilize their skills to share performative material that serves as ‘a provocation for the spectator’ (Wolford 1997: 8) and themselves. For me, Wolford’s provocation implies the ability to share stories that challenge established understandings of everyday life and raise questions around existing ecological and sociopolitical structures. Through training performers to carefully tune into their stories and their relationships with their every day, the MovingVoice Laboratory supports them to develop the ability to be present in performance.

How can shifting narratives around dissonance inform relationships between bodies and stories, and nurture presence?

Nurturing presence requires simultaneously employing attention and letting go of it. Recognizing that attention both ‘modifies and is modified by what it attends’ (Home-Cook 2015: 39), the process of growing presence

6. Discomfort here is used to describe the unease and friction that can emerge out of singing close intervals and is not referring to physical or emotional distress.

entails the fundamental qualities of an attention that is both precise and loose, circular and linear, feeding into and being fed by each moment. This attention does not employ a narrow concentration that aims to analyse, memorize or criticize a singular phenomenon. Rather, it is an attention that engages the performer in embodied, interpersonal and active ways.

Paying attention to be present is an experience that engages all the senses, it is a 'dynamic embodied attending in the world' (Home-Cook 2015: 37). Recognizing the challenges of inhabiting dynamic, embodied ways of being due to contemporary sedentary, screen-focused living, the Moving Voice Laboratory is a process that invites participants to consider slowing down, paying attention to what already is and allowing for new possibilities to emerge.

THE HOW

To facilitate such a process we should curate pedagogical structures which are flexible and responsive. Drawing on my ongoing movement, voice, somatic practice and performance experiences I offer participants skills that respond to the performative needs of their now.

The MovingVoice Laboratory training combines somatic practices, contemporary dance, improvisation and psychophysical practices, and voice training which includes singing, text delivery and improvisation. In her book *Somatic Voices*, Christina Kapadocha explains that the term somatic describes 'any process that emerges from the state of being or having a living body' (2021: 2). The combination of training offered within the laboratory works with the body as a whole beyond mind-body and voice-body dualisms. We work with the body as an organism that is continuously evolving.

Within this work, my research on close intervals is prominent. Through teaching a variety of choral, polyphonic songs from Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Scotland and Ireland, I draw participants' attention to the relational qualities of the melodic lines within the performative materials we use. Clashing, cutting, weaving, pulling, mirroring, echoing, imitating, contradicting, contrasting, supporting and blocking are some examples of the ways a melodic line can relate to another within these songs. Further to Ingold's contrary forces, polyphonic songs incorporate complex relationships that echo those of our everyday lives. Using the principles of these meetings as beginning points, participants explore relationships between their movements, imagination, stories, songs and the other bodies around them.

It is striking to witness preconceptions around these relational qualities manifesting on bodies in motion. Often unconsciously, performers will embody movement behaviours that feel distant from and contrary to their intentions. In these moments, societal and cultural embodied habits become apparent, and performers are invited to notice them. The process of noticing can challenge them and make them more vulnerable. Building on Chambers-Coe's proposition that creative flow is experienced as 'vibrational currents *in* and *between* bodies' (2023: 167, original emphasis) in these moments, the energetic currents in and between bodies become disrupted. Their attention and listening narrow, the connection and non-verbal communication weakens, and their creativity is inhibited. As with singing close harmonies, performers lose the sense of spaciousness in their bodies and in between each other. It is in these moments of observation that presence can be nurtured.

1. *Can you notice without judging and trying to change?*

2. By guiding performers' attention to recognizing existing behavioural
3. patterns that might inhibit their creative agency, and by offering them strate-
4. gies through which they can allow their attention to wander in new territories,
5. transformation can happen.

6. *What can we learn from the movement of the sung voices about the ways we*
7. *relate to and resolve conflict, or about the ways we chose to relate to others within a*
8. *movement context?*

9. When sharing polyphonic songs with the Moving Voice Laboratory
10. ensembles, I create complex harmonious arrangements. The vocal warm-ups
11. include sung, sustained close intervals in which participants are encouraged
12. to feel the pulling tensions between the two notes, and to trust the process
13. of learning through exposure to dissonance. Within a few sessions, a shift is
14. already taking place. With regular exposure, relaxation techniques and rig-
15. orous training of attention, the spaces in between the notes open up for them,
16. too. They begin to breathe in the vibratory spaces between the notes and
17. to hear new possibilities. The way they listen to each other and themselves
18. begins to expand. It becomes more active, spacious, trusting, confident, curi-
19. ous, attentive and precise. The retreating attitude towards the initial fear and
20. discomfort of a sound is replaced by calmness of mind and a welcoming spirit.
21. The sounds 'touch each other' (Olsen 2011: 31) differently. Olsen discusses
22. the power of the voice to touch and how this touch can vary in intention and
23. impact. It is as if in the moments of shift of listening, the sonic touch becomes
24. clearer and easier to feel.

25. Physically, this shift becomes apparent, too. There is a rekindled passion for
26. play, exploration, exchange and connection. The vulnerability of the
27. bodies in the space is more present than ever before but is welcomed and
28. held by everyone. I see bodies moving in new ways which seem more
29. honest, connected and resilient. I see bodies that yearn for connection,
30. bodies that are present. Reflecting on actor trainer Nicolás Núñez's psycho-
31. physical training practice, scholar Deborah Middleton writes that being
32. present is a performer's means of 'energetic, emotional, imaginative power'
33. (2019: 159). Nurturing presence fuels bodies to be creative, dynamic and
34. confident.

35. I observe that this shift happens when each participant begins to listen
36. to the sound they actually make in relationship to each other, and stop look-
37. ing for the sound they think is expected of them. By lifting expectations and
38. nurturing presence the boundaries of the notes become penetrable. The
39. notes invite new ways of engaging with them and their intervals transform
40. into spaces from which something emerges. This *something* is the clarity and
41. acceptance of each individual presence.

42. The ensemble carries a sound that balances the individual voices and a
43. collective unified sound. They move as one with individuals confidently taking
44. space within the ensemble. The close harmonies become precise, light and
45. carry an intriguing, complex tension. Their movements are rooted in the
46. imaginative space of the ensemble. Often towards the end of the process, the
47. melodic lines and the bodies seem to move in new ways, not forced together
48. but entangled. The moving bodies are free, and their stories interwoven with
49. each other. There is ease, playfulness and space. Kapadocha's observation of
50. the problematic 'distancing between voicer and listener' (2021: 175) is, in these
51. moments, dissolved, and everyone is involved in a seamless exchange of offer-
52. ing and receiving.

7. 'Information overload (also known as infobesity, infoxication, or information anxiety) is the difficulty in understanding an issue and effectively making decisions when one has too much information (TMI) about that issue' (Wikipedia n.d.).

As I sit and observe this process I am reminded of my young child. I see her in everyone, her genuine curiosity, her desire to play, discover and build relationships and her ability to create and inhabit worlds effortlessly. I wonder when we lose these abilities, and remark on how easy it now seems to find them again. I see people who care about each other, the process and their environment. Directing our attention to the qualities of the spaces between us, our meetings, our conflicts and dissonances will awaken our desire to be present again and will support us in finding resilience.

Witnessing the unfolding of the individual presence in the Moving Voice Laboratory space, I understand that my work is to be a safeguard; to guide participant's attention to what already exists in their bodies and to safely support them to explore the spaces and stories they carry. In stepping back from a facilitating that aims to solely develop technical skills, I see others more clearly and feel part of a whole. The subtleties, complexity and beauty of each performer flood the space and each individual is seen clearly. Their unconscious is present now, too, through the ways they hold their bodies, and the energy of the ensemble is electric. Participants' 'multiple aspects of being' are present and the performers carry a 'sense of integrated wholeness' (Chambers-Coe 2023: 160). This integrated wholeness is presence. Being present in such connected, free and playful ways is an acknowledgement of our aliveness. The meetings of the harmonies and the bodies can become metaphors for a fuller, more present living.

CONCLUSION

The distance between sung notes can offer new perspectives on the ways bodies move. Through learning how to listen closely to what they have to offer, performers can pay attention in embodied, active ways that strengthen their presence and resilience. This is an integral element of existing in and beyond close harmonies and of inhabiting a presence that is interwoven throughout every single moment.

Facilitating spaces in which performers can cultivate these qualities seems pertinent in times when presence is challenged by ecological and sociopolitical structures, infoxication⁷ and individualism. Through the Moving Voice Laboratory, I have re-encountered anew the significance of the processes of learning and have drawn my attention away from the final destinations of my journeys. Rather than yearning for resolutions, I inhabit and embody experiences as a means for growth that is in-tune with the world around me and my needs. I encounter each session anew and each person as a well of possibilities for change.

Within this context, the learning that takes place is embodied and touches on fundamental qualities of living. The most important quality is, for me, connecting to others in dynamic and embodied ways. It is my hope that by participating in communal structures and activities such as singing and moving together, we can allow for new embodied, ecological and political possibilities to emerge. Within these emergent possibilities, bodies can confidently move and connect in ways which are harmonious and dissonant, and all the qualities in between.

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This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

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Voicing journeys through grief: A musician’s study of confronting loss through expressive arts practices

ABSTRACT

This article confronts grief, trauma and dysphonia through transformative techniques of expressive arts therapy. It discusses strategies for easing dysphonia and freeing the singing voice whilst exploring lamentation, incantation and spell casting as vocalizations of grief. Concepts of internalizing and externalizing and the role of the imagination are explored. Selections from the author’s project are presented. These document the process of accessing the pain of loss through recording improvised music and vocalizations, writing, drawing and photography. The approach was methodologically loose and experimental. Seeking recovery and a return to functioning in society, mind, body and voice were allowed to move freely in creative practices whilst being present with memory, soul searching and the experience of loss. The ‘journey’ led from personal to collective grief and rage centred on climate breakdown. The research seeks to draw attention to concepts of intermodality, interconnectedness, the role of music in the grieving process, vocal rehabilitation and the value of expressive arts as tools for transformation. Photographs, drawings, music and voice recordings are included.

KEYWORDS

practice-based research
vocal pedagogy
dysphonia
lament
spell casting
arts and ecology
song and bereavement
interconnectivity

1. A Venn diagram shows different elements interconnecting and overlapping. Each layer affects another in varying proportions. A simple representation of this can be seen in Appendix 1.
2. A key feature in my research is the 'slipperiness' of concepts that are explored. Law says of this: '[P]erhaps we will need to rethink our ideas about clarity and rigour and find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight. Here, knowing would become possible through techniques of deliberate imprecision' (2004: 3).

INTRODUCTION

Life is a series of 'blossomings' and 'fadings'. Loss is as natural as breathing, yet our society, allows very little time to be in the grieving state and many struggle to cope with the effects of bereavement. 'Grief – timeless, universal, and complex – can take many different forms. It may be anticipatory, forbidden, or ambiguous. It can be acute or severe and prolonged. And different forms of grief can overlap like intersecting circles in a Venn diagram' (Holinger 2020: 29).

In this article, I explore this idea of overlapping forms through the lens of an artist's outputs during periodic retreats. This necessitated acknowledgement of deeply resounding grief and trauma, after multiple shocks and losses. The 'Venn diagram' that emerged was complex, needing careful and gentle management.¹

I am interested in understanding through doing and exploration through experiencing. In *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (Macfarlane 2019), Allen Graubard tells us: '[D]arkness becomes a medium of vision' (Graubard 2020: 103) and this 'chimes' with the project which entailed descending willingly into the underworld of the grieving soul, to later re-emerge into light. The work connects with Paolo Knill's ideas of 'intermodality' and theories of transformation through arts practices (Levine and Levine 2011). The 'personal experiencing' methodology is underpinned by John Law's discussions in *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (2004), in which he questions academic reductionist practices and points to different ways of knowing. Law suggests 'perhaps' knowing 'through the hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies [...] through "private" emotions that open us to worlds of sensibilities, passions, intuitions, fears and betrayals'.²

My questions when embarking on this project were murky at best, centred perhaps on 'what happens if I do this?' 'What will I come to know?' 'What will happen to my voice if I allow it to be what it is?' *The Anatomy of Grief* (Holinger 2020) serves as a holding vessel for some of these questions. Holinger describes different forms of grief, the effects on body and mind and the significance of the 'language of the bereaved' (2020: 51). She works with ideas of transformation and discusses grief expressed in literature and other art forms. There is a softness to her writing that encourages understanding of the universality of grief and seeks to ease and inform the bereaved. She tells us: 'Some will sketch the world they've been thrust into, or even diagram the pain of absence in a journal or on a pad [...] spoken, written, signed, or sung, words put things in order' (2020: 71).

My project interrogates arts practices as intervention and tools for transformation. Voice, dysphonia and pedagogical solutions are explored. A journey from personal to collective planetary loss and grief emerges alongside ideas of interconnectivity. Reading Levine and Levine's description of Karen Estrella's work helped to affirm my 'messy' methodologies, they write: 'Estrella situates the arts as transformative by nature and therefore amenable to holding multiple discourses and dynamics in coherent tension. In art-making, the goal of transformation is organically contained in the process itself' (Levine and Levine 2011: 12).

PROCESSES

Confronting grief and dysphonia, accessing the pain of loss and allowing it to be channelled into external outputs entailed many hours of recording.

Vocal and instrumental improvisations were interlaced with writing, drawing and photography. Photographing processes of budding, opening and fading flowers became a means of accepting the natural life, death, rebirth cycles. This became an extended meditation that eased my inability to accept the losses and created 'stepping stones' on my pathway. The methodology was an initial ten days of quiet isolation, allowing mind, body and voice to move freely through memory, soul searching and full acknowledgement of the experience of loss. I viewed this as a possible means of finding acceptance and a way back to functioning in society as an artist and teacher of voice. This was followed by periodic quiet time over the following year, revisiting, working with and generating further materials through creative practices. The writing often followed a stream of consciousness approach but periodically switched to 'documenting of the creative practice', where techniques and toolkits were noted. The project was purposefully 'instinctive' not 'planned'. I followed a trail of writers and practitioners who connected in some way with my field of 'expressive arts research'.³ The 'journey' led from the micro-experience of personal grief to the macro-experience of global grief and rage centred on climate breakdown. Ultimately it led me out of the extremity of anguish and back to the edge of re-integration.

What follows are selections from this project with interjections relating to existing literature and comments arising from revisiting the materials. Italics indicate text taken from my *Project Notebook*. Audio links, indicated by the word 'Listen' can be accessed via the sidenotes.⁴

VOICE BREATH AND MEANING

First written words day 1

Internal Dialogue:

*Being here in a world of shock and grief and pain and shame
and fear and guilt
and love and horror and images and soul searing anguish
and anger and quiet and empty chairs and empty beds
and a garden gone to 'wild' and a body gone to flab and joints locked and stiff
and having time again.*

*Time to think, time to do, time to plan, time to be.
Time to talk with my missing ones, now always here.
Are they here?
If I invite them in?
Apologies for things long gone but newly realised – I was wrong – again!*

*Death, now familiar, has changed every atom of my body into awareness,
a new map of this strange existence.
One life – billions of choices
I'm here ... the raging roiling torrents ... crossed
... I'm on this side looking back ... and it's quiet.
I feel my breath go in and out and see the ant test the air, the spider groan
when I break the web, the bobbing of a life, momentary calm, wave of salt
tears coming again as pictures rise with teeth and snarling power behind
inner eyes.*

3. The research, activism, writings, films and songs of others working with rage, sadness, loss, horror, sciences, data and drive for radical change became stepping stones along the route. I include a small selection of these in this article. This connects with Holinger's discussion of the role of literature and other art forms in navigating through grief.
4. For readers of the print version of this journal, all audio links are listed in Appendix 2 which also contains a download link for ease of access.

5. Rushton, *Project Notebook*, 4 August 2021. See page 153.
6. First version – spontaneous deeply connected to inner world. Link: Internal Dialogue Audio 1 Rushton, 4 August 2021.

Second version – more performed, arguably less effective. Link: Internal Dialogue Audio 2 Rushton, 4 August 2021.
7. A concept I go into in more detail as this article progresses.
8. Ruth Boulton is a sound therapist working in Cornwall. We met during my initial project to discuss joint teaching strategies. Our conversation though moved through many of the questions I was working with in this project and became, as always, rich with her experience and insight. Her careful direction and gentle guidance led me to untangle many thought processes and loosen locked up questions. See Figure 1.
9. First Sung Notes Audio Rushton, 6 August 2021.

What will come from my silenced mouth? Song has been silenced by the violent things. Muscles wasted by the holding of grief, vocal folds folded in and away, to groan in a tight harsh, nails on metal creak.

*So can I even try to play?
Conjure up the landscape of bubbling now, then and what might be, with the help of electronic wizardry?*

*And what comes from that? What then?*⁵

First spoken words day 1

There are two recordings of these words. **Listen.**⁶ The voice carries the meaning in very different ways in each. After recording the first version, I realized that the recording levels were set too low, so I reset the equipment and tried a second recording where voice and synthesizer seem to communicate a brittle hardness reflecting the immense friction I felt when having to deal with anything beyond the inner world of grieving. A neutral dark emptiness drove these words and is more present in the first version – a stark example of the difference between vocalizations deeply connected to meaning and superficial vocalizing.⁷

Sung sounds day 2

Raising my voice to ‘sing’ was immensely difficult as my ‘brain to voice’ coordination seemed blocked by ‘some kind of’ physical wall. I discovered though that although the more powerful muscles of the chest voice were too reluctant to respond, I could find some control in my quiet head voice. This became my default way to make sound and, once resonating, allowed me to briefly access stronger vocalizations, though these were often harsh and hard to manage making me retreat to softer wispier sounds.⁸ **Listen.**⁹

Vocal sounding is a subtle dancing of inner mechanisms of the body, requiring carefully balanced coordination of muscles alongside an inner connection to ‘soul’ or meaning to be fully unleashed. Orlanda Cook writes of this saying: ‘[T]o sing is to join with and become “dance partners” with the air around, breathing it in and then sending it out full of sound, vibration and meaning’ (Cook 2004: 62).

There is a tangible difference between vocalizations that are made with technique as their primary driver and those driven by inner connection to meaning, spirit, soul, feel or emotion. In my teaching, I refer to this as ‘going in’. For some, technique is an instinctive, known coordinated happening that comes about naturally through ‘doing’. For others, technique is learned and mastered. When technique and reaching inwards meet, an alchemical transformation can happen that the singer feels as rightness, power or clarity and the listener may perceive as a moving communication.

The severing of instinct and inner connection from voicing can lead to blockages felt between intention and actualization. These can be temporary and brief or lead to a complete breakdown of the singing and/or the speaking voice. Speaking of Iris Warren’s 1930’s pioneering vocal coaching work, Kristin Linklater tells us that ‘she did not deal directly with the suffering voice but with the physical and mental tensions caused by blocked emotions’ (2006: 5–6).

'The natural voice' she writes:

[I]s most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension; it suffers equally from emotional blocks, intellectual blocks, aural blocks, and psychological blocks. All such obstacles are psycho-physical in nature, and once they are removed the voice is able to communicate the full range of human emotion and all the nuances of thought.

(Linklater 2006: 8)

Reflection:

As a full-time artist singer musician, the natural ability to instinctively convey what I wanted to was never questioned. When my work shifted, this vocal instinct gradually was cut off firstly by the need to 'switch off' my sensitivity through the demands of my job. Secondly because of ill health and thirdly, through the shocks and demands of dealing with the brutal diseases of my loved ones. Linklater maintains that these processes of blockages can be eased away through consistent and gentle work. This point of absolute personal darkness of deep grieving seems like a strange time to reconnect but at the same time provides a fissure from which oozes and leaks emotional pain – that fissure could be the channel back in – a way of opening up and moving the blockages.¹⁰

My vocal predicament is complicated by long covid (contracted pre-vaccination) with long term compromised breathing patterns and further complicated by hormonal changes due to menopause. Regular sensations of suffocation, cause the body to yank hard at the breath to try to fill the lungs to capacity. I have quickly discovered that this is futile and that expelling air from the lungs is more useful, often resulting in an easing of the sensation of suffocation. While watching a programme on long covid treatments I saw someone being directed to blow hard into a machine. This reminded me that as a young musician I was aware that playing my clarinet gave my singing voice enhanced strength, clarity and flexibility. I wondered therefore whether returning to my clarinet might help with my vocal recovery, training my muscles for power and control.¹¹

The extensive examples of breathing exercises available for recovery from COVID-19 aiding healthy muscular reflexivity, connect also with breathing exercises commonly used in vocal training which significantly enhance vocalizations.¹²

With breath work, Linklater warns against 'conscious control of the breath' saying it 'will destroy its sensitivity to changing emotional impulse' adding 'you cannot imitate a reflex action' (2006: 44). With these words she raises the level of awareness required in working with breath, body and mind, encouraging questioning rather than slavishly 'doing'. Questions I ask myself and my students to pay attention to might be 'what do I feel happen in the body automatically when I do this?' 'Am I letting it happen naturally or am I interjecting?' Linklater goes on to write: 'Natural breathing is reflexive, and to restore its reflexive potential, the only work you can do is to remove restrictive tensions and provide a diversity of stimuli' (2006: 44). Balloons work well!

10. When reviewing this article, Elisabeth Belgrano suggested that this connects with the writing of Rick Dolpjin in *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation* (2021: 91). I will go on to read this.

11. I continue to work with this, having experienced marked beneficial effect. Note also the singers' straw exercises for developing power and tone in the voice – accessible to all where 'clarinet' is not!

12. 'The difference between the pre- and post-values of SpO2 [oxygen saturation] was found to be significant, which suggests that balloon exercise is a low-cost physiotherapy strategy that can be utilized to enhance oxygen saturation in COVID-19 patients' (Misra et al. 2023: n.pag.).

In their article documenting 'the balloon exercise' as effective treatment, the authors clearly explain the muscular responses of the body to the 'blowing' (also revealing the mechanics of breathing exercises for singers).

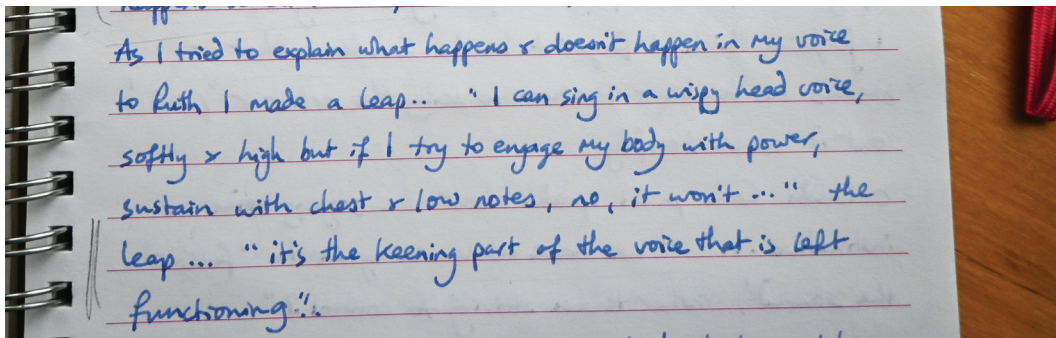


Figure 1: Keening – Project Notebook, 12 August 2021. Provided by the author.

13. Here I refer to the subject of the work, placement of the voice, feeling of the music and source of the feeling.
14. For an explanation of the role of building neuronal pathways or neuroplasticity in performance, see Chapter 5, *Brain Mechanisms* in Parncutt and McPherson (eds) (2002).
15. For more on this visit: <https://veritystanden.com/hug.php>. Accessed 18 February 2025.
16. I also recalled that Verity composed 'Hug' after the loss of her own mother.
17. Mm Ma Audio Rushton, *Project Notebook*, 5 August 2021.

On a deeper level, this is training in concentration and being in the moment. It develops the ability to focus the mind like a laser beam onto the thing we are presently working with. In focusing on the reflexive actions of breathing mechanisms, we train a habit of awareness, which can be applied to all aspects of our practice.¹³ This focused awareness builds strong neuronal pathways that can take us ultimately to a non-thinking freedom of expression where the body responds reflexively to the musical impulse, connecting mind, body and soul in and through the work.¹⁴

MM MA: GOING IN DIGGING DEEP FINDING VOICE

Mm and 'ma' sounds are standard practice for warming up the voice without strain, awakening the muscles and encouraging resonance. In 2015 and 2016, I sang in Verity Standen's 'Hug',¹⁵ an extraordinary vocal ensemble piece which invited the audience to experience a performance blindfold and, with carefully choreographed movement, held close to and by a singer. One of the sections of this piece, a heart-rending lament with multiple harmonies, was based on the word 'Ma'. In this moment of loss of my mother, I reached for that word unconsciously as I tried to connect with, even follow her, whilst simultaneously attempting to re-find my way back to 'life' and control of my voice. Listening back to my small simple sounds, I recalled Verity's work and the power of its singular word.¹⁶ The deep connection to this word formed a stepping stone which linked broken connections together, creating a pathway for the voice to find a way out. **Listen.**¹⁷



Figure 2: Iris life cycle 1, Rushton (2022).

STEPPING STONES FOR VOICE FINDING

Part of this voice finding process was defined by inability at times to vocalize at all. When voice stopped coming, turning to the piano brought about an internal shift, a loosening of the rigid grip. Through the movement of fingers, the sounds took on the weight of the things I could not vocally express.

Reflection:

Just play... again, a deep internal breath like coming to a closed door, a few notes... you can hear that they don't mean anything more than a knock on the door but then gradually it begins to open little by little until a place is found and, targeted with intense concentration, the inexpressible finds a way out through fingers hands arms shoulders mouth and ears and something inexplicable happens.

What came was an outpouring that I had not foreseen or planned, it opened a fissure and channelled the immense pain, love and 'spirit breakage' into sound. This laid another stepping stone on the journey's route through the remembering of deep musical connections, creating a 'bridge' back to the lost voice. **Listen.**¹⁸

DOCUMENTING AND DOING

Documenting was an important part of making sense of my project. It led me to explore different modes of thinking and writing and consider how one impacted another.

Reflection:

And this, this picking over the process interrupts that process, uses a different part of the brain, the mind, to question. There is a need to stop this as I feel 'the work' slipping away like melting ice cream. There is a need to go back in.

When the act of doing becomes *overwritten* by acts of intellectualizing, the body can forget how to be connected to the visceral physicality of feeling, sensing and allowing flow to take place. John McLaughlin commented on this in an online master class where the act of explaining was for him interrupting his ability to play freely. 'I'm trying to be inspirational and academic at the same time and the two don't marry very well' he said, 'once you start playing you should move to the level where you don't think anymore'.¹⁹

The deep need to acknowledge anguish, be with it and allow it to transform into something else was paramount. To not intellectualize but

18. Loss Piano Audio
Rushton, 5 August 2021.

19. Livestream (2022).

This perhaps points back to my thoughts on developing strong neuronal pathways, which, through mastery allows the non-thinking self to bring knowledge, soulfulness and skill together moment by moment.



Figure 3: *Iris life cycle 2*, Rushton (2022).

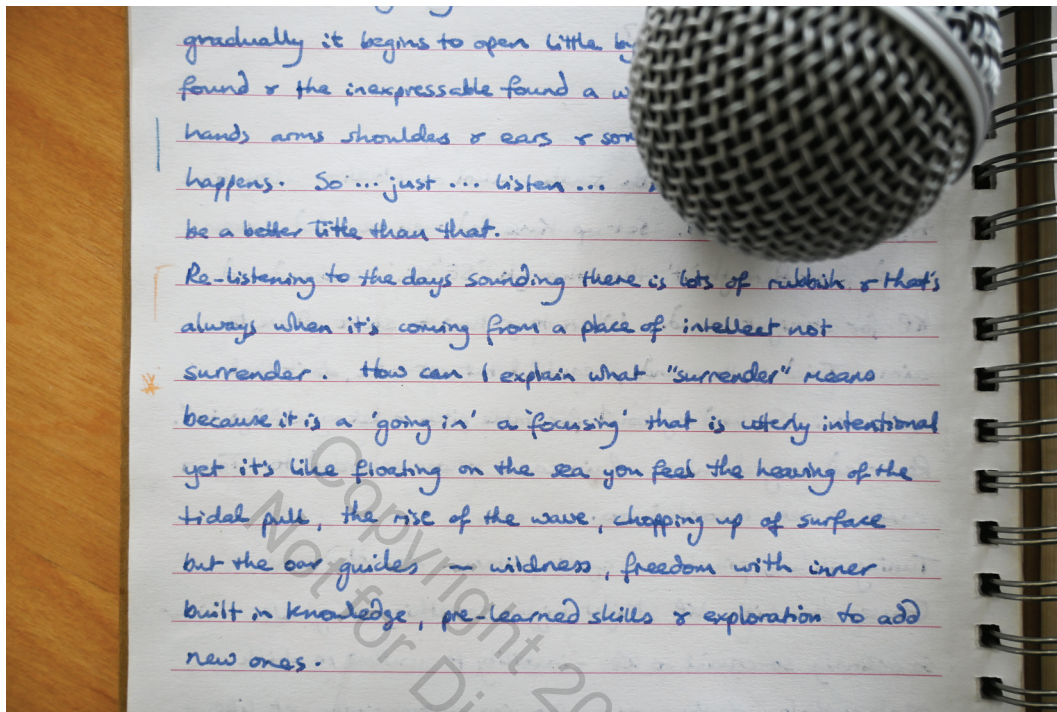


Figure 4: Surrender – Project Notebook, 5 August 2021. Provided by the author.



Figure 5: Iris life cycle 3, Rushton (2022).

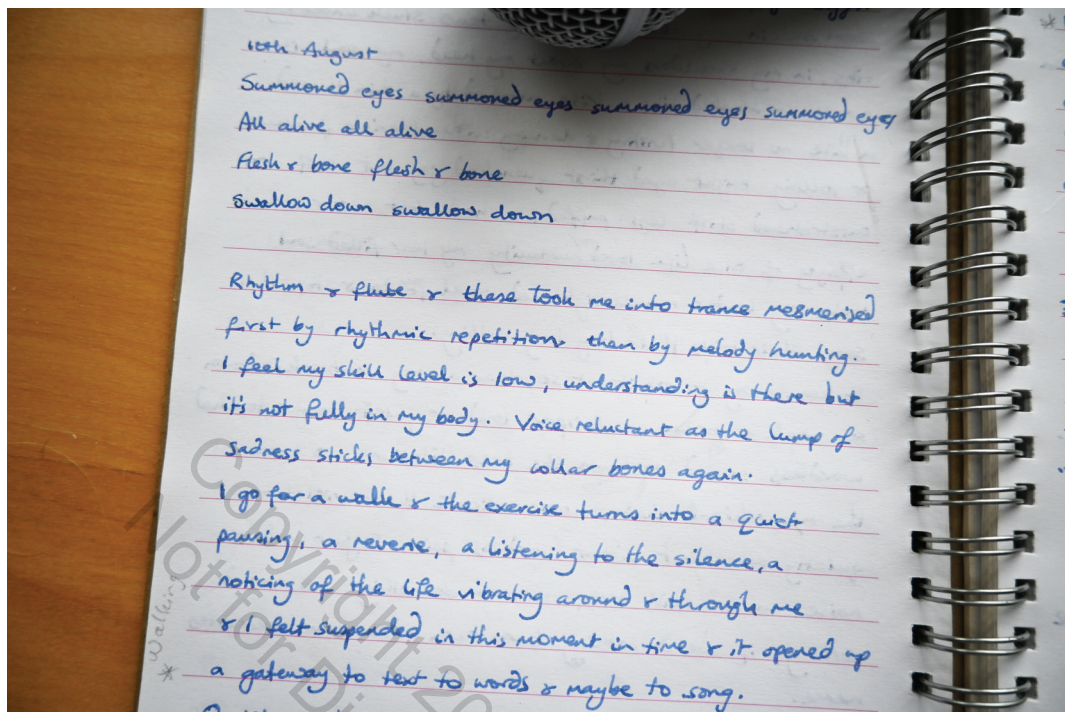


Figure 6: Reluctant voice – Project Notebook, 10 August 2021. Provided by the author.

to allow flow, to 'play' was essential – a dark and heavy play no doubt but play none the less. This it seemed would externalize what was locked in.²⁰

Some sounds emerged in the moment as voicings of wordless shapes, others as words often in jumbled disorganized forms. These later became texts. Some words were 'thrown down' onto the page first before becoming song voiced as overlapping layers, echoing a desire to state and re-state them.²¹

On this process of externalizing, Levine and Levine comment: 'the work does not express the self; it expresses a world. It starts with me, but it then finds its own shape which I can only follow' (2011: 26).²²

LAMENT DAY 7

These following sections are taken from a long and deep lament that came from within as rain hammered down outside. Over time the vocalizations turn to song, then sobs, traces of which are left in the voice when it re-emerges in song again. This created a long pathway of 'voicing' on the journey which left darkly etched footprints between the inner and the outer, the dead and the living. The need to stay in the song was profound but eventually, was relinquished. The words written below approximate what was sung. **Listen.**²³

20. In reviewing this article, Elisabeth Belgrano noted the importance of 'play' in 'Artistic Research and Performance Philosophy and in the art of imagining', she writes: 'I have not yet seen a specific study making the connection between young children's learning/pedagogy and Artistic Research methodological strategies' (2011: 26).

21. In documenting these different methodologies, they become accessible for strategies in future work or for others to explore in their own work. Also see Figures 6 and 9.

22. It could be said that the work unfolds and reveals itself and the things buried within it, holding different states of experience together without having to articulate them as separate elements. The work is greater than the self which is why, Levine and Levine say, the art affects the individual who makes or encounters it.

23. Loss Hear This Shout Lament 1.

Loss Are You Here Lament 2.

Loss Deep Lament Keen for Me 3.

Hear This

To-to-to... hear this

Is this... here

Hear

Shou t-t-t.

Try to reach you.

Now we are alone all out of time

Hear this

Past images

... Are they here?

Oh my summoner

I'm no failure

... Are they here?

Oh my secret

Taller than the

Mountain pasture

Past you

By a censure

Sense you

Over

Enchanter

Time that you said

Wait until I'm gone.

'Keen for me'

My darling ones say

'Keen for me

My daughters my sons.

Keen...

Let the waters come

We rain down

Our love is one

Hear the rain

Our tears will drown out

Your pain'.

SPELL CASTING PATHWAYS

Sometimes the pain of loss and shock of violence is too great for words and only sounds come, wordless and primal, guttural and groaning. Tender and keening.

David Appelbaum's astonishingly revelatory book *Voice* (1990) provides provocative clues to vocal dysphonia, he writes 'voice reduced to mechanics strips us of vocally contacting the awareness at the heart of ourselves' (1990: 90). He argues that the power of speech through voice has been framed as the civilizing factor in mankind. That taming the sob, scream or cry is paramount for humans since these uncontrolled 'animalistic'

vocalizations invade polite rationality. 'To this end exists the state of glottal tension and respiratory re-tention' (1990: 46–47). Natural vocal connections to our inner self are perhaps the sounds that come in our extremity of experience.²⁴

Conjuring sung or spoken pathways as a spell casting gave structure to my 'cries'. Reaching into the inner realms of 'spirit' or 'soul' to connect with lost ones awakened rigid vocal folds and coaxed them into vibrations. Repetitions became soothing and mesmeric as well as mechanisms for massaging inflexible vocal muscles.

Used universally in ritualistic practices, chant, rhythm and repetition have long been used for their powers of coercion, suggestion and transformation.²⁵ Estonian poet Jan Kaplinski wrote of this in his 1969 article saying:

[W]e must remember that there still exists a clear connection between ancient folk song and witchcraft, shamanism, and casting a spell, as is obvious even in *The Kalevala*, and elsewhere where a great singer is actually the same as a powerful shaman. The fact that our singers also promise to sing the earth into sea, to fell the forest, and dry fir trees with their voices is not as much a metaphor of poetry as of 'magic'.

(Kaplinski cited in Daitz 2004: 61)²⁶

Mesmerizing through rhythm and song is a universal human response to life's events. These practices provide anchorage, a balm and a pathway between states of being, through the paradoxical simultaneity of 'letting go' and a pinpoint focus of intention. '[T]he rhythmic life of sung voice is enchanting because it is chant. Its spell moves us vitally. Chant is that vital motion, the organic pulse of life, ever changing, yet repetitive, with which body awareness vibrates' (Appelbaum 1990: 93).

The voice is wispy, even ghostly, hardly there but the repetitive cycle reaches towards 'chant'. **Listen.**²⁷

Half Here

I don't feel like I'm here. I'm half here, I'm half hidden.

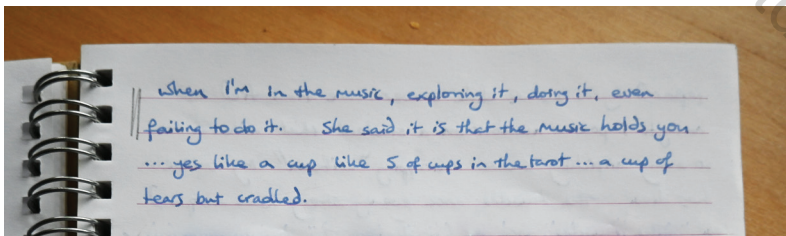


Figure 7: *Music holds you* – Project Notebook, 12 August 2021. Conversation with Ruth Boulton. Provided by the author.

SEEKING SPELLS

The next outpouring is of rage, accusation, self-recrimination, blame and guilt. Heavy with despair it perhaps represents the absolute centre of the darkness of grief.²⁸

24. And even hints of these emotive vocalizations in song can act as powerful triggers for listeners. The groan, the cry, breakage, gravel and breathy qualities are examples of what I am referring to here.

In conversation with Ruth Boulton, whilst speaking of my loss of voice, she spoke of the phenomenon of voluntary muteness coming about after trauma. This re-emerged in my written 'rants' as the project progressed. 'This grip that is needed to hold back the sob, the scream, the rage, becomes so all-consuming that voluntary muteness, or at least a silencing, a stopping of flexible movement is, for some, almost inevitable' (Boulton 2021). This provided another stepping stone in my journey. For more information about Ruth Boulton's work, see Boulton (n.d.).

25. For an explanation of the effects of music on the brain, see Kučikienė and Praninskienė (2018).
26. In this article, Kaplinski demanded that the authenticity of the ancient folk song of his homeland be retained rather than romanticized by composers who systematically removed their visceral hypnotic raw qualities.
27. I Don't Audio Rushton 12 August 2024.
28. Please be aware of trigger warnings in these passages and skip over them if susceptible.

29. Elisabeth Belgrano commented here that this sounds like the paradox of Nothing and All. This is a fascinating opening I would like to explore further.

The focus lost, all things are whirling, are real are here are not here are just out of reach, perplexing, instinctive, body oddly non-responsive, a booby trap, take me here, won't go, where is there? Can't go.²⁹

Where are they?

Betrayed.

All hope lost, all betrayed, abandoned, left, lost...

Ugly twisted wrongness... I didn't rescue you. I turned and I left and I am drowned in my helplessness my inability to rise up and roar and take over. I am trash. You knew me then and you knew your pain and then and then you knew me not again. My dearest dear one I failed you in every raw cell... and the anguish has claws.

This is the beast that stalks me – I need spells, incantations, a weaving of and summoning of the strongest of forces to slay this monster – this is the dark art.



Figure 8: Day lily tear, Rushton (2022).

Bone Dried

We are not supposed to say this,

We are civilised.

To say it is to inundate

To flood.

To be lost

And drowned,

Airless,

Limp,

Scattered,

Dust,

Clogged.

Mud blocked,

*Bone dried,
Stuck,
Sucked,
Bogged.*

30. For a live performance of this, see Mariana Sadovska's film *Spell* (2017).

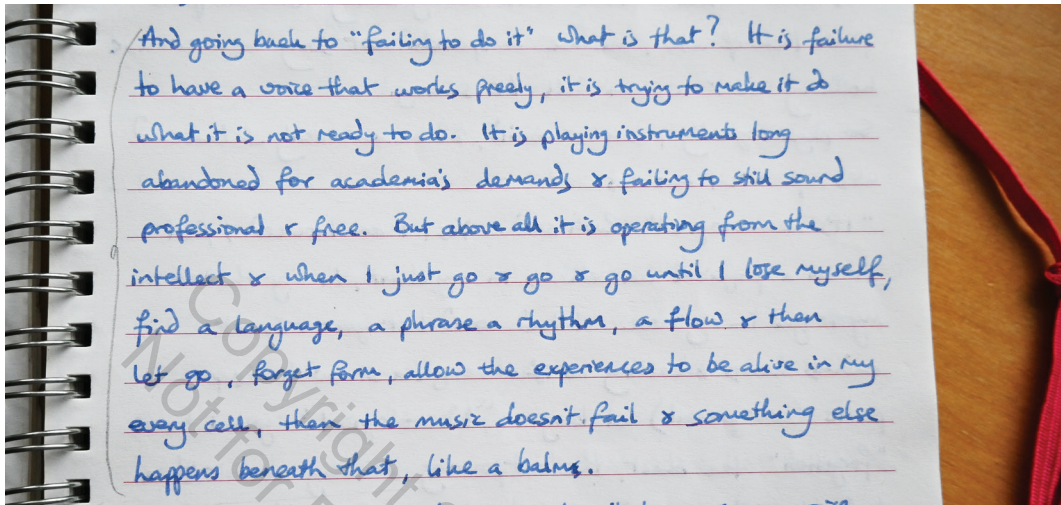


Figure 9: *Failing and finding* – Project Notebook, 12 August 2021. Provided by the author.

Highly acclaimed Ukrainian singer, researcher, musician and performer, Mariana Sadovska says of her current project with Christian Thomé:

[R]age and love are the two main energies that are moving us in our music. [...] The project is made out of Ukrainian poetry and could have a similar function as a ritualistic music, it works sometimes like a prayer, sometimes like a spell.

(2024: n.pag.)

The song 'Spell' (Sadovska and Thomé 2016), mesmerizing and deeply affecting, especially when experienced 'live',³⁰ is rich with ritualistic tropes. Between long melismatic phrases sung in her mother tongue, she intones the words 'go away, do never come back'. Her voice drops to her lowest of pitches where vocal gravel and 'groan' infuse her words: 'wasted years, lost time'. The song is heavy with rage and grief but simultaneously projects the power of the curse of banishment. Drones and slow tempo repetitions build in intensity before dropping and building again. 'Incantatory music is by definition introverted, slowly turning around upon itself, proceeding by fascination, and developing itself in immobility' (Rouget 1985: 240).

FOCUS IMAGES FINGERS MOVEMENT

There is a phenomenon that has long fascinated me whereby imagination allows the singer access to vocalizations that otherwise elude them. Externalizing an 'idea' of the sound has a strange but solid impact on what

emerges. When working to release tension in a singer's throat I often suggest they imagine their sound emerging from a deep pothole, the voice becomes a spark of light that floats up through the space 'never touching the sides'. A spaciousness comes into their next vocalization and just as easily disappears when the image is let go of. When working to ensure pinpoint accuracy of pitch I will invite the singer to use their hands to place the note in the air in front of them, dropping the notes in space with the idea that it exists 'there'. Often this 'magically' tunes a note that has been persistently 'off'. A particularly intricate manifestation of this is in any Bobby McFerrin performance. Watching him sing phenomenally difficult vocal phrases we see his fingers 'playing the microphone' as if it were a clarinet or pipe, the subtle movement of his fingers is a dance that corresponds exactly to his vocal notes (McFerrin 2010: n.pag.).

I worked with this phenomenon, tracing shapes in the air with fingers, hands and body. This dance of tiny movements traced the sound I sought to vocalize in the moment of making it. Somewhere in the fissure between



Figure 10: *Ink spirit*, Rushton (2021).

movement and broken spirit, the aching pain moved through the body and into the voice. During the project and in subsequent months I made ink drawings that corresponded to my imagined concept of the continued presences of my 'missing ones'. These in turn seemed to connect to slides, droplets and melody shapes that found their way out of me as 'voicings'.³¹

Listen.³²

*My missing ones
Looking for
My missing ones.*

31. This can perhaps be heard in *Loss Hear This Shout Lament 1* with the halting 'do do' droplets mirroring the tiny circles of the ink spirit drawing. I did not see these drawings as scores, but in a reversal, they could become that.

32. *My Missing Ones Audio* Rushton, 6 August 2021.

GOING IN PATHWAYS FISSURES

As I sought to find my voice, my focus often became fixed on 'the making of something' and from this came long stretches of painful vocalizations. But when the focus shifted back to the inner experience, moving freely through memory, soul searching and 'just being', the voice came, reluctantly, softly but with authenticity. In my teaching, questions such as: 'what does it mean, what is the essence of what you are singing and what are you expressing(?)' lead the singer to reach inwards. Connecting, with a concentrated focus, to the point of the vocalization can, 'like magic', release a depth of tone and meaning. 'The singing voice', Orlanda Cook tells us, 'is instinctive [...] we have to learn again to "follow the sound", rather than striving to control it' (Cook 2004: 27). On my journey, in these delicate moments, stepping stones and pathways emerged and along with voicing what had been inexpressible came a trickling release.

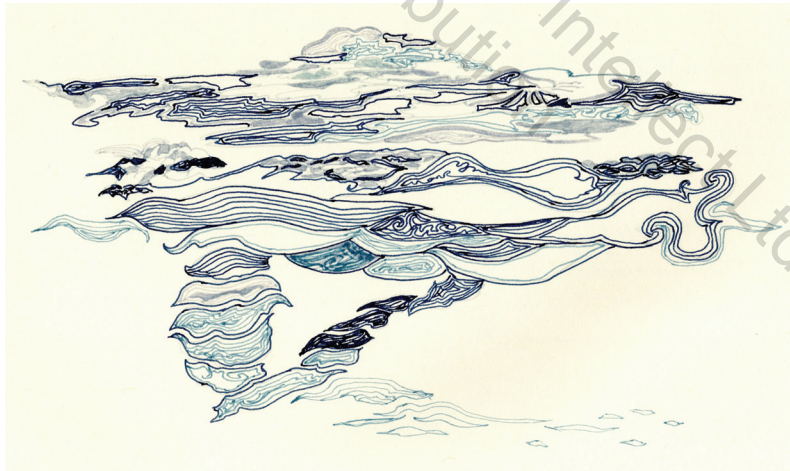


Figure 11: Ink spirit coagulation, Rushton (2021).

Renowned spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

[L]ife today is organized according to 'reason'. We participate in life with only part of our being – our intellect. The other half, deeper and more important, is the store consciousness, the foundation of the roots of our being. This part can't be analysed by reason.

(Hanh 2005: 152)

33. This is too complex a suggestion to be thoroughly explored here but included because of its influence on my journey.

This holds some correspondence to concepts of 'reaching inwards', connecting also with Law's desire for a reimagining of ways of knowing.³³

Man today [...] trusts his rationality so much that he is uprooted from his true being. From this comes the feeling of alienation from which he suffers and through this, little by little, his humanity becomes more and more mechanical.

(2005: 152)

In my journey through grief, the sense of alienation eased when I set aside rational thought and allowed instinct to take the lead. In broader issues, the need to re-balance rationality and instinct or 'true being' is, I suggest, urgent.

INTERDEPENDENCY: EXISTENTIAL PLANETARY HOWL DAY 6

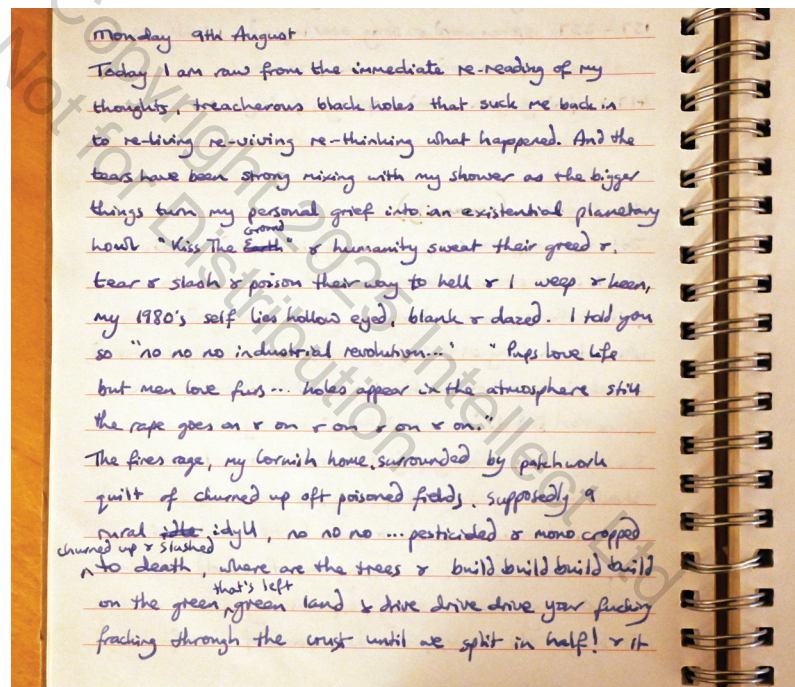


Figure 12: Planetary howl – Project Notebook, 9 August 2021. Provided by the author.

The shift of focus from personal to planetary was a key moment in my journey, leading to a 'loosening' of personal darkness. Destruction and poisoning of interdependent life forms experienced across the globe has created a state of collective grief. Voicings of loss and outrage from others became my point of connection. Our plight is summed up here:

As the scale of economic activity increases, until capitalism affects everything from the atmosphere to the deep ocean floor, the entire planet

becomes a sacrifice zone, we all inhabit the periphery of the profit-making machine [...]. This drives us towards cataclysm on such a scale that most people have no means of imagining it.

(Monbiot 2021: 48)

34. No Not Dancing Audio
Rushton, 13 August
2021.



Figure 13: Bright poppy, Rushton (2022).

Listen.³⁴

No Not Dancing

*Voice is stopped by tears stuck under ribs,
in shoulders throat and head,
my soul is swollen,
bloated like a kite attached by thin thread,
a kite no longer twisting,
no, not dancing
flexible with pleasure
and rolling bright eyed thirst quenched joy.
But stiff,
arms outstretched,
stiff legs puffed,
a shock lost,
horror struck effigy
of once life loved humanity.*

*My tear-filled soul
blocks tender muscle tightened vocal folds
and stops their songs
their trills their long, long calling.*

So keen away so sob it out so clear a way

so break it down,
 so creak and groan or whisper loud,
 or quiet, tongue touched wordless sound.
 So hum the bees delirium,
 so buzz the mycorrhizal chain,
 communicate their violation
 quietly,
 an almost silent wordless pain.
 So just make noise
 we are still here,
 we can't do nothing,
 we can do nothing,
 if we do nothing
 burn,
 burn
 and drown our memories name.

Words can be just words: inanimate, built of shapes and spaces that we can alter and explore internally in throat and nose, mouth, jaw, cheeks and tongue but something else happens if we deep-dive into the meaning. The kite metaphor for the broken, grieving soul-self turned rigid is focused on its stiffness. Rigidity and vulnerability to disconnection from the earth emphasizes the 'lack' of the beautiful things we might associate with a kite. Colour, movement, flexibility, twisting, dancing, swooping could also be metaphors for a life with loved ones or a planet full of health and diversity. And in that emphasis is held the loss of these precious things and the darkness of that loss. The deep-dive is simultaneously taking the inanimate words whilst infusing them with these meanings, allowing them to manifest as 'knowing' turned to voicing. Then and only then does the voice start to open, loosen and find its resonance and freedom. This is instinctive to the healthy singer but when blockages occur, the voice stops 'singing'.



Figure 14: Bedraggled poppy, Rushton (2022).

Hanh describes 'interdependency' as 'interbeing and interpenetration' saying 'we must learn to see the one in the many and the many in the one' (Hanh 2009: 103). This is now being experienced and discussed globally. In his review of *Entangled Life* (Sheldrake 2021), Richard Kerridge writes that the book is 'about how life-forms interpenetrate and change each other continuously' and in a satisfying echo of the teachings of Hanh, writes:

[A] great deal of ecological thought now asks us to take more note of the relationships of interdependency that embed and sustain us, including many too large or small for unaided vision. The interpenetration of these systems raises questions about the boundaries of our selfhood. It is difficult now to think simply in terms of inside and outside, or self and not-self.

(Kerridge 2020: n.pag.)

The impact of humanity's self-centred activities that wilfully ignore interdependency is being felt across every form of life.³⁵ We are told one in two will experience cancer but there is an odd lack of *mainstream* reporting on why. Where action should be immediate, little is being demanded.³⁶ Questions surrounding my mother's rare blood cancer and my sister's breast cancer point to the interdependency of the disrupted systems of the planet.³⁷ Seeking voices concerned with these issues became my focus.³⁸

OTHER VOICES

Artists 'voices' are powerful carriers of stories, facts and emotive messages, often bridging gaps between science, politics and people. We see this in *Kiss the Ground* (Tickell and Tickell 2020)³⁹ where narrator Woody Harrelson expresses his despair before pointing to a breadth of projects that offer tangible solutions. And in *Before the Flood* (2016), Leonardo di Caprio journeys across the globe revealing shocking destructive impacts of human activity on our ecosystems. The song 'A Minute to Breathe' (Reznor et al. 2018) from the soundtrack 'expresses' the anguish in the film and our individual powerlessness. Reznor's subtle use of filters and delays on the repetition of 'I just need a minute to breathe' enhance meanings, evoking ideas of presence, disappearance, loss and memory traces.

Karine Polwart⁴⁰ deals skilfully, with dark issues, nature and loss in her exquisitely constructed songs. *Cornerstone's* refrain 'be still, be still and watch the sky/tread lightly as you pass on by and listen' (Polwart 2018a) is both invitation and warning. Whilst in *Matsuo's Welcome to Muckhart* (2018a), she encapsulates the unpredictable and devastating power and effect of natural forces, capturing a sense of beauty and the fleeting nature of human life. Her words, 'to tend this earth is all that we can do with this life' resonate with significance in today's context of loss and environmental crises.

FULL CIRCLE: INTERCONNECTIONS

The journey from the deeply personal, leading to the global, for me looped on a macabre 'pathway' back to the start through researching environmentally triggered cancers. In late April 1986, my sister was caught in torrential rain whilst walking the mountains of Cumbria, she was soaked to the skin.

35. For an excellent informative guide that explains our situation and shows, with clear data how we can navigate out of the mess, see Professor Mike Berners-Lee's highly regarded book *There Is No Planet B* (2019).

36. It is not in the scope of this article to explore or evidence these points but I make them in the spirit of the questioning individual, grappling with grief. There is a huge body of research that evidences man-made environmental causes of cancer. In a 2008 article, the authors' summary ends with this: 'We repeat the call of ecologist Sandra Steingraber: "From the right to know and the duty to inquire flows the obligation to act"' (Clapp et al. 2008: 1).

37. For further reading on man-made environmental factors in breast cancer, see Calaf et al. (2020).

38. A lifelong area of concern for me, this crystallized in the extremity of my grieving process. I engaged with the work of scientists, academics, activists, artists and writers. I offer a snapshot of this aspect of the project here, commenting on examples of powerful messages conveyed through arts practices or by artists.

39. This multi-award winning documentary demonstrates the interconnectedness of healthy bio systems showing how, replacing micro-organism starved soils, through bio sequestration 'captures carbon and stores it in the soil' (Tickle and Tickle 2020: n.pag.).

40. Recipient of multiple awards including four

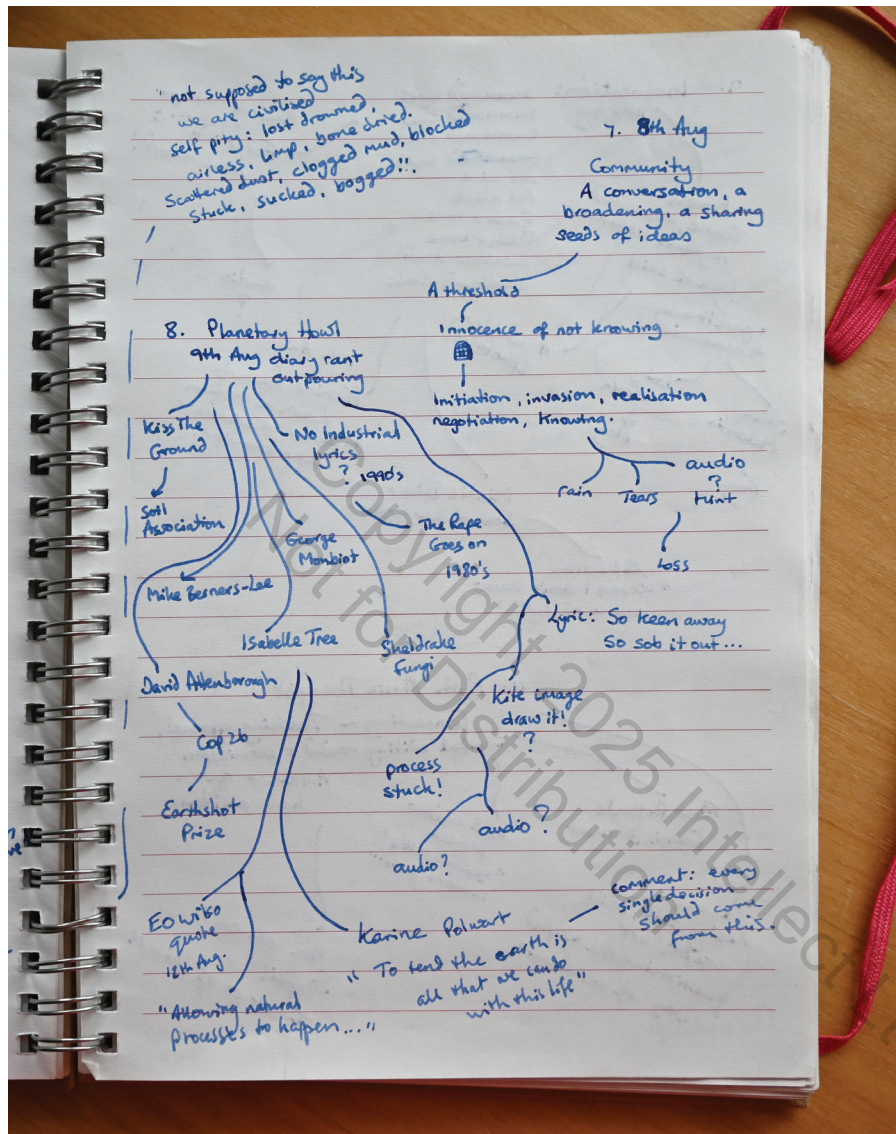


Figure 15: Seeking voices flowchart – Project Notebook, 2022. Provided by the author.



Figure 16: Day lily life cycle, Rushton (2022).

On the 26th of April in 1986, an explosion in Ukraine sparked the world's worst nuclear accident. [...] The accident sent a cloud of radio-activity across western Europe, spreading above Cumbria – where the heavy rain washed it down onto the fells.

(ITV News 2016: n.pag.)

times winner of the Radio 2 Folk Awards and Mojo's Folk album of the year. See Rogers's review (2017) for discussion of the album *Laws of Motion* (2018b).

In September 2018, my sister was diagnosed with cancer, we will, of course, never know if the events of Chernobyl were the cause.⁴¹ A few months later, my mother also fell victim to cancer. My laments run deeper than individual experience, my voicelessness has been metaphorical as well as actual, rooted in an existential scream that goes back through mine and the planet's history.

41. For further reading on this, see Anon. (2022).

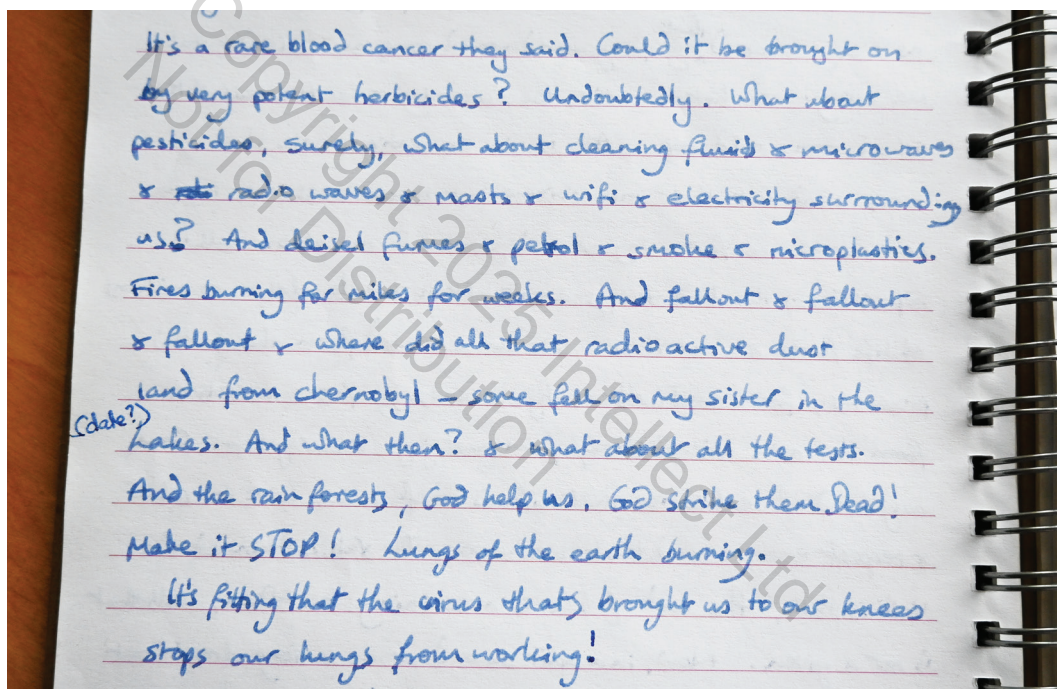


Figure 17: Poisons rant – Project Notebook, 12 August 2021. Provided by the author.



Figure 18: Day lily life cycle, Rushton (2022).

42. Compassionate leave, if given at all is brief. Friends want to make us feel better. We try to get on with things.
43. See John Law (2004).

CONCLUSIONS

This 'project' was like a giant iceberg mostly submerged, and in whose murky caverns I needed to dwell for longer. Through the meditative processes of creative practices, transformations emerged. I felt a softening of the grip of grief as sounds, images and words leaked out of the openings and spaces made. 'The creative possibilities that arise from an aesthetic response to a situation or an issue generate change not only at the level of imagination but in lived, measurable reality' (LeBaron in Levine and Levine 2011: 11).

Ways of navigating unfolded through the work of 'doing', and perhaps the most important discovery for me was that 'being with' my grief was a necessity for finding a way through it. Grief is a normal part of existence that we, in our society, often need to hide.⁴² But if we can honour our dark times, accepting that we are governed by natural cycles, we may value our minutes more. Minnie Driver referred to her grief as an 'expression of love' (Bryant 2021: n.pag.). Ruth Boulton spoke about 'yin and yang, dark and light needing each other to know each other (2021: n.pag.). These ideas may, as a starting point, ease us towards a gentle acceptance of our dark times.

Voicing is perhaps a metaphor for 'making manifest'. The word, image, piano note and photograph were vehicles for this, offering 'ways of knowing' through 'intermodality'. Vocally, 'use what you have' was my mantra. So, I did, repeating phrases that held burning meaning until the meaning moved, along with the inability to express it. I discovered physical points of tension and a 'creaky' re-awakening and massaging of muscles long left unused. Theoretically if this had continued gently each day, the re-building of my damaged voice may have been completed relatively quickly. Continuous, gentle practice is crucial to maintain connections to all aspects of voicing.

On re-reading the poetic texts that run through this work, it seems clear to me that a journey emerges. From utter blank shock, through imagery of the pain of loss to the last text, where suddenly the focus opens to the plight of the world outside. This is the moment of breakthrough. Describing the subtle shift from the dark underworld of grief back towards 'light', Barnes writes: '[A]ttention is caught by something interesting [...] an unexpected breeze has sprung up, and we are in movement again' (Barnes cited in Holinger 2020: 249).

The interconnectedness of natural cycles, ecosystems, disease and loss became a significant focus in my journey, broadening my perspectives.

Through the voicings that emerged in this project, the unspeakable seemed to me to transform and find a way out. There is no doubt that the really dread filled images remain untouchable but maybe there is some slower underlying alchemy at work here. In allowing 'lament' to happen, staying with it and flowing towards the insights it brought, the horrors softened into sounds. Many hard and harsh, repetitive or dull, but some hold softness. And with this process came a release of pressure, making way for life and ease to seep back in.

Losing something important is messy, the repercussions, aftershocks and chains of events that follow create complex networks of experiences. These are like ever shifting meanderings of becks, tributaries, rivers and deltas flowing simultaneously in multiple directions. This project has been messy, and multimodal, its value slippery and hard to capture.⁴³ To borrow the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estés, the work has been that of 'soulful reclamation' (1998: 4), and this is never finished, it is a continuous journey of seeking and making 'stepping stones'. That it is doable is hugely comforting,

[L]ost instincts do not recede without leaving echoes and trails of feeling, which we can follow to claim them again. [...] If we could realize that *the work is to keep doing the work*, we would be much more fierce and much more peaceful.

(Pinkola Estés 1998: 253, original emphasis)

Every stepping stone on my journey led me to the next. There is no point of arrival, the journey continues and I am content to keep doing the work.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

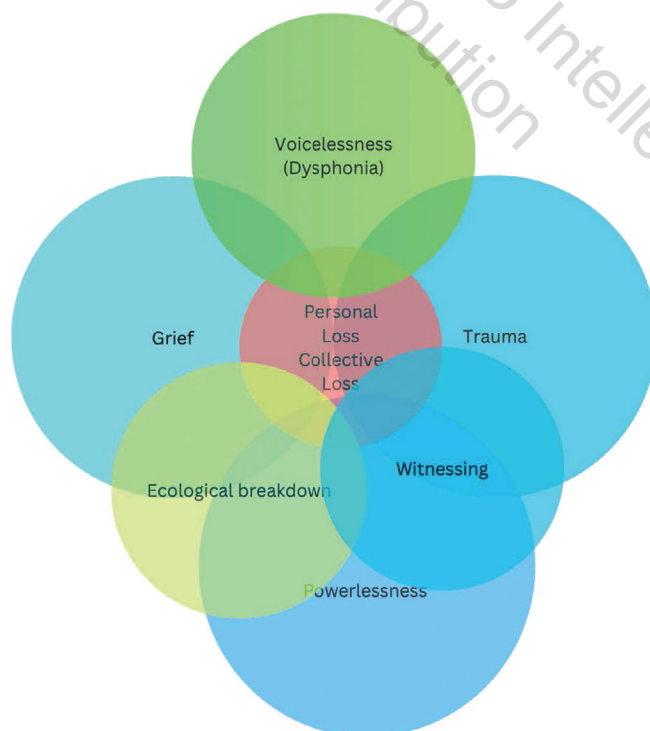
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APPENDIX 1

Venn Diagram – a simplified representation of the overlapping forms and effects of grief I was dealing with in this project.



APPENDIX 2

AUDIO LINKS:

Sidenote 6

Internal Dialogue Audio 1

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_PWW5bS2pLYqY0YewyLffF4H8Qhjmt4r/view

Internal Dialogue Audio 2

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14uL_wIwNH3PlAVfFw4k2zTMylpKLJKG1/view

Sidenote 9

First Sung Notes Audio

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HMr6JHRLrEHUVI7sO5zjNkwiAtThAKc1/view>

Sidenote 17

Mm Ma Audio

https://drive.google.com/file/d/19rLRfQtb_a7rCGbQ6u0k7qD0MzZI8hqR/view

Sidenote 18

Loss Piano Solo

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tiqx8E4mY4pEFQCr1VPcHsDSWVxPmWGY/view>

Sidenote 23

Loss Hear This Shout

Lament 1.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14B6i0cX-DZHikpMb6D4mtGS2auXhjZW/view>

Loss Are You Here

Lament 2

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_i_SFjNqmyjtGSnl6Cs3MaBODN-d9jNA/view

Loss Deep Lament Keen for Me 3

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o39HINYbG_Dlle0n_XDLMvDKYx31wnS-/view

Sidenote 27

I Don't Audio

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tdmdlQhNZpL7-z_DdbD6q8ynz2M-J_kL/view

Sidenote 32

My Missing Ones Audio

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OA6Nic4Pd5nUYmQ7EbCS6gDI-qLgnU7/view>

Sidenote 34

No Not Dancing Audio

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M0JiloB9yGDqHcDmSo6NvdgETr8z_V5j/view

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1. Audio Links to download:

2. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/12gNv5HrUdQYtTihElAsU1bGF4REzhiNy/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12gNv5HrUdQYtTihElAsU1bGF4REzhiNy/view?usp=sharing)
 3. [view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12gNv5HrUdQYtTihElAsU1bGF4REzhiNy/view?usp=sharing)

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Scoring the spiritual in-between: By way of sounding your sensations

ABSTRACT

'Sounding Sensations' is a sounding-and-moving praxis that explores the transformational power of embodied expression. The praxis connects practitioners to their voice, their dance and, if the spirits permit, their spirituality. The spiritual in-between is enlivened (scored) by way of the 'Sounding Sensations' practice score. This article explores the spiritual in-between experientially, as an experience, and metaphysically, as a place. The metaphor of 'a shoreless ocean' is introduced to capture the defining essence (the spirit) of the spiritual in-between. Intentional focus is placed upon appreciating and understanding the transformative capability of sounding, by way of the practitioner's voice and vocality. An adjacent focus is placed upon what is required (of practitioners, the praxis and the practice score itself), in order to successfully score the spiritual in-between. This article works to contribute to a deeper understanding of the latent potential that exists not only at the intersection of sounding and moving but also at the intersection of sounding and spirituality. In this article, sounding refers to and encompasses various non-linguistic Vocalisations – grunts, groans, growls, screams, giggles, yells and whines. Released from linguistics, semantics and semiotics, sounding is understood to communicate something universal, unique, emotional, present, unrepeatable and ultimately, spiritual. At its core,

KEYWORDS

dance and spirituality
dance and voice
expression
liberation
sounding and moving
somatic practice
release
practice as research

1. 'Sounding Sensations' emerged from Franziska Boehm's Ph.D. research at Trinity Laban, London, United Kingdom (completion 2024). Franziska's research investigates the impact of 'the felt sense', as forwarded by psychologist Eugene Gendlin (2018), upon what Franziska terms the 'vocalic self'. Following Joan Skinner's term 'psychophysical self', Franziska uses the vocalic self to describe the sounding-and-moving self (Böhm 2024). Franziska is currently completing her teacher training in SRT. Franziska invited Serena Ruth to join her research as a participant and co-practitioner. Serena works at the intersections of sociology, auto-ethnography, somatics and contemporary dance, and expressive embodiment practices. Her studies centre yogic wisdom on the divine feminine. Serena is currently completing her teacher training in the Feldenkrais Method. Within seemingly moments of the pair's collaboration, as if spirit herself were in the room, the praxis 'Sounding Sensations' was born.
2. The word 'embodiment' evokes multiple connotations, especially within the realm of neo-spirituality. Embodiment, in the context of this article, refers to the way in which a principle, a concept, or an idea is actualized through the body (OED Online 2023). Embodiment is understood by the authors to encompass both the physicality and the cognitive thought processes of the sounding-and-moving body.

this article wishes to call forth the spirit of embodied expression. The 'Sounding Sensations' praxis invites practitioners to sound their frustration in a world of frustration, their desire in a world of desire and their terror in a world of terror. This invitation serves as an intentional reminder to practitioners: that they are themselves a direct route to that which is spiritual, and that they can indeed animate themselves with agency.

'SOUNDING SENSATIONS'

'Sounding Sensations' (SS) is a sounding-and-moving praxis developed collaboratively by the authors.¹ The praxis explores the transformational power of embodied expression.² The 'Sounding Sensations' practitioner (SS-practitioner henceforth) is connected to their voice, their dance and, if their spirits permit, their spirituality.³ We approach dialogues surrounding the relationship(s) between sound and movement by way of our bodies, which are experiential places flooded with sensation.⁴ Approaching in this way, we have found our understanding of the relationship(s) between sound and movement to broaden immeasurably.⁵

We study sound and movement as it exists within and occurs throughout our bodies: our emotional, vibrational and sensorial bodies. In 'Sounding Sensations', embodied expression refers to expression which is simultaneously sounded (by way of the voice and vocality) and moved (by way of the kinetic body). 'Sounding Sensations' is in service to this type of embodied expression. That which is being expressed is the SS-practitioner's moment-to-moment felt sensations. Sensations are approached as manifold. They can be physical feelings (my hip hurts), unexplainable awareness (we are being watched), or felt impressions (my heart is crushing down into my lungs). Within 'Sounding Sensations' that which can be sensed is that which can be *sensorially felt*.⁶ That which SS-practitioners can sense, is that which can be sounded-and-moved. This is embodied expression. Hence, 'Sounding Sensations'.

PRAXIS AND SS-PRACTITIONER

Sounding encompasses various non-linguistic vocalizations. Sounding can mean grunts, groans, growls, screams, giggles and belly laughs. Sounding can mean roaring, hissing, sighing, humming, yelling, murmuring and whining. Released from linguistics, semantics and semiotics, sounding communicates something universal. It transcends the ordinary to express something unique, emotional, present, unrepeatable and ultimately, spiritual.

We situate 'Sounding Sensations' in the field of dance, somatic voice studies and neo-spirituality. As performative researchers, we conduct our work under the umbrella term 'practice-led research'. This means that we modify and create our research methods through practice (practising). As avid practitioners, we tussle with the trouble of languaging our praxis in our collaborative authorship of this article. When practising as SS-practitioners, we experience many happenings occurring simultaneously. Yet when we write, we must speak to each happening individually and chronologically. While 'heuristic diagramming' (a method developed by Böhm and introduced in the next section) yields some of these troubles, it remains that what we may experience as practitioners in a fleeting moment of practice, takes us an entire article to sufficiently elucidate as authors.

The praxis 'Sounding Sensations' departs from the lived experience that making a groaning sound akin to the sensation of compression you feel in your lower back, does indeed shift something sensorially.⁷ Expression offers release: a momentary sensation of liberation, letting go, relief or relaxation.⁸ Yet the embodied expression of 'Sounding Sensations' also offers *more than* the momentary felt sense of release. Embodied expression offers release in a meta sense. Release from the pressures of living in this contemporary world, release from that which pains us emotionally or haunts us retrospectively. Release from the paralysis of deep worry and the hyper-stimulation of anxiety. Embodied expression offers release from holding ourselves together. In 'Sounding Sensations', the release of embodied expression is achieved through nuanced processes of sensing, sounding, imagining and moving. This is the *doing* of the praxis.⁹

As a praxis, 'Sounding Sensations' consists of a score, the 'sounding sensations score', a series of studies, the 'sounding sensations studies' and a game, the 'sounding sensations game' (SS-score, SS-studies and SS-game henceforth). The SS-score offers a chronological container for what SS-practitioners *do*.¹⁰ There are three stages to the SS-score. Stage 1: stillness, Stage 2: expression as release and Stage 3: harmony as resolution. The SS-studies offer SS-practitioners guidance for how to *do* the SS-score. The SS-studies shape focus, value and orientation of the SS-practitioner.¹¹ They study the SS-studies as they *do* the SS-score. These two acts together, *doing* and *studying*, are what it means to practise 'Sounding Sensations'. It is integral to state that the SS-practitioner is not practising alone, for 'Sounding Sensations' is not a solo pursuit. Whilst it is possible to *sound your sensations* alone, it is not possible to *practise the praxis* as only one.¹² SS-practitioners must find themselves a practice partner.

Adjacent to the score, there is the SS-game. The SS-game is imaginative and is *played* by the SS-practitioner as they transition from Stage 1: stillness to Stage 2: expression as release. Here is a diagram, depicting the components of 'Sounding Sensations'.¹³

Indeed, the SS-practitioner is she who can hold a multiplicity of happenings. She simultaneously *does* the SS-score, *studies* the SS-studies and *plays* the SS-game.

Skinner uses the term psychophysical self to describe embodied states as a phenomenon that include both body and mind. As research practitioners, we approach embodiment from a perspective akin to Skinner. We acknowledge that 'vibrational movements of voice are multidirectional, physical and at the same time psychosomatic [...] as thought pour[s] through sound, the voice circulates and encompasses mind' (Fraleigh 2020: 40).

3. In the context of this article references to spirituality or the spiritual both either describe 'the prevailing or typical quality, mood or attitude of a person, group or period of time' (Oxford Dictionary of English 2024), as well as 'spirit' as 'the non-physical part of a person [...] the seat of emotions and character; the soul' (Oxford Dictionary of English 2024). As both descriptions describe how energy circulates within people or

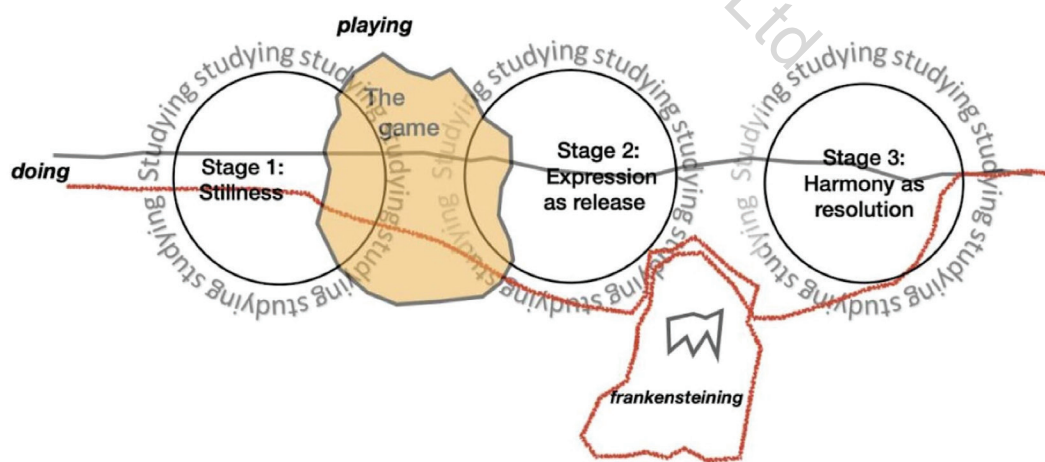


Figure 1: 'SS-score', heuristic diagramming, 2024. © Franziska Böhm and Serena Ruth.

agglomerations, the notion of energy as an agent of the spiritual comes into focus in this article. We position ourselves (and 'Sounding Sensations') within neo-spirituality. The term neo-spirituality is a recent term and does not have a single point of origin (Gronek et al. 2023; Aschenbrenner and Ostrowski 2022). It has evolved from and alongside various forms of interpretations of spirituality. Aligned with the theologian and movement practitioner Lina Aschenbrenner's interpretation, we understand neo-spirituality as a field that recognizes contemporary pathways into spiritual methodology within the twenty-first century. The 'transform[ing of] bodies' is a common characteristic of 'contemporary (movement) practice that can be addressed as "spiritual"' (Aschenbrenner and Ostrowski 2022: 3). The transformational power of embodied expression is a key spiritual principle that underlies 'Sounding Sensations' as a praxis.

4. Franziska's early training is within western classical music. These teachings conceptualize sound as scales, harmonic structures and sound ideals, to name a few. Detaching from this, we choose to follow the desires and logics of our always-and-already sonorous bodies.
5. As research practitioners we identify as performative researchers, conducting our work under the umbrella term 'practice-led research'. Practice-led

It is thus true that 'Sounding Sensations' is a complex praxis. There are concentric circles of considerations that interweave in multiple ways. Yet when one is practising, all becomes clear. The SS-score is the spine of the praxis.¹⁴ It is scored intentionally, such that when SS-practitioners are *doing* the SS-score, they are naturally oriented towards *studying* the SS-studies.¹⁵ In order to *do* and *study* simultaneously, as is required to *practise* 'Sounding Sensations', SS-practitioners must also *play* the SS-game.

Underneath all this, there is a question. The central question of the SS-practitioner, to which they return again and again, in every moment, is: if the sensation I am experiencing in this moment had a sound, what might that sound be?

PRIMORDIAL SOUND

To the spiritually inclined, sound, song and vibration have forever held undeniable significance. It is the 'OM' for the Vedic yogi, the heartbeat drumming for the Native American shaman, the Bija Mantra for the Kundalini traditionalist, the vocalizations for the Taoist Qigongist and the dream songs for the Aboriginal tribe members. Tradition after tradition, sound has been harnessed as a conduit to commune with the divine. Sound and spirituality are inseparable, innately interwoven.

Not only has sound been considered *of* the divine but *as* the divine. The essence of Shakti, a deity within Hindu mythology, resonates (manifests) through the sound 'EEEE'. She(EEEE) is divine resonance. Worshipping Shakti, and her beloved Shiva, orientates the devotee to the divine vibration that underlies all of existence. For in this world, nothing is without sonic resonance. This whole world is sounding: from the sound of trees (Wohlleben 2017) to the sound of black holes (Strickland 2023). Every manifestation in existence reverberates with fractal resonance that echoes into an immeasurable number of expressions. At this moment, there are sounds. Deep underneath these sounds, there are primordial sounds. The hum of the universe, of aliveness, of infinite emptiness or perhaps even of life itself. Can you hear them?

If each reverberation of sound is a fractal of primordial sound, then one need only follow a wave of sound to find that each sonic vibration holds the ability to transport us. Each sound wave carries us directly to the feet of Shakti, to the altar of the divine, to the great dark expanse of the Universe and to the ineffable core of life itself. Sound offers a direct route to dialogue with the great unknown and to commune that which is greater than us: that which is spiritual. As avid and devoted SS-practitioners, we are here to sound back. In our sounding back, we give ourselves over to each sensorial vibration of the primordial sound, riding these sound waves back to source, back to spirit.

The stagnancy of speaking to a *primordial* sound is not lost on us. The Latin roots of primordial are 'primus', meaning first, and 'ordior' meaning to begin or to start (OED Online 2007). These roots inherently suggest singularity. Evoking a vision of something unified, simple, foundational and existing before complexity and multiplicity emerged. There is, therefore, a notion of 'one-ness' baked into our understanding of primordial. In the realm of neo-spirituality, within which this article situates itself, the concept of 'one-ness' is central. One-ness emphasizes a fundamental unity and interconnectedness which underpins all of existence. It is common to hear the neo-spiritualist to reflect that 'we are all one', meaning we are all *of* one. Born of the same spec of

stardust. As SS-practitioners, we enjoy holding the implied stagnancy of 'one-ness' in tandem with an understanding that we are, in this human lifetime, incarnate as *separately embodied* beings. We are both 'of one' and 'more than one', both 'the same spec of stardust' and 'highly individuated beings', simultaneously 'the same' and 'other' (to one-another). When held together, there is a certain paradox that becomes available to the SS-practitioner. The stagnant primordial one-ness is forever crashing into and interfacing with ongoing acts of animation, expression, transformation and becoming. It is within the landscape of this paradox that we practise.

THE SPIRITUAL IN-BETWEEN

The notion of the in-between is widely explored within the field of dance, performance and somatic practices. Artist-practitioners often apply the notion of the in-between to describe how traditional boundaries or understandings of discipline and technique are challenged. Artist-practitioners encounter the in-between experientially, typically when they notice a *letting go*. Their letting go relates to that which they are actively or currently working with. Which, depending on their discipline or craft, could be a state, a knowing, a familiar movement, a certain technique or a specific idea. In the wake of the artist-practitioner's letting go, they find themselves in an eerie state of anticipation. The artist-practitioner awaits a novel state, knowing, movement or idea to emerge. Perhaps what will emerge is a novel *relationship* between already established elements. It is this space – between the familiar fading away and the novel not yet clearly materializing – that is the in-between. It is transitory. One is neither fully in one state nor fully in another. In flux, the in-between can feel ambiguous, transient and liminal.

The spiritual in-between thus refers to an in-between state or experience that is laced with spiritual phenomena. The spiritual in-between may be used to refer to a shift in consciousness, such as from ignorance to enlightenment. It may be a place or condition where different realms, dimensions or realities converge or overlap. A 'thin place', where the veil between one world and another is lessened.¹⁶ Perhaps the spiritual in-between refers to the ambiguity or uncertainty an individual feels when they are unsure of their spiritual path. Ultimately, the spiritual in-between is a nuanced and subjective state. It is associated with introspecting, seeking deeper experience or understanding and reflects a journey or process of exploration or growth.

The spiritual in-between that this article is concerned with is the 'sounding sensations spiritual in-between' (SS-spiritual in-between henceforth). That is, the specific spiritual in-between that is enlivened (scored) by way of 'Sounding Sensations'.¹⁷ Much like the concept of the in-between more generally, the SS-spiritual in-between transports SS-practitioners into a state or experience that feels incredibly present, incredibly *now*. SS-practitioners experience a sense of letting go of any need or effort to justify, analyse or make sense of their moment-to-moment experience. Instead, they are flooded with a peaceful and comforting sense that they need not try to prove, rationalize or advance any type of agenda. When one is able to *give themselves over* to the SS-spiritual in-between (the requirements of which will be discussed shortly), they are simply humming along with what is.¹⁸ There is also an eeriness to the SS-spiritual in-between.¹⁹ Inhabiting the SS-spiritual in-between, SS-practitioners experience the eerie sense that they have been transported. That the space itself has changed. Although everything tangible and manifest

research is 'intrinsically experiential and comes to the fore when the researcher creates new artistic forms for performance and exhibition' (Haseman 2006: 3). Practice-led research reinterprets original contributions to knowledge, questioning how presentational forms (such as a dance, a novel or a contemporary performance) become the outcome of the research. It is 'the symbolic data that works performatively. It not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself' (Haseman 2006: 6). The SS-score, which is introduced shortly and analysed throughout this article, is one such symbolic data. This means that in the case of this article the 'Sounding Sensations' score performs an action in and of itself. As we conduct practice-led research, practice (and practising) is both the primary focus and the precondition of engagement. As researchers, we modify and create our methods through practice (practising). Similar to heuristic research in which trial and error processes support the researcher in finding ways to describe the phenomena that is investigated, performative researchers follow the needs of the practice.

6. To sensorially feel can mean to discern, feel, observe, recognize or notice. It can mean to get an impression of, become aware of or become conscious of.
7. 'Sounding Sensations' is not, in any way, focused on making pain, contraction or discomfort *disappear*.

It is simply that this noticing (that sounding is transformational to the sensorial experience), was the moment of conception for 'Sounding Sensations'.

8. The concept of release, and the practice of releasing, underpins a vast array of somatic techniques, modalities and practices. As students of western contemporary dance, our experiential understanding of release and releasing is informed by techniques such as SRT. In SRT, release is considered a dynamic and continuous process. Release is therefore termed releasing. The suffix 'ing' is, as SRT practitioner and dancer Polly Hudson remarks, 'vitally important'. It offers 'a possibility that no state is fixed or finished [...] this [SRT] practice is continual and on-going, rather like the peeling of the layers of a (never ending) onion' (2017: 18). In this article, when we speak to release, we are speaking to release as a meta concept (explained momentarily in the body of the text). We understand release as a concept to be founded and rooted in the practised actions and processes of releasing.
9. The work of postmodern dance practitioners such as Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Anna Halprin, contribute to a discourse that shifted (and continued to shift) the focus from dance as a spectacle to dance as a practice of intention, process and presence. 'Sounding Sensations' aligns with the values of these practitioners. As performative researchers and SS-practitioners,

looks (and of course, remains) the same, there is an eerie and curious sense that you, SS-practitioner, are inhabiting *some other place*. This, too, is the SS-spiritual in-between.

It is integral to state that the SS-practitioner *practises* 'Sounding Sensations' (simultaneously *does* the score, *studies* the studies and *plays* the game), in a dance studio. An empty, white box, blank canvas of a room.²⁰ To practise 'Sounding Sensations', there can be no visible mirrors in the space.²¹ The dance studio, much like the proscenium arch, awaits transformation. Indeed, when the SS-practitioner practises, the dance studio itself seemingly transforms. It becomes the *place* of the SS-spiritual in-between.

As a place, SS-practitioners encounter the SS-spiritual in-between as a threshold where the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical blur. The veil thins. The SS-spiritual in-between is somehow a non-place. Beyond, on top of or within this place. Although it feels other, the SS-spiritual in-between is *this* place. It is *this* dance studio that transfigures to become the SS-spiritual in-between. The walls adopt an intriguing new essence. The ceiling curiously shifts, as if imbued with subtle unseen forces. The floor becomes uncanny, somehow newly distinct and profound. A transformation occurs that is sensed *and* felt, but is not visibly apparent.²² As can be the way with transformation, it is eerie, ineffable and primarily sensorial. The place of the SS-spiritual in-between is physically a dance studio, yes. Yet the metaphysical place of the SS-spiritual in-between is much more oceanic and vast. Composed of fractal resonance of primordial sound. The metaphysical place of the SS-spiritual in-between, we have come to know, is like a shoreless ocean.

THE PARADOX OF CONTAINMENT

Can one contain a shoreless ocean? Need one contain a shoreless ocean? As expressed, the SS-spiritual in-between is transitory. Flooded with flux, suspension, ambiguity and liminality. Imbued with otherness, eeriness, uncanniness and profoundness. There is potential for the experience of the SS-spiritual in-between to be unsettling and disruptive to the self and to the nervous system. Working with embodied expression, this potentiality is increased. For, and perhaps you have experienced something akin to this, it is possible for our own expressions to be disruptive to ourselves and our nervous systems. It is possible that when expressing anger we transgress from regulation into a shaken panic that we struggle to settle. It is possible that when expressing our grief we collapse into profound states of introspection or emotional turbulence. 'Sounding Sensations' is a complex and highly sensorial praxis. It is likely that SS-practitioners will feel stretched. We feel stretched *every time* that we practise. It is our intention, manifest in the way we have authored and constructed 'Sounding Sensations', that, although stretched, SS-practitioners are *held* by the praxis. Being held is a gift that this modern world can certainly lack. Yet we need containers.²³ Therapists offer containment for our processing, women's groups offer containment for our healing and friendships offer containment for our platonic love. The 'Sounding Sensations' praxis itself *is* a container. It offers containment for the SS-practitioners embodied expression, inviting them to *give themselves over*.

Containment is a founding value of 'Sounding Sensations'. We do not mean containment in the sense of restricting, enclosing, confining or restraining any part of the SS-practitioner or the praxis itself. Containment offers the opposite. When we are held, and when we can feel and know that we are held,

there is less possibility of the sensations that stretch us tipping us into panic without warning. The container of 'Sounding Sensations', by which we mean the tensegrity of relationship between the SS-score, SS-studies and SS-game, is in service to the SS-practitioner's liberation.²⁴ 'Sounding Sensations' can hold the individual, their sensations, their expression, their imagination, the spiritual and the SS-spiritual in-between. 'Sounding Sensations' is intentionally constructed to hold with precision and integrity. It is intended as such so that SS-practitioners may welcome the vastness of their embodied expression and know that they are held. The SS-practitioner knows that she may inhabit the shoreless ocean of the SS-spiritual in-between without risk of getting lost at sea.

As is the case with that which is spiritual, sacred or divine, the way that we hold ourselves *in relation to* and *behind the scenes of*, matters. How we prepare for ritual, how we set the altar, how we walk through the temple, how we bow to the goddess, matters. In 'Sounding Sensations', how we *study* the SS-studies, how we *do* the SS-score, how we *play* the SS-game, how we sound, how we move and how we relate to our sensations, it *all* matters.²⁵ It is the honour with which we hold 'Sounding Sensations' that not only creates a strong container for SS-practitioners to practise their embodied expression but also creates a strong container for the SS-spiritual in-between to inhabit. Our focus on containment does not restrict but instead invites.²⁶ It is not frivolous, it is ritualistic.²⁷

All of this focus, orientation, containment, intention and the SS-spiritual in-between may still elude the SS-practitioner. Yet this is not a disappointment, for the SS-practitioner knows that regardless of how 'well' they practise or with how much devotion they set the praxis container, the presence of the spiritual is *never* guaranteed. One of the SS-studies, a 'study on surprise', speaks to the ways that expecting can be akin to entitlement. As many devoted spiritual practitioners will tell you, the spiritual is not inclined to gift those who are radiating entitlement.²⁸ In fact, the more one 'wants' or 'expects', the less likely one is to receive. The SS-practitioner does not practise to *get to* or *reach* the SS-spiritual in-between. They understand that experiencing the SS-spiritual in-between is a gift, not a guarantee. They are therefore required to give over (give up) their attachment to the SS-spiritual in-between as an outcome or destination. Yet this does not impede the devotion of the SS-practitioner, as they do not practise exclusively to experience the SS-spiritual in-between. They practise because of *who they become* through their practising.²⁹

POLITICS AND PASSION

Our practice is both that which gifts us and that which we offer as a gift. We lay our practice on the altar of the spiritual. We set the container to invite the SS-spiritual in-between in every way we know how, and then we give over (give up) our expectations and wants. We enter the space, lie down on our backs and turn our attention fully towards the act of (and our love for) practising. Whether the SS-spiritual in-between chooses to grace us today or not, we will be here. Practising. Expressing. Studying. Doing. We will be here, sounding primordial sound back to primordial sound. Offering our embodied expression to the universe.

Our passion for the SS-spiritual in-between is not born of a passion for spirituality. Our passion for the SS-spiritual in-between is made manifest through our devotion to liberating our expression. We do not practise with

engaging with 'Sounding Sensations' centres around (and departs from) an intentional *doing*.

10. By container, we mean holding. The SS-score offers containment because it *holds* the SS-practitioner (and their expression) as they *do* the practice. This notion of container will be elucidated further later in the text.
11. The SS-studies are mentioned briefly throughout this article, however they are by no means explained and extrapolated upon in a way that offers them justice. We simply could not fit everything in. It is the 'scoring' of the spiritual in-between that is our primary focus for this article. For now, let us share with you a list of some of the central SS-studies: sounding, moving, expression as release, trust, stillness, fear, reveal, honesty, dreaming, friendship, not-copying, witnessing, sensing and imagining.
12. We understand *praxis* (within artistic research) as a mode of research that integrates theory and practice in a reciprocal relationship (Nelson 2013; Haseman 2006).
13. In quantitative and qualitative research, traditional diagrams like Venn diagrams or pie charts yield the classification of research findings. However, in research that is practice-led and within the field of dance, the phenomena investigated is often unpredictable, ephemeral and ineffable. Thus, Franziska created in her Ph.D. research a form of diagram that extends traditional research diagrams to include

temporal and sensorial dimensions. She calls these diagrams 'heuristic diagramming' (Böhm 2024). Developed in relationship with heuristic research methodology (Moustakas 1990) 'heuristic diagramming', like the heuristic research process, allows for trial and error phases and allows space for ambiguity. Extending a traditional diagram, 'heuristic diagramming' resembles pictorially how aspects of the research *feel*.

14. The spine is our body's central support structure. The adjustment of weight in the upright position is made by means of muscles and bones including the 'various loads, head, chest and pelvis, at their several levels, and the transmission of this accumulated load to the ground' (Todd 2017: 87). Like the spine, the SS-score is the both the motor and the connector within the praxis. We thus employ the metaphor of the spine as it provides a visceral way of articulating the role of the SS-score within the wider praxis of 'Sounding Sensations'.
15. As Johnathon Burrows remarks, 'a number of different approaches tend to be grouped under the word "score". This can get quite confusing' (2010: 141). The SS-score breaks with models of dance improvisation scores that provide a 'tool for imagination, image, and inspiration' (Burrows 2010: 141). The SS-score is a written template which holds within it the chronological detail of what SS-practitioners will *do*. The SS-score captures the praxis itself, separate from the personality or desires

a determined focus, want or need to inhabit the SS-spiritual in-between. We practise to become practitioners (and moreso, human beings) who are a deep, clear, integrous 'match' for the SS-spiritual in-between. When we are practising, we let go of any outcome. We are focused on the dharma of this work: the spirit of this praxis.³⁰

We practise to sound our frustration in a world of frustration. Sound our desire in a world of desire. Sound our terror in a world of terror. Each sound we sound rises to meet the primordial sound: as frustration, as desire and as terror. We sound our liberation and the great liberation of the universe sounds around us. We sound our yearning and the great yearning of the universe expresses throughout us. The shoreless ocean of the SS-spiritual in-between is animated precisely at the moment that we surrender our want to be anywhere other than *here*, to be anyone other than ourselves in this moment. Our embodied expression of our moment-to-moment felt sensations returns and reminds us. The SS-score teaches us that we each reverberate with primordial sound. We ourselves are a direct route to that which is spiritual. To practise 'Sounding Sensations' is to remember that we have not, even in a world of terror, lost our chance. We can indeed animate ourselves with agency into who we dream of being.³¹

Yet, nuance remains, for we wish to offer our sounding back to source with intentionality, honesty, awareness and truth. As Moshe Feldenkrais famously and repeatedly remarked, 'he did not know what he was doing [therefore] he could not do what he wanted' (2019: 115). You need to know what you are doing in order to be able to do what you want. We, Franziska and Serena, want to offer our call back with bravery, yes, but not recklessness. We wish to offer our call with wholeness, precision, honesty (as opposed to extravagance) and with a felt sense of integration, regulation and authenticity.

REQUIREMENT

The SS-spiritual in-between requires SS-practitioners to attune their sensing to be able to hear and receive the cosmic pulse of primordial sound. If SS-practitioners are distracted, and indeed this modern world threatens infinite distraction, they will not hear the fractal reverberation of the shoreless ocean. To commune with the spiritual, attuning is required. Stage 1: stillness of the SS-score, is the doorway to the SS-spiritual in-between. This is where the journey begins:

Walk into the space and lie on your back.

There is no correct orientation. You do not need to be arranged symmetrically.

As you lie down, prioritize your comfort.

Once the room has settled, still your body.

Become absolutely still.³²

Let every cell be still.

Still even the rise and fall of your breath. Imagine, if an outside eye were to observe you, they would not detect *any* movement.

Once you have found your stillness, stay there.

The longer you are still, the stronger your desire to prioritize your comfort will become.

As you acclimatize to back lying, it will feel as if extra inches of comfort become available to you. Your joints will want to give into the gravitational pull. Beckoning you to surrender your holding of yourself and your shape. Enticing you to 'let go' and give yourself over to the holding of the ground.

You will want to soften.

But do not. Do not let go, do not soften.

Do not give yourself over to the holding of the ground.

Instead, stay still.

Stay still in the shape you initially took, when you first lay on your back.

Allow the tension of your want to soften and your commitment to stillness be present.

This is a requirement.

This is how we attune.

Attuning is akin to listening. Fine tuning one's ear. In 'Sounding Sensations', attuning means to cultivate silence so that *another voice* may speak. The voice of primordial sound. The SS-score begins with Stage 1: stillness. This is a deep bow of acknowledgment to that which is required of us as SS-practitioners to dialogue with the spirits. To welcome the spirit muse of animation into SS-practitioners bodies, the volume of life must be turned down. Space must be cultivated for another voice to speak, another sound wave to be heard. As 'Sounding Sensations' is a sounding-and-moving praxis, to attune also means to become still. To quiet the noise of the body is to quiet the movement.

As a great many practitioners will know, back lying on the floor is foundational to many somatic disciplines, techniques and practices. Yoga, Pilates, the Feldenkrais Method and release-based contemporary dance techniques such as Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), incorporate lying on the back as a tool to ground the body and the self. Quite literally, lying on the floor places the practitioner in closer proximity to and contact with the ground, comparative to their centre of gravity when they are standing vertically, with their weight stacked atop the surface area of their feet.

Back lying is also a methodology used within sounding-and-moving practices. Lying on your back experientially deepens the felt sense of the voice. It is common practice to *begin* lying on the ground. 'Grounding before sounding. Gravity responses in the body set the pre-movement for breath and vocal expression – our readiness to respond' (Olsen 2021: 29). In SRT, for example, when practitioners are back lying at the commencement of a class, they are

of the SS-practitioner (Burrows 2010: 143). The SS-score is improvisational not in the sense that it itself is improvised, but in the sense that it renders the SS-practitioner an improvisation (Ruth 2022: 45). Having a set score is part of why we identify as performative researchers, for each time we practise, we are performing (defined as carrying out, accomplishing or fulfilling [Oxford Dictionary of English 2024]) the score. Or perhaps more accurately, we are *practising the performance* (carrying out) of the score. It is the SS-studies which hold the principles and philosophy of the praxis.

16. 'Thin places' are locations that are laced with transcendence. Where the veil between the physical world and the spiritual or divine realm feels particularly thin. Swimming in a grotto, wandering beneath the canopy of a forest, ancient ruins at dusk, mist-covered moorland, passing through a waterfall. 'Thin places' feel extraordinary in their presence. There is a sense of suspension, awe, peace and connection. Thin places can be blissful, serene, mythic, thought provoking and awe inspiring.

17. The SRT practitioner Alex Crowe investigates the in-between of Buddhism and SRT. He states that SRT 'is not unique as a somatic movement practice whose contemplative and spiritual aspects have yet to be fully articulated' (2021: 40). Investigations into this intersection have been purported by Williamson et al. (2014) and Blum (2016), which

opened up a field of study that brings together somatics, spiritualities, Buddhism and dance. While Crowe explores the connection between Buddhism and SRT, this article seeks to contribute to this emerging body of research by looking at the intersection of the SS-score and neo-spirituality.

18. Experientially this is similar to certain improvisational, flow, trance or meditative states.
19. We use the term eerie in alignment with Mark Fisher's (2017) musings in his work *The Weird and The Eerie*. Fisher writes that the eerie innately includes a preoccupation with the strange. This strangeness has to do 'with a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience' (2017: 8). Fisher notes how the

eerie entails a disengagement from our current attachments. [...] The serenity that is often associated with the eerie – think of the phrase *eerie calm* – has to do with detachment from the urgencies of the everyday. The perspective of the eerie can give us access to the forces which govern mundane reality but which are ordinarily obscured, just as it can give us access to spaces beyond mundane reality altogether.
(2017: 13, original emphasis)

asked to allow their relationship to the ground, and to gravity, support them in releasing habitual tension and holding (LeQuesne 2018). For contemporary dancers and somatic practitioners alike, this is a common instruction. To soften and relax into the ground, allowing yourself to fall into the backspace of your body/self.³³ These instructions aim at inviting practitioners to surrender their muscular holding of themselves, giving their weight over to the holding of the ground.

The SS-score individuates from this invitation. Initially, SS-practitioners are instructed: **Walk into the space and lie on your back.** What follows are not invitations to soften, surrender or relax into the holding of the ground. Instead, Stage 1: stillness invites tension. Lying down, SS-practitioners are invited to freeze themselves in a shape. Before we go on, we invite you to experience this for yourself. Here are your instructions:

1. Choose a space to lie down.
2. Lie down on your back in a way that is comfortable.
3. Become absolutely still.
4. Stay still long enough to notice that you want to soften into the ground.
5. Do not give in to your want to soften.
6. Stay still, lying in the shape that you initially took when you lay down.
7. No need to torture yourself in this tension. Feel it, acknowledge it and return to us here.

Step 3, become absolutely still, means *do not continually soften into the ground*. This requires that you engage in opposition to your natural inclination to release into the ground. Instead of letting go, you hold, instead of surrendering, you allow tension to build. Yet although you are still, your being remains pulsing with aliveness. Experientially, it can feel as if your skin becomes an outer shell of stillness. What you may have noticed when you experience this for yourself, is that that which first felt comfortable soon becomes constricted. More opportunity to relax and release soon becomes available and in response you *want* to let go of *more* of your holding. The body *wants* to give itself over to the ground. At this point, you may have started to imagine that another position, different to the shape that you chose, would have been easier, 'better' or more comfortable. This is, unfortunately, a fantasy. For it is the stilling itself that is confronting, not necessarily the shape of the self.³⁴

If the priority of the SS-score is absolute stillness (as far as is possible), the SS-practitioner will not choose to drop their shoulder an extra few centimetres towards the floor. The tension between *wanting to surrender* and *allowing tension to build* can feel incredibly intense. To still yourself in any shape creates an internal tussle. If SS-practitioners can sustain the silence and the stillness despite the discomfort of internal tussle, past the threshold of the internal trouble, they will find attunement with the sonic resonance of the primordial sound. Stage 1: stillness attunes the SS-practitioners ear for another sound wave to be heard. It is from this place, of quiet attunement with primordial sounds, that the sensations of the SS-practitioner themselves begin to sound.

A central value of 'Sounding Sensations' is that we need not remove, erase or bypass *any* parts of ourselves, ever. 'Sounding Sensations' scores the SS-spiritual in-between by way of sounding *your* sensations. It is the vibrational waves of our very own sensations that offer us dialogue with the great

unknown. The primordial sound that we speak of is not an abstract, transcendent hum. No, the primordial sound pulses dynamically and specifically. Not only all around us, but *within us*. It is sensorially felt differently throughout different parts of ourselves. The resonance of the primordial sound may feel loud in the pelvic bowl but linger like smoke in the sternum. It may flow like thick liquid down the legs but grow like weeds around the ankles. It may jubilantly press into the heart and simultaneously suffocate the lower belly. Your moment-to-moment sensations are fractals of the divine, can you feel them? Your sensations are sounding, can you hear them?

THE SS-GAME

This is an imaginary game. Apply it to your reality.

LEVEL ONE

Objective:

Trick the motion sensors. Find yourself lying in the dark.

Clue:

The overhead lights in this space are controlled by motion sensors. When the sensors detect movement, the lights turn on. If no movement is detected, the lights will turn off. The sensors are sensitive. Even the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe can activate them. The sensors are unpredictable. There is no way of knowing how long it will take for the lights to turn off when the sensors no longer detect movement.

Tactics:

If you lie still enough, for long enough, you will trick the motion sensors.

Success:

You will find yourself lying in the dark.

LEVEL TWO

Objective:

Remain in the dark as long as possible.

Clue:

To avoid activating the motion sensors, you must not move. The sensors are sensitive. Even the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe can activate them. You will be required to be still for much longer than is comfortable.

Tactic:

Become absolutely still.

Success:

You remain lying in the dark.

20. 'Sounding Sensations' understands dance studios as offering 'a retreat from the outside world [and] a space to think, to experiment and to create [...] studios are designated physical workspaces' (Tate 2024: n.pag.).

21. Many dance studios are equipped with mirrors as, within forms of dance such as classical ballet, the reflection of oneself in the mirror is used as a method to train. However, in order to practise proprioceptive perception (necessary to sensing) a focusing inwards is necessary. Seeing one's own outer shape reflected back in the mirror does not support the intention of an inwards focus. In fact, even sensing that there are mirrors in the space, be they turned away or behind a curtain, can impact the SS-practitioners ability to turn their focus inward.

22. It is in this way that 'Sounding Sensations' sits in strong conviction that the spiritual is *not* disattached, nor is it oppositional, from the bodily or the sensual.

23. In sacred intimacy and polarity work, the notion of container is associated with Yang energy, the Divine Masculine. Creating a container is one of the primary tenants of the Divine Masculine. If Yin energy, the Divine Feminine, does not have a meticulous container to flow into, the feminine energetic is going to be diffuse. Just as 'the samurai adorns his robe to perfection, or a shaman constructs a sacred space with painstaking care, the conscious Masculine generates containers that allow energy to flow and

love to blossom' (Wineland 2022: 89). The meticulousness with which the container is set and held directly impacts the depth of practice. When working with expression, intimacy and our hearts, we can only go as deep as we are held. An unconscious or sloppy container is 'the enemy of depth' (Wineland 2022: 89).

24. The notion of tensegrity 'refers to the characteristic property of a stable three-dimensional structure that consists of members under tension that are contiguous and members under compression that are not' (Oxford Dictionary of English 2024). We think of tensegrity as (in)tensional integrity and a sense of floating compression. For the SRT practitioner, tensegrity is experienced as a qualitative felt state where 'no one part of the self congeals against any other part of the self' (Skinner 2003: n.pag.). For the SS-practitioner, tensegrity is experienced through the container of the praxis. This is depicted in Figure 1.

25. We *study* with as much heart forward rigour and honesty as we can muster. We *do* with precision and intentionality. We *play* with devotional focus. We sound with radical honesty and warm, wide throats. We move with our whole selves. We relate to our sensations with curiosity and permission, consciously softening inner judgement.

26. When Elisabeth Gilbert is feeling 'particularly sluggish and useless', she will look at herself in a mirror and firmly

LEVEL THREE

Objective:

Attune to your sensations.

Clue:

Focus on what you *feel* and what you *sense*. Sensations can be physical sensations (my hip hurts), unexplainable awarenesses (we're being watched), or felt impressions (my heart is crushing down into my lungs).

Tactic:

Be patient. Don't impose. Let your sensations reveal themselves. If there is nothing, lean further into nothing.

Success:

You remain lying in the dark. You are attuned to what is sensorially present.

LEVEL FOUR

Objective:

Imagine sounding your sensations.

Clue:

Stay within the realm of imagination. Imagine your sensation had a sound. What sound might that be? Imagine making this sound.

Tactic:

Imagine widening your jaw to scream the tightness of the throat. Imagine billowing the lips and lengthening the back of the neck with a humming exhale to ease the eerie suspicion. Imagine spreading your arms wide to wail at the top of your lungs to blissfully release the shrapnel in your torso.

Success:

You remain lying in the dark. Your imagination of sounding your sensations affords you sensorial release.³⁵

LEVEL FIVE

Objective:

Remain in the dark as long as possible. Express your sensations with sound and movement.

Clue:

You can express much more than you think without activating the light sensors.

Tactic:

It is not your job to judge what is present. The *why* of each sensation is none of your business. Do not add stories or justifications to your sensations. Instead, simply let them be true.

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Success:

Someone, perhaps it will be you, will eventually express in a way that activates the light sensors. When this happens, the lights will turn on. The lights turning on does not mean you have lost the game. Yet, it is too soon to say if you have won the game.

Part of the genius of the SS-game is that it asks SS-practitioners to consider the central question of the praxis (if the sensation I am experiencing in this moment had a sound, what might that sound be?) from a place of nuance, subtlety and efficiency. The motion sensors impose a restriction. What makes the SS-game a game is that SS-practitioners can, indeed, lose. To lose the game is to move in a way that activates the motion sensors *too soon*.³⁶ Losing feels like a kick in the teeth for the remainder of the SS-score. Losers do not transition into Stage 2: expression as release, but into *Frankensteining*.³⁷ In Frankensteining, there is no SS-spiritual in-between. The felt sense of the SS-practitioner is that she is a monster who has been spat out into an existence which she cannot make sense of, no matter how much she thrashes, pushes, pulls, tries or forces her way towards a sense of figuring out.³⁸ As Frankensteining is an experiential by-product of *not* experiencing the SS-spiritual in-between, we will not discuss it any further in this article. For now, let us imagine we have successfully played the game, and are transitioning into Stage 2: expression as release. Before we speak to this stage of the SS-score, a note on our approach to sounding itself.

SOUNDING YOUR SENSATIONS

As SS-practitioners, it matters *how* we sound.³⁹ Sounding is not a *representation* of a sensation. Sounding is not *about* a sensation, nor does sounding *describe* a sensation. Just as Shakti is divine resonance, sounding is a sensation. When the SS-practitioner sounds their sensations, they are sounding *the sensations themselves*. With their sounding, they remake the sensation. They afford the sensation sounded acknowledgement, offering it the gift of animate life. The sensation is remade.⁴⁰ It is itself, made manifest through the vocal resonance of the SS-practitioner. As SS-practitioners remake their sensations, they remake themselves.⁴¹ They replenish themselves. The SS-score teaches and reminds SS-practitioners that we are animated and enlivened *because* we are sounded. Sounding replenishes our relationship not only to ourselves and to each other, but also to that which (as we perceive it) truly matters in a sonorous world.

As feminine practitioners, we sit in deep service to liberating expression. The SS-score is scored as such to facilitate SS-practitioners not only to *remember* themselves as animate and powerful beings but also to facilitate SS-practitioners *experiencing* themselves as such. As writer and Jungian psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estés notes, when we are without animation we are ‘without inspiration [...] without soulfulness, without meaning, shame bearing, chronically fuming, volatile, sick, uncreative, compressed, crazed’ (2022: 9). Without animation, we feel ‘powerless, chronically doubtful, shaky, blocked, unable to follow through [...] inert, faltering’ (2022: 9). ‘Sounding Sensations’ provides an experiential counterpoint for these feelings. It scores the SS-spiritual in-between so that one may recall their animal body, their aliveness and their animation. It is true that she who tries to make her deeper feelings invisible is deadening herself. ‘The fire goes

asks ‘why wouldn’t creativity hide from you, Gilbert? Look at yourself!’ (2016: 163, original emphasis). Gilbert believes in ‘dress[ing] for the novel you want to write’ (2016: 164, original emphasis). She reminds us that it is necessary to set a container that the muse (for the SS-practitioner, the spiritual) *wants* to inhabit. A container that is indeed inviting, welcoming, of the correct calibre, and equipped to hold (dialogue with) that which is greater than us.

27. Ritualistic in the sense that it offers ritual containment. The praxis itself is a tremendous. (‘A piece of ground surrounding or adjacent to a temple; a sacred enclosure or precinct’ [Oxford Dictionary of English 2024]).
28. The SS-study on surprise details the paradoxical equation of knowing that the SS-spiritual in-between is a possible outcome, but simultaneously knowing that in order for this possibility to be made manifest, the SS-practitioner needs to fully and genuinely let go of (or dis-attach from, after Deborah Hay’s use of the word) any attachment they have to destination or outcome. If they truly desire to experience the SS-spiritual in-between, they are paradoxically required to *give up* this very desire. The SS-study on surprise references a well-known spiritual saying that ‘enlightenment is an accident, but some activities make you accident prone’ (Burkett et al. 2023: 3).
29. Modern neo-spirituality, especially that which we encounter on social media platforms

such as Instagram, can become tunnel visioned, focused solely on self-optimization as an aim. Whilst well intended, this aim to self-optimize can focus so heavily on the end result of transformation that the experience of transformation itself is overlooked or bypassed. Yet the experience of transformation, from *within* transformation, is vital to embodying the desired transformation. The SS-practitioner understands that the value they seek will not be found in the outcome of their transformation, but in their ability to be present with the transformation itself.

30. Dharma is a Sanskrit Buddhist term which refers to 'the nature of reality regarded as universal truth' (OED Online 2021). An individual's dharma is their inherent purpose, or true calling in life. Dharma is what you were born to do, your soul work, if you will. The dharma of 'Sounding Sensations' is, simply put, to liberate expression.
31. We dream of being embodied, expressive, intentional, integrous, wild, tender, heart-forward and liberated women.
32. To become absolutely still is, of course, impossible. As embodied beings, we are always in motion. This truth is acknowledged in conjunction with this instruction to 'still your body' within the SS-study on stillness, which is not included in this article. The holding of this paradox is similar to that of the stagnant 'one-ness' crashing

out. It is a painful form of *suspended animation*' (Estés 2022: 88, emphasis added). Stage 1: stillness of the SS-score offers us a (perhaps uncomfortable) reminder that none of us are meant to be suspended in our animation. We are meant to be becoming, transforming and shapeshifting. Not only this, but we are meant to be active and engaged agents in these processes. This is what we mean by liberation.

EXPRESSION AS RELEASE

Having spent the majority of this article building up to this section, we smirk as we arrive here. Indeed, if Stage 1: stillness is the spine of 'Sounding Sensations', then Stage 2: expression as release is the belly, the womb, the feminine-animal-body. In other words, it is Stage 2: expression as release is the spirit of the praxis. In the earlier section 'Primordial Sound', we established sound as vibration. As vibration, sound *is* movement. Innately animative in quality, sound (sounding) supports us in moving our sensations.⁴² As the SS-game makes known, sounding is the primary consideration of the SS-practitioner. Movement of the body is a secondary consideration. Working this way, the embodiment of the SS-practitioner (the movement of their bodies) *takes the shape* of their sound (sounding), which is already taking the shape of their sensations. The SS-practitioner's sensations become shaped primarily by their sounding and secondarily by their embodiment.

In Stage 2: expression as release, SS-practitioners move their bodies into shapes that they intuitively and in-the-moment feel are maximally supportive in allowing their sounding to be fully expressed. The sounding of the SS-practitioner births their embodied shapes. The shapes the SS-practitioner embodies both support and liberate their sounding. This is the feedback loop at play within 'Sounding Sensations'. SS-practitioners are constantly sounding themselves into vital shape after vital shape. Their transformation is forever shaped, forever sounded. The embodied expression of the SS-practitioner releases (liberates) their moment-to-moment felt sensations.

This is the potency and power of expression as release. The sounding *is* the shape-taking *is* the divine resonance *is* the shoreless ocean *is* the SS-spiritual in-between. Provided SS-practitioners have successfully played the SS-game, passing through the doorway into the SS-spiritual in-between (and not into Frankensteining), each sound the SS-practitioner makes and each shape the SS-practitioner takes is an intentional reverberation of the primordial sound. Having devoted themselves to the uncomfortable work of attuning, SS-practitioners now express fractals of the primordial sound as attuned, integrated beings. They offer their call back with their whole selves.

This is embodied expression by way of 'Sounding Sensations', and it transports SS-practitioners to a place of radical presence. To be immersed in a shoreless ocean of the SS-spiritual in-between by way of Stage 2: expression as release, is to dissolve. SS-practitioners ride the fractal resonances of sound waves back to Source, only to dissolve there. They remake primordial sound by taking and being taken by its sonic and kinetic shape. They become conduit and vessel. Expression as release is simultaneously an offering to the spiritual, the source of the offering itself *and* the place that the offering returns to. This is what we, as SS-practitioners, live our lives for. This depth of connection, relationship and harmony with that which is larger than us.

We feel joyous, enlivened, surrendered, grateful, awakened and humbled to inhabit and experience the SS-spiritual in-between. It is a gift of the highest order that we may touch this experience by way of our very own sensations, voices and vocalities.

And then it ends. Abruptly. The SS-spiritual in-between decides of its own accord that it is ready to come to completion for today's practice. Sharp and sobering, a gust of cold northern wind 'wakes the SS-practitioner up' and transports them from the shoreless ocean of the SS-spiritual in-between back to the white walls of the dance studio. Stage 3: harmony as resolution is the end. Marking the closing of the practice, it reads:

You will know when the practice is over.

**The work flattens.
Love, embodied.**

There is an intelligence to the abruptness of Stage 3: harmony as resolution. SS-practitioners are reminded that everything must, and indeed does, end. This practice, yes, but also this life, this moment, this experience. Stage 3: harmony as resolution is a bow to endings, as tender or unwanted as they may be. Acknowledging that all of 'this' (life, living, sensing, practising, studying and expressing) is but a miracle dream. SS-practitioners are required to lay their practice on the altar of the end. They give themselves over, one final time, to that which is larger than them.

PRIMORDIAL RESONANCE

From the shoreless ocean of the SS-spiritual in-between, the SS-practitioner returns abundant with wisdom, overflowing with the ability to reinvigorate themselves and their lives. They return from their journey with enlivened gnosis about themselves, their expression and perhaps even about ineffable cosmic truths or spiritual understandings. As they return to their lives outside of 'Sounding Sensations', they carry their liberation, expression and experience with them, by way of their embodiment, out into the world. Who they are, as both SS-practitioners and human beings, has transformed.

She who bites her tongue to avoid conflict, begins to notice her own sensations in the face of another's activation. The one who does not voice her needs, begins to breathe deeply when their lover asks them what they wants. He who spirals into existentialism when receiving feedback, begins to take a stand for his own values. She who was taught that anger is bad, begins to allow the sweet relief of hot rage to fill her belly. The one who overworks to distract from their inner world, begins to take a walk around the park when they notice the ache of their heart. He whose thirst for life is rotting, begins to actively animate his facial expressions. She who masterfully mirrors the behaviour of her peers, begins to risk saying what she truly means. The one who harshly judges to repel intimate connection, begins to cultivate compassion for the innocence of their protective patterning.

The SS-practitioner has been gifted life altering lessons: how to feel without shame, sense with greater respect and express with greater coherence. And so it is. May we each return, with liberated animation, to our novel now-moment.

into and interfacing with ongoing acts of animation, expression, transformation and becoming, as we spoke to in the 'Primordial sound' section.

33. The experiential understandings we have gained from 'Sounding Sensations' has taught us that the body *is* the self. We do not have space (nor is it immediately relevant) for us to justify this finding within this article, however, the central idea we are following is that 'the mental and physical components of any action are two different aspects of the same function' (Feldenkrais 2019: 19). We notice that although neo-spirituality tries its best to parse itself from the Cartesian body-mind split, there can be very heavy reference on 'the body'. This seems, to us, to be restating and perpetuating a divide between the body and the mind, the body and the self. Yet our experience of our bodies is that they are as much ourselves as any other part of us. We therefore use body and self interchangeably.

34. A similar approach is applied in yogic practice of Āsana. Practitioners are asked to choose a suitable position, and consider what happens. There is a sort of happy medium between rigidity and limpness; the muscles are not to be strained, and yet they are not allowed to be altogether slack. It is difficult to find a good descriptive word. Braced is perhaps best. A sense of physical alertness is desirable.
(Crowley and d'Este Sturges [1969] 2024: n.pag.)

The key is to maintain the tension until it becomes creative. Donna Haraway may phrase this as 'stay[ing] with the trouble' (2016: 1). The trouble itself will transform and something novel will emerge in its place.

35. Imagination itself offers the SS-practitioner immense sensorial release. We do not cover this within this article. It is written into the SS-studies, particularly the study on imagination.
36. There is no set or measurable amount of time that qualifies as the motion sensors being activated 'too soon' or 'too late'. This part of playing the SS-game is experiential. You must trust us when we say that to the SS-practitioner, it is clear.
37. The pathway into and place of Frankensteining (in relation to the other components of 'Sounding Sensations') is depicted in Figure 1.
38. We are aware that in Mary Shelley's canonical text *Frankenstein* ([1818] 2012), it is the Doctor who is named Frankenstein, not the monster. Frankensteining is termed as such because of the experiential feedback loop of simultaneously feeling like a monster whilst simultaneously attempting to change, alter or interfere with (to doctor) your monstrous experience into a more palatable, smooth and enjoyable experience. The failure of these efforts only add to the monstrosity of the SS-practitioners experience.

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This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

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17. 39. A reminder that sounding encompasses various non-linguistic vocalisations: grunts, groans, growls, screams, giggles, belly laughs, roars, hisses, sighs, hums, tells, murmurs and whines.
18. 40. Remade in the sense that it is made manifest in a different form (sounded by way of the SS-practitioner), not that it is represented.
19. 41. We are not using the prefix 're-' to demonstrate a representation. It is the experience of the SS-practitioner that they remake their sensations, for they first sensed them, and now they sound them (these processes become concurrent throughout the SS-score). Yet as this chapter opened by stating, sounding is approached as sensation itself.
20. 42. Literally, by way of vibration.

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Sing, O Muse: Vocality as contemplative practice

ABSTRACT

My practice as a singer–composer explores the sonorous expressivity of poetic language in a relational multi-layered meaning-making process. Drawing on a studio-centred contemplative approach, I focus on the intertwined and liminal spaces between my creative process and personal contemplative practices. My writing is a hybrid autoethnographic and poetic-postcritical engagement within a theoretical frame centred on the work of Robert Fripp and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I re-envision and re-imagine artistic discipleship, that is, the artist as disciple of the Muse – defining the Muse, in part, as the energy signature of a creative discipline. This energetic presence evolves and morphs as an inspired, externally perceived sacred source and as an internal guide inherent to the human psyche and to the artist’s creative process.

KEYWORDS

voice
embodiment
music
poetry
sonority
performance

Sing, O Muse ...
Begin where it begins
Sing as you have always sung
Tell it for our time
(Penton [2022], original poetry/lyrics excerpt from my song ‘Muse’ inspired by Robert Fagles’s translation of Homer’s *The Odyssey* [1996: 58–59])

This offering is a creatives reflection on my practice with accompanying theoretical threads, musings and considerations. My writing is a hybrid autoethnographic and poetic-postcritical¹ engagement that traverses the liminal spaces

1. I align with postcritical theorists such as Rita Felski (2015). In her enquiry, Felski explores the limitations of the critical tradition with its suspicious and disenchanted purview: ‘as if the only way to make sense of something were to assume the role of an eagle-eyed detective tracking down the

invisible forces and maleficent entities that have conjured it into being' (2015: 27). In attending academic talks Felski notes that one 'has learned to expect the inevitable question: "But what about power?" and she posits that new questions are in order, such as "But what about love?"' (2015: 17). With this in mind, I am, firstly, a practitioner and then a theorist only if the theory inspires and supports my ongoing creative work. I am highly engaged in the practice of music and I am far less active within the confines of the theoretical dimensions related to practice. In my writing, this positionality is supported by the imbrication of original poetics (often including music media) with practical reflections and accompanying theoretical concerns (academic resources share equal space with popular writers and artists). For a deeper engagement with my perspective on postcritical discourse, please see the chapter in my thesis, 'Postopera, the postdramatic & new opera practices: A theoretical framework' (Penton 2021a: 5).

2. To orient the reader, my use of the term 'vocality' is defined as 'the extensive range of sound of the human voice – from singing to conventional speech and extra-vocalic expressions: "a spectrum of utterances broader than lyrics-based singing" with a focus upon the "bodily aspects of vocal utterance, beyond its linguistic content"' (Karantonis and Verstraete 2014: 4 cited in Penton 2021a: 10).

between my creative process and personal contemplative practices. The reader will find first-person engagements with my studio-centred voice methods accompanied by a sensitivity to spiritual aspects of creative work. Original poetic verses are imbricated with theoretical strands, embracing the fragility of a discipline-specific practice. I am not presenting an academic argument in the traditional sense; rather, I hope to offer the reader a glimpse into my creative and contemplative landscape and how devotion and inspiration sustain me in our deeply uncertain times – and that this 'subtle work of the heart' (Bruford [1982] 2024: 04:50) may do the same for others.

My creative work is centred in music, in an embodied vocal practice that embraces the movement of poetry and breath through the voice and body. In working with vocality² and original poetic text, I often draw on creative and contemporary re-imaginings of ancient Aegean-inspired spiritual practices and cosmogony (thus the impulse for the title of this piece) as well as taking inspiration from mythology, fairytale and literature of the western canon, from global shared sacred story, and the cycle of the seasons. This work is intertwined with my contemplative spiritual considerations and shares space with imaginative and literary points of enquiry.³ Contemplative movement, visual art as process–practice and journaling are also part of my daily work. These foundational approaches form a reciprocal framework for my voice and music practice.⁴

I begin with the idea of discipleship. The Latin root of the word 'disciple' and 'discipline' is *discipulus* 'pupil' or 'student' – a person who devotes themselves to learning. The word 'devote' is found in the Latin for 'dedicate' and 'vow'. Devotion, then, is an act of love but something more – it is a *commitment* to love. As a dedicant of music, with voice as my primary instrument, when addressing music I might ask, 'How shall I sing of you who are in all ways worthy of singing?' (Merrill 2011: 205). This question spurs me to embark on the task to realize a creative vision. Thus begins an alchemical process, one that is personal, creative and technical; a process that meets the demands of music, or rather, rises to the calling of the Muse.

I re-envision and re-imagine artistic discipleship by centring the artist as disciple of the Muse. I define the Muse variously: as an energy signature of a creative discipline, as a metaphor for the impulse and inspiration behind my creative work, as my relationship with music, and as a real anthropomorphic spiritual presence. Each of these expressions evokes and invokes the Muse as Mystery. John Keats expressed this paradox as 'Negative Capability', that is, the artist's ability to simultaneously hold creative/poetic truth with rationality: being 'capable of uncertainties [...] without reaching after fact & reason' (1817: n.pag.). For the artist–practitioner – myself, writing experientially from a studio-centred, creative–autoethnographic purview – the presence of the Muse evolves and morphs as an inspired, externally perceived sacred source as well as an internal guide intrinsic to the human psyche and to the creative process.

Discipleship and its intertwined devotional practice require attention, awareness and compassion towards self and others. Discursive energies surrounding the concepts of discipleship and discipline may have strict, constricted, hierarchical or punitive associations. I hope to reclaim and recontextualize discipleship as a process that embodies a devotional commitment to a practice rather than serving as a model for a goal-oriented paradigm or hierarchy of achievement. The paradox is that a discipline does foster achievement of personally defined goals and acquisition of skillsets. However, these achievements are

received from a process of devoted learning – received as unexpected and un-strived for gifts – the blossoms and fruits of a dedicated journey.

In a traditional teacher–student model, learning usually takes place under the tutelage of an accomplished or wise educator. What if this teacher is the instrument itself? The voice itself? The body itself? The creative process itself? My practice is wholly intuitive, mystical, embodied, experiential and experimental. The mystical dimension of singing and voicing is a practice in relationship to Mystery. As such, vocality is an expressive, embodied overflowing – a technical yet heart-centred discipline. Through the poetic sonority that emanates from and reverberates beyond my being, the expressive resonances of language are ‘ways for the human body to sing the world’s praises and in the last resort to live it’ (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 218).⁵

As evidenced by the previous citation, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s writing beautifully expresses ideas regarding our delicate, ephemeral, corporal experience of being as well as addressing poetry’s ineffability. As a singer who works closely with the sonority of words – that is, the meaning-making processes present in the sound of language beyond-before denotative or referential meaning – it is this poetic sonority that vibrates through my body and out into the world. Breath wakes the voice and moves sound through my being to meet yours: ‘poetry [...] is essentially a variety of existence’ (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 174).⁶

Although this kind of embodied engagement is central to artistic and creative practices, western philosophic discourse continues a considerable emphasis on analysis of the semantic rather than on lived experience. I continue to draw inspiration from thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous,⁷ writers whose labyrinthine expressions circumvent and undermine signification by illuminating the meaning-making inherent in the embodied poetic. Jill Marsden, likewise, offers a contrast to the disembodied semantic via her engagement with Friedrich Nietzsche, noting the ecstatic dimension of creative expression wherein ideas arise through a ‘corporeal intelligence’ making it ‘difficult to say whether it is thought which enraptures the body or the body which enraptures thought’ (2002: 74). Along these lines, Adriana Cavarero, another theorist central to my work, writes that the vocal experience and its relational embodied practices subvert ‘philosophical canons’ and contrast ‘the tendency of philosophy to focus on the necessarily abstract semantic component of language, at the expense of its material and corporeal vocal component’ (2023: 10:43).

The vocal theoretical often (and surprisingly) neglects to centralize the artist–practitioner’s corporeal knowledge.⁸ In contrast, my life as an artist is fully engaged in the bodily experience of vocality. Abstraction removes me from experience. Abstraction relegates vocality and music to the theoretical, negating the expressivity of poetry and sidelining sonorous meaning-making processes – after all, ‘The world is not what I think, but what I live through’ (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: xviii–xix). This concern and support for our embodied being-ness speaks to me deeply – it often keeps me afloat, bolstering me spiritually and thus creatively. I become *inspired* in its Latin (*inspirare*) and Ancient Greek (*πνεῦμα/pnéō/numa*) sense, that is, infused with spirit and breathed by a universal energy.

Inspiration is sometimes dismissed due to the propagation of trite wellness and self-care axioms on social media. Yet, for the artist, inspiration is a mindset to cultivate. Inspiration facilitates alignment with creative intention, that is, alignment with the Muse. Mindset nourishes the artist’s work and directly affects the ability to collaborate and to share work with each other

3. My vocal music projects (solo and collaborative live performance and media works), variously, have embraced the heroines of Greco-Roman tragedy: *Ottavia* and *Klytemnestra*; the mytho-historical figure of Sappho; the composition of original hymns to the Muse and to the god Apollo (inspired by Homer’s *The Odyssey* and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, respectively); a Brothers Grimm-based song cycle; a number of music and video projects for the solstices and equinoxes; and many micro-operas including works rooted in the sacred cosmogony of the western canon. See my portfolio of performance and music media works at <https://mishapenton.com/projects> (accessed 3 April 2024) (Penton 2024).

4. My movement practice is a hybrid of traditional fitness exercise, walking in nature, yoga and eastern meditation-inspired movement. Physical wellness is as essential to my vocal practice as mental, emotional and spiritual wellness. My visual art practice is currently a whimsical and ephemeral daily watercolour practice of putting pigment to paper – the shapes and splashes and whirls of colour are directly informed by the physicality of movement with attention to breath that initiates movement > that initiates sound. In addition, I keep a digital journal of daily musings and creative reflections.

5. See the chapter ‘Vocality & embodiment’ in my thesis for a closer

look at my work in relationship to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writing (Penton 2021a: 24–30).

6. The reader will find this Merleau-Ponty citation realized as a micro-opera vocal media work and can be accessed at my Vimeo page: <https://vimeo.com/497786123> (accessed 12 March 2024) (Penton 2021c: 29). I have composed many micro-vocal works as well as pieces created as citations for imbricated written-media texts, including in my Ph.D. thesis.
7. I often return to the writings of Adriana Cavarero, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva as I have yet to find contemporary theorists whose work inspires me in the same way.
8. There are, of course, exceptions to this neglect as more practitioner-scholars are writing about their experiences. The work of singers and artistic researchers Elisabeth Belgrano, Päivi Järviö and Fides Krucker come to the fore for me here.

and with our broader communities. This sharing of creative processes and accompanying outcomes is paramount in a world that may feel chaotic and overwhelming. Many of us feel that we are teetering on the precipice of an unknown and catastrophic future. However, imagining and then creating the world we desire is the only way forward. On social media, I often use the hashtag #StayInspired to remind myself and others that we are in service to creative inspiration.

One of my favourite definitions of creativity is from Elizabeth Gilbert:

Q: What is creativity?

A: The relationship between a human being and the mysteries of inspiration

(2015: ix, original emphasis)

Robert Fripp, the English rock guitarist writes extensively about his life as a professional musician and craftsman in service to music, 'In a musical sense, acquired musical skill is an instrument placed at the service of the Muse' (2006: n.pag.). For decades, Fripp's work has inspired me to continue my own. So, I, too, have set about acquiring the skill to realize a creative vision that is tasked me by the Muse, and this skill acquisition is a practical and a mystical discipline. Fripp asks, 'How does the musician open themselves to this relationship with music? And for that, one needs a discipline, that is, a body of techniques which enables you to develop this relationship with music: training the body, mind, and the heart' (Bruford [1982] 2024). For Fripp, the sensitive training of the heart is rooted in mediative practice, in the cultivation of awareness, attentiveness and care in all facets of one's life. Likewise, discipline and its companion, devotion, are central: there is no way forward for an artist without a daily commitment that serves the work, whether that form is solo, collaborative or communal:

Discipline enables us to hold ourselves in front of a challenge, or a task.

The work is in meeting the challenge, not acquiring the discipline.

But until we have acquired the discipline, our proper work has not begun.

So, until then, our work is to acquire discipline; in the knowledge that this is not an end in itself, only the means to an end.

(Fripp 2001: 15.37)

And this end is '[w]here music comes not only to visit occasionally, but comes to live' (Bruford [1982] 2024: 02:30). The subtle work of the heart is essential and when the three disciplines come together and are working, 'music begins to play the musician' (Bruford [1982] 2024: 04:50). It is this understanding gained through the embodied experience of a disciplinary practice that becomes more than a series of techniques to acquire skill – it is not, after all, 'only the means to an end'. Without a 'true' mindset – an aligned devotional aspiration – the artist may become lost in our world that is at once all beauty and terror and chaos and wonder. This heart-centred practice of awareness and attentiveness expands, fills and spills forth, infusing collaborators and community with a kind of healing and inspiration unavailable otherwise. It is no surprise, then, that I find solace, joy and energetic reinforcement in aphorisms such as, 'In strange and uncertain times, a reasonable person might despair. But Hope is unreasonable, and Love is greater even than this' (Fripp 2022b: n.pag.).

Here, dear reader, allow me to sigh a soft dream-song close to your ear:

Night⁹

The moon hides

She perches

Winged

On my rooftop

She holds a deck of cards

Between slender palms

Her skin is all iridescent light and shadow

Speckled with the birth of stars

She pulls a card

And without looking

Releases it from her fingertips

It floats down my dark chimney

And slides to a landing on the cold hearth

Whisper-like

Breath-like

Song-like

I reach down

And pick up the small rectangle of paper

I lift it to the glow of my lamp

Its image shows an open doorway

I turn it over:

‘Creative events reach back from the future and draw us towards them’¹⁰

I bring attention to my breath and how my voice gently touches sound (Linklater [1976] 2006: 227). I lightly vocalize: my voice swoops and rises and falls in easy siren waves. As the sound flows through my torso, arms and legs, my body responds with movement – an *aaaahhhhhhh* travels from deep in my belly, vibrates the sides of my rib cage and escapes through my fingers as I stretch skyward. The vocal tones continue to resonate through my bones and stream out of my hands and feet, sending fan-like energy waves up and out from the crown of my head. My sound becomes the impulse for movement and through this resonant and breath filled experience, ideas and emotions that may have been in stasis or knotted begin to loosen. Tim Ingold brings this related and lovely idea: ‘sound, like breath, is experienced as a movement of coming and going, inspiration and expiration. If that is so, then we should say of the body, as it sings, hums, whistles or speaks, that it is *ensounded*’ (2011: 139, original emphasis). I am *ensounded* and energy moves but not randomly: there is a wisdom and intelligence behind the free-form expression. Expressivity infuses my vocal improvisations that are at the heart of my compositional approach – and I step into:

Breath: a river¹¹

I step into its stream

And release my body to the flow

I am immersed

My voice touches the surface

Sound ripples

Breath breathes me

9. This is an original poem by the author. It concludes with an aphorism from Robert Fripp (2022a: n.pag.).

10. This original poetic section concludes with an aphorism from Robert Fripp (2022a: n.pag.).

11. This is an original poem by the author. It concludes with a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work *The World of Perception* ([1948] 2004: 99).

12. This original poetic section concludes with a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work *The World of Perception* ([1948] 2004: 99)..
13. This is an original poem by the author. It concludes with a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work *The Visible and Invisible* ([1964] 1968: 144) and is another Merleau-Ponty citation that I realized as a micro-opera vocal media work that can be accessed at my Vimeo page: <https://vimeo.com/497786134> (accessed 12 March 2024) (Penton 2021b: 27)..

Music sings me
My 'world exists in a universe of possible music'¹²

I direct my attention to the interplay of my internal experiences and the relationality of my body in space. Movement segues into spontaneous vocal sounding. Through this attentiveness, I settle into my grounded energy and listen: body wisdom emerges. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone writes, the 'complexities and subtleties of kinesthetic experience' ([2009] 2010: 11) come to the fore. Through attentiveness and awareness, I try to make sense of my devotion to expressivity and to music – my body moves and sounds in time and space and the world around me shifts and morphs in amazing, terrifying and seemingly unprecedented ways. There is respite and ease in 'how thinking in movement is at the core of our sense-making' ([2009] 2010: 12), that is, movement is the foundation of how we make sense of the world ([2009] 2010: 11). Without movement there is no vibration, no sound, no voice. My voice is unseen movement. My instrument is my body and yet I cannot see my voice. The presence of my voice is in the air that vibrates to create sound, enfolding me in its waves.

On a summer day in New England, I experience an expressive arts workshop with a small group of like-minded seekers:

Light streams through translucent curtains¹³
Warming my
Feet
Bare feet
I breathe
Tiptoe prance swoosh
breathe
and
Dash saunter scoot
Savor
breathe
Across the honey-hued wood floor
And then –
A pause and a pivot:
A sigh
My voice catches the morning sun
And swirls and shimmers
In blue and yellow and gold
'Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being'

My embodied sonorous language – the language that my body speaks – offers glimpses of voice-body and psyche as 'not separate entities but mysteriously a totality' (Whitehouse [1958] 1999: 42). The insights that arise are sometimes playful and sometimes profound but feel like authentic inner knowing.

I am voicing the energy of movement

In paying attention to ideas and inspirations that come through my practice, my energy feels grounded, centred, wise and joyful. My voice and movement

practices evoke a *beginning energy* or *blank canvas energy*, preparing for the creative tasks ahead. I notice the rise and fall of my breath and this reminds me to pause and to tune into the energetic qualities of the moment – to notice what feels easy or resisted in an assessment of now-ness. Developing this kind of awareness sets the conditions for creative work to emerge and nourishes each phase of an artistic journey. I have a sense that conditions are optimally set for the work ahead.

Through tuning into my body, I notice my edges and boundaries. I strike a delicate balance between intensity and self-compassion, technique and exploration, and craft and wellness. My intuitive energy systems feel aligned and an inner knowing is foregrounded, affirming that I am doing the work that is meant to be done – work only I am capable of as a unique conduit for the creative process, just as every artist has their own work to do. Richard Shusterman's concept of somaesthetics speaks to this experience. It is somaesthetic awareness that permeates my work with an embodied groundedness in the experiential and spiritual details of creative practice. For Shusterman, somaesthetics subverts the semantic reinforcement of mind-body duality and, instead, offers 'an aesthetic discipline which pragmatically unites the somatic and the spiritual through the integrated exercise of body and mind' (2000: xiii). Shusterman's focus on corporeal understanding is concerned 'not with saying but with *doing*' and conceives somaesthetics 'as a comprehensive philosophical discipline concerned with self-knowledge and self-care' (2000: 276, original emphasis).

How an artist cares for themselves is an act of self-compassion interwoven with the creative task and entwined with how the work emerges into the shared space of our world. Because my voice-body-voice are one, caring for my instrument is also caring for my body. There is no separation between my creative inspiration, artistic ideas, body, voice/voice-body, psyche and the technical details of bringing work to fruition. My concern is 'not with saying but with *doing*', and this *doing* is why my writing, such as what you are reading here, is often filled with poetic engagements. I blur the boundaries between concept, theory, analysis and my creative contributions. If I am honest, I seek a destruction of those boundaries. The magic is in the doing of the thing, not in the talking about the doing. Nor is it in the theorizing. Nor the analysis of the doing.¹⁴ The meaning is in the work itself and in our experiential engagement with sharing our practices. Merleau-Ponty puts it this way: an artwork's 'nature is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyze it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of the direct perceptual experience' ([1948] 2004: 95). Susan Sontag famously confronted analysis and interpretation in the arts,¹⁵ offering instead the experience of transience in an encounter with the 'luminousness of the thing in Itself' (1966: 9).

Luminous! Luminous! Luminous!
That is the word.

In closing, I leave you with a reflection, an invitation, an invocation ...

My journey is a personal and a mystical one:
An act of faith in Music
An act of faith in the work that is entrusted to me
An act of faith in a disillusioned world

14. I align with composer John Croft whose articles, 'Composition is not research' (2015) and 'Composing, researching, and ways of talking' (2016) set off a firestorm in music academia (predominantly in the United Kingdom). Croft writes that:

the very idea that musical composition [I expand this to include all of my creative work] is a form of research is a category error: music is a domain of thought whose cognitive dimension lies in embodiment, revelation or presentation, but not in investigation and description. (2015: 6)

Embodiment! And 'revelation' is the magic word for me – that is, to reveal, often through an encounter with the divine. Relatedly, in arts and humanities academia, it is the relentless ontological enquiry and ideological value judgments accompanied by 'the piercing but one-eyed gaze of critique' (Felski 2015: 17) that is so toxic to creative expression – in effect, twisting an artist's work into an apologia.

15. Sontag calls interpretation impoverishing and depleting: a 'revenge of the intellect upon the world' (1966: 4). Even in 1966, she saw the dangers of art as 'content' – a word we use so freely on social media today – making creative work 'into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories' (1966: 6). This categorization, in effect, makes creative work fodder for advertising algorithms and AI learning models.

16. I am thinking here of the tale of the cicadas recounted in Plato's *Phaedrus*. The cicadas, once men who were so intoxicated with song that they forgot to eat or drink and thus died. The Muses turned them into cicadas, creatures who could sing all day and night without need of nourishment, with their sole job being to report to the Muses which humans were duly offering work in their honour (see Ferrari 1987: 26).

Here in Texas
When the cicadas¹⁶ sing their long summer songs
I open my window and sing into the void of night
We sing together
We cannot see each other
We cannot discern the way ahead

We sing
For the Muse is listening

We sing
For this is our offering

We sing
For our world
In desperate need of inspired magic

May our creations be luminous

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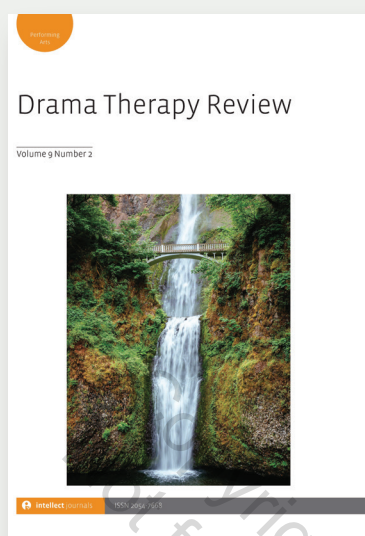
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Speakingdance: Accessing, interpreting and performing the dancer's sense of being

ABSTRACT

This article discusses a new concept-based approach to contemporary dance practice called Speakingdance, in which a dancer performs their sense of being. The practice responds to the need for a more considered use of speech in contemporary dance and the historical perception of the dancer in terms of a body-object. Philosophical thinking about speech and being provides a framework with which to re-think the relationship between speech and contemporary dance to perform a dancer's sense of being. The practice research approach from which Speakingdance emerges values the agency and experience of the practitioner-scholar as part of a phenomenological enquiry. Practical experiments with the performance of dance and speech were documented through video and written experiential accounts. Following a period of studio-based exploration, to formulate the 'just be' approach to improvisation and the poetic rhythm of speech and dance in which dance 'speaks', three new solo 'practice sharings' were created to gather information about the resonant impact of the practice on audience members. The presence of resonance indicates that a relational engagement with the dancer's being has been encountered and that the perception of the dancer has shifted away from body-object terms. The practice of Speakingdance provides a meaningful purpose for the use of speech in contemporary dance – to perform the dancer's sense of being and promote a resonant relationship between the dancer and individual audience members. Further to this, the practice has revealed a particular conceptualization of being through what has been termed the 'internal-being-construct'. This article

KEYWORDS

dance and voice
dance and being
performance
philosophy
practice research
Martin Heidegger
dance improvisation
voice and being
Adrianna Cavarero

1. Three different forms of the word 'being' are used in translations of Heidegger's work, presented in upper- or lower-case forms, as 'being' or 'Being', and the translation of the more archaic word *Seyn* as 'beyng'. Some common-ground definitions of the terminology have emerged, which Richard Capobianco and Mark Wrathall (acknowledged as world-leading scholars of Heidegger) comprehensively summarize in *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon* (2021). In English translations of Heidegger's work, the lower-case 'being' is generally accepted as referring to entities (*das Seiende*) and their metaphysical beingness in relation to form or essence. This is the 'being' performed in Speakingdance, hence, my use of the lower-case 'being' in this article.
2. Defined as the vocal utterance of words in this research.
3. The intertwining of thinking about dance and speech inherent in this statement can also support ideas that the voice can dance, although that was not the focus of the research project or the argument in this article.
4. Examples include publications from John Searle, Steven Connor and Yvon Bonenfant, in relation to speech acts, although there are also sources from performance studies more broadly that cite Austin's writing about speech acts. Recent examples include Fischer-Lichte et al. (2020) and Butler (2021). Given my concern with speech, it seems important to contextualize my

encapsulates some of the findings of academic research on the topic of dance and speech which is only just emerging and contributes a unique discussion of the of the dancer's ontology.

This article discusses a new and original concept-based approach to contemporary dance practice called Speakingdance, in which a dancer can perform their sense of 'being'. I purposely use the word 'being' rather than alternatives such as 'self' or 'identity', for example, as I am referring to Martin Heidegger's (2011) conception of the term.¹ The practice responds to the need for a more considered use of speech² in contemporary dance and the historical perception of the dancer in terms of a body-object. Philosophical thinking about speech and being provides a context with which to re-think the relationship between speech and contemporary dance to perform the dancer's sense of being. This practice-research has been driven by the question of how speech can be used in contemporary dance to perform the dancer's being? From my position as a female dancer, I argue that speech can be used to perform being in a poetic rhythm with dance more coherently than dance or speech can alone. Heidegger's temporal consideration of being moves away from conceptions of being that are fixed and can, therefore, pose a challenge to the objectification of dancer in relation to the dancer's body.

The sense of being experienced in Speakingdance is accessed through a 'just be' approach to improvisation to interpret and perform the dancer's 'internal-being-construct', through a poetic rhythm of speech and movement. Engaging with this original 'just be' improvisation method asks the dancer to tune out of their external sensory information and attune to their internal sense of being in that moment of time, asking the question 'who am I?' Attempting to somehow pause the temporality of being, in order to capture and perform it, an 'internal-being-construct' comes forwards as a bundle of language and imagery. The dancer interprets this through a poetic rhythm of speech and movement. In this rhythm, the dance has a voice.³

The 'internal-being-construct' is philosophically understood in relation to ideas of affect through Jacques Derrida's writing about interior monologues in *Voice and Phenomenon* and Henri Bergson's thinking about imagery in *Matter and Memory*. Derrida describes how the 'voice' of the interior monologue unifies the subject and object of our sense of being. This hearing-oneself-speak is a specific kind of auto-affection, that uses phonic complexes in the form of words and signs ([1967] 2011: 65–68). Internal images are regarded by Bergson as the seat of affection and the source of action. The centre of our universe and the physical basis of our personality are described as being in these images (1991: 61). Bergson unites affect, image, action and personality in a way that helps us to illuminate how a Speakingdancer can attune to their 'internal-being-construct' to access, interpret and perform their sense of being.

In the context of this research, speech could have been considered independently of dance. Speech acts, originally written about by J. L. Austin (1975) in his book *How to Do Things with Words* inspired further notable publications on the topic.⁴ Austin's discussion of speech acts is in the context of the performative which has made his work, and speech acts generally, ripe for the picking in relation to understanding theatrical art forms. Speech acts have particularly underpinned the recent development of voice studies as

an academic discipline emerging from UK-based theatre and musical theatre practices in academia. A key text from this emerging discipline, *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*, edited by Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson, was published in 2015. The editors went on to disseminate current research in the area through their *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, which began in 2016. Thomaidis and Macpherson are theatre and musical theatre academics, respectively, and as a result, the development of voice studies is influenced by the performativity and ontology of the singing voice. There are re-occurring discussions of the in-between in the chapters and articles I read in this area. Initially, the idea of the voice being in between the speaker and the listener appealed to me as a means of connecting people in those roles and transporting something of their being from one to another.

Academic voice studies literature has a tendency to focus on the voice as a separate entity which occupies the space between the performer⁵ and the listener. There is discussion of the uniqueness and identity of the performer, made present through their voice, which has been helpful in terms of my research. However, there is an implied passivity on the part of the listener and arguments emerging from this academic discipline centre on the performativity and ontology of the voice, as something distinct from the being of the performer and the listener. In contrast to this, Speakingdance engages with the ontology of the *dancer* and the relationship between speech and dance to perform being.

In the context of this research, the dancer's being is understood in relation to the work of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. In Heidegger's (2010) influential publication *Being and Time* (1927), he articulated a particular temporal experience of being, with-others and with-world. This thinking posed a challenge to the traditions of metaphysics at that time. Alongside Heidegger's work, I have particularly engaged with the work of the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero. Cavarero's notion of the narratable self conceptualizes an understanding of being as externally relational and facilitated by speech. This thinking has been significant in the formulation of Speakingdance concepts and the creation of Speakingdance practice sharings. Cavarero's argument that being is not an internal, ineffable phenomenon, but is instead an externally, relational narration, opens a field in which Speakingdancers are able to share who they are. Furthermore, Cavarero's writing about speech as action has provided a philosophical frame with which to conceptualize the movement in Speakingdance as having its own voice.

The practice research approach that Speakingdance has emerged from, values the agency and experience of the practitioner-scholar as part of a phenomenological enquiry. Practical experiments with the performance of dance and speech were documented through video and in written experiential accounts to formulate the 'just be' approach to improvisation and the poetic rhythm of speech and dance in which dance 'speaks'. Following a period of studio-based exploration, three new solo 'practice sharings' were created to gather information about the resonant impact of the practice on audience members. The presence of resonance indicates that a relational engagement with the dancer's being has been encountered and that the perception of the dancer has shifted away from body-object terms. This article focuses on what was learned about the poetic rhythm of dance and speech and the performance of being in practice sharing #1⁶ and #3.⁷

research in relation to Austin's seminal text and the use of Austin's ideas in the emergence of voice studies as an academic discipline, to make it clear that my research does not make a contribution to voice studies, but how it contributes to dance and performance philosophy instead.

5. I use the word performer here because the person using the voice does not necessarily speak. They may be making non-verbal vocal sounds or singing which engages much more creative and dynamic intonations, pitches and volumes, for instance.
6. *Being: Exhibiting a Speaking Dancer's Practice* (2017), performed as part of the Cultural Exchanges Festival in Leicester, United Kingdom.
7. *Practicing Ontology: A 'Speakingdance' Event* (2019), performed as part of the *Innovative Methodologies: International Art and Science* conference in Croatia.

8. Agamben uses a capitalized version of the word 'voice' to differentiate his reference to vocal speech from vocal sounds.
9. Logocentrism refers to the ideas that words and language are the fundamental expression of an external reality.
10. 'Self' refers to a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of self-reflection. Therefore, the term differs slightly from Heidegger's concept of being which is in relation to others and world. However, Cavarero's notion of the narratable self does align more closely with Heidegger's thinking about being.
11. Arendt's close personal relationship with Heidegger is interesting to note in terms of the connection between the ideas being discussed here.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF SPEECH AND BEING

Giorgio Agamben's (1982) thinking about voice⁸ and language addresses issues of logocentrism⁹ outlined by Derrida, particularly in his article 'Plato's pharmacy'. Derrida defines logocentrism as giving primacy to the spoken word based on the premise that speech is present at the same time as the person delivering it. This 'metaphysics of presence', as Derrida terms it, is conceived of in relation to truth, reality and being. Logocentric thinking distinguishes truth from the written word, as it is considered to be a representation of speech and has a different temporality to the writer. However, Derrida argues that there is truth in absence as well as presence. The value of absence in Derrida's work informs his concept of *différance*, whereby the meaning of language – spoken or written – is revealed through differences, oppositions and deferrals. The concept of *différance*, when applied to speech, gives meaning to the spoken word in a way that is no longer dependent on presence. The truth and reality of being can be revealed through what is absent in the meaning of words. This makes what language can convey about being, and in this case the dancer, less ineffable than previously thought.

Cavarero responds to Derrida in her book, *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Cavarero aligns herself with Derrida's issues of phonocentrism and videocentrism – the privileging of the spoken word and visual presence as representing the truth of being, and goes on to critique the centrality of the self¹⁰ in Derrida's thinking. Cavarero gives attention to the other in meaning making, stating that speech is not just for us to hear, but to be shared with others (2005: 232). The relationality of self and others in Cavarero's work is underpinned by her reading of Hannah Arendt.¹¹ In her key text, *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that life stories, through which we have an understanding of our being, intertwine as they are shared with others through speech and action. For Arendt, a life story is not created but revealed – through speech, language and action – when we have the courage to leave our private hiding and insert ourselves into the world (1998: 186). Arendt goes on to praise the dramatic arts as: 'the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship to others' (1998: 188). Speakingdance is practised as a direct and intentional engagement with that relationship, sharing the self with others, revealing who we are and bringing the dancer's being out of hiding.

Taking a different approach to Agamben and Derrida, and even Arendt, Cavarero focuses her discussion of speech and being on the uniqueness of beings: 'not reducible to the name, or to language' (Cavarero 2005: 235). She goes on to argue:

Thus, the reciprocal communication of this uniqueness functions all the more in the physical, corporeal element of the voice – in contrast to the proper name, which belongs to the verbal register. The name is not flesh; still less is it singular flesh. The voice, however, is.

(2005: 238)

For Cavarero, there is more to be considered with regards to the reciprocity and physicality of the voice in the communication of the uniqueness of being. This thinking opens doors for speech and dance in the performance of being as it challenges logocentric ideas with a physicality not discussed by Agamben. Cavarero's arguments are clearly articulated across two of her monographs: *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* and *Relating*

Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood. Both of these texts have been influential in the understanding of being explored through Speakingdance and require further discussion in order to highlight their relevance.

The uniqueness of being is central to Cavarero's argument in *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. She argues that this uniqueness is something to be revealed through the voice as:

The voice is the equivalent of what the unique person has that is most hidden and most genuine. This is not an unreachable treasure, or an ineffable essence, or still less, a sort of secret nucleus of the self; rather it is a deep vitality of the unique being who takes pleasure in revealing herself through the emission of the voice. This revelation proceeds, precisely, from inside to outside, pushing itself in the air, with concentric circles, towards another's ear.

(2005: 4)

This figuration of the voice is reminiscent of Arendt's comments regarding the courage needed to leave our private hiding and insert ourselves into the world, but Cavarero re-frames that idea specifically for the voice and goes on to make the point that the revelation of our uniqueness is always for someone else: 'The voice is always *for* the ear, it is always relational' (2005: 169, original emphasis). Therefore, the uniqueness of being cannot be defined in terms of a subject, but rather it needs to be considered as an interrelated self-distinction or 'uniqueness-in-resonance' (Cavarero 2005: 199).

In her argument for the physicality of the voice – in the context of the vibrating, fleshy throat, Cavarero acknowledges an alignment of the voice with the body and the feminine that is paralleled by the masculinity of the semantic (2005: 6). This perspective on speech complicates the usually marginal position of the feminine and corporeal in addition to the normative privileging of the masculine and language. Cavarero brings these parallels together in her conceptualization of speech as an action to communicate rather than signify, further disrupting traditionally fixed, hierarchical positions. Thinking about speech as an action in dance creates a potential for dancers to be seen beyond the objectification of their bodies and perform the uniqueness of their being with others.¹²

Cavarero's ideas about the voice in terms of uniqueness, relationality and physicality pose a challenge to the privileged position of sight and the gaze in metaphysics, by reclaiming the voice as resonant and sonorous:

The point is not simply to revocalize logos. Rather, the aim is to free logos from its visual substance, and to finally mean it as sonorous speech – in order to listen, in speech itself, for the plurality of singular voices that convoke one other in a relation that is not simply sound, but above all resonance.

(2005: 178–79)

This reclamation of physical sonority is not at the expense of the semantic. Cavarero later goes on to outline the relationship between the voice and speech as interweaving in such a way that they 'cannot be severed without sacrificing humanity itself; this goes for both the animal voice and the devocalized logos' (2005: 210). Through this statement, I return to Heidegger, as Cavarero's thinking reflects his discussion of language in his 'Letter on

12. This reconceptualization of speech as an action is one that contributes to understanding Speakingdance as a concept-based approach to dance practice. Speakingdance is a practice, it acts and what it *does* is significant, with conceptual thinking through a philosophical lens in its performance. This is different to the understanding of conceptual art, in which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object. The shifting relationship between art works or performance and conceptual thinking is a current area of consideration for a collaborative project I am involved with: ORIGIN/FORWARD/SLASH (see <https://www.originforwardslash.com>, accessed 18 February 2025).

“humanism”’. Both Cavarero’s writing about the voice and Heidegger’s writing about language intend to free speech from the imprisonment of metaphysical and logocentric thinking, while maintaining humanity. This conceptualization of speech provides an opportunity for Speakingdance to bring the being of the dancer forwards.

In her earlier book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero discusses her concept of the narratable self which has a temporality resembling Heidegger’s thinking about being. Cavarero’s original contribution of the narratable self emphasizes our external relationality with others, rather than an internal encounter with the ‘self’ which is prevalent in western metaphysics. The argument for the narratable self as an externally relational concept commences with the view that our life story begins at birth, with memories that are soon forgotten and leave our story fragmented. A desire for unity promotes the telling of our stories with a necessary other: necessary, because being is understood through our connections with world and with others. Cavarero argues that: ‘Autobiography does not properly respond to the question “who am I?” Rather, it is the biographical tale of my story, told by another, which responds to the question’ ([1997] 2000: 45). That is not to say that our narratable selves are constructed solely by others, but that our stories are created through our relationality to others. In this context, Cavarero states that auto/biography is *external* so there is no *internal*, ineffable self.

Cavarero argues that the exchange of those auto/biographies enables a recognition of the uniqueness of being and the desire for narration. That exchange facilitates a: ‘tendency to recognise the meaning [*sensu*] of one’s own self within the other’s story, especially if that story speaks of suffering and misery’ ([1997] 2000: 91). However, Cavarero goes on to argue that recognizing ourselves in an-other is quite different from recognizing the uniqueness of the other: ‘Who I am and who you are are thus passed over in favour of the question “who are we,” which is simply an ontological error of language’ ([1997] 2000: 91–92). The uniqueness of being is to be found in the resonant response to the question ‘who am I’, not the question ‘who are we’. American philosopher Judith Butler, acclaimed for her work on the performativity of gender, summarizes Cavarero’s construction of the narratable self as follows:

I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no ‘you’ to address, then I have lost ‘myself’. In her view, one can tell an autobiography only to an other, and one can reference ‘I’ only in relation to a ‘you’: without the ‘you’ my own story becomes impossible.

(2005: 32)

It is for these reasons the practice of Speakingdance recognizes the necessity of being as being-shared-with-others, in order for a narratable self to be revealed.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A ‘JUST BE’ IMPROVISATION

Once I have shut my eyes and started to attune to the question of who I am, time seems to slow down and my sense of being broadens. I try not to think of what I have just done and allow myself to be open to the response to my question, rather than thinking about what I should do when I have finished this task. There is an intention to be in the moment and I gradually arrive

there with an increased sense of the entirety of my being. My experience shifts from being sensory-heavy, cognitively busy and temporally linear to a web-like sense of self:

The practice begins with 'just be'. To attune to the flow of becoming I often begin with the eyes closed, quiet, not moving. This limits my sensory input and responses to the externality of my world. I need to attune to thinking of me right now, in this now as it passes on to the next now. Me in the middle of my now web and its connections to past, future, world and others. Me in relation. Me becoming in relation while quiet and still.

I become aware of so much all at once – too much to be able to say. Words are restricting. The abstraction of movement alludes to my thoughts – my embodied thoughts. My bodily system of thinking and moving unfold and unravel into an emerging movement vocabulary with little meaning. The movement makes its point known once words are uttered. The utterance, performed by me, the dancing me, is considered before it's delivered in its relation to the thought, the dance, the rhythm and the spectator.

The utterance, my voicing of words chosen to articulate my thought, is said for another more than my movements alone are danced for them. That moment of speaking is when I find the words in my thoughts and the words are not too fast to capture with the voice. The words are rooted in language, but let us not forget their origin in the physicality of the vocal. Nuanced, resonant and ontological.

Speaking discloses something more with each iteration. A childhood narrative, an uncomfortable mood, a difficult relationship. Those narratives, moods and people are not disclosed through the voicing of words that represent them. It is me that is disclosed through a decision to speak of them. These are not truths of a fixed 'me' to be revealed and discovered by others, separate from others. These are voicings, sayings, becomings. Moments when I am 'speaking', in relation to others who are 'hearing'. This is part of an Event¹³ in which relating can become a dialectic interchange of resonance, individuation and ontological difference.

(Hay 2019: n.pag.)

This reflection captures my experience of being as I arrive in the moment.¹⁴ The sense of being is initially overwhelming, but clarity emerges as I start to move in response to what I can capture. As I speak, the being of the affective, abstract movement unfolds some more. However, my being is not signified by language, rather it is disclosed through the implied decision to speak and move and quality of the 'voice' in the dance. The awareness that I speak for an-other, more than I dance for an-other, is interesting and brings me back to Cavarero's argument that speech is relational as is Heidegger's thinking of being. Through this experience I start to connect speech and being with dance.

THE DANCE SPEAKS (OF BEING)

Cavarero's discussion of speech in *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* considers speech as a vocal ontology and is particularly

13. The word 'Event' is capitalized here as a translation of *Ereignis* in Heidegger's work, usefully described by Jussi Backman as 'Time, in Heidegger's sense, as the dynamic, singularizing contextualization of situations in terms of the intertwining dimensions that orient them, is what makes possible a derivative conception of time as a *sequence* of interrelated situations' (2015: 90: original emphasis).

14. Here the moment needs to be thought of not as a fixed moment in time, but in the Heideggerian sense of *augenblick*, as an experience of insight into one's situation that breaks through the temporality of everydayness (Polt 2021: 497).

useful for exploring how movement and speech work together as action in the practice of Speakingdance to give greater presence to the being of the dancer. Paul Kottman, the translator of *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, writes in his introduction:

Every utterance is moreover an action, which at once manifests one's embodied uniqueness to others in the context of a material, ontological relation here and now and which also initiates, or alters, a relation whose sense exceeds this sheer manifestation of one's corporeal uniqueness. In other words, action – especially vocal utterance – is the way in which the actor affirms and manifests his or her embodied uniqueness, and also inaugurates a new sense for that uniqueness by fostering a relationship whose character is more than solely ontological, but also political.

(Kottman cited in Cavarero 2005: xxi)

The emphasis here is placed on the action of the utterance rather than the language of the utterance. With this, it is possible to perceive speech as a manifestation of a person's uniqueness, through the relation of their matter and being to others. Kottman speaks of the actor in this statement, but let us turn this well-made point towards the dancer. The dancer's movement is also an action capable of manifesting her uniqueness to others, but the movement needs to be relational through matter and being. Speech achieves this with greater ease as it is a shared experience with which people can relate. A dancer's movement can make their matter and being appear quite alien in a contemporary dance context. They become muted people moving in unfamiliar ways, drifting further away from the shared experience they have with others.

The movement in Speakingdance practice differs because of its origin. The affective origin of the movement, accompanied by speech that comes from the same place, creates a Speakingdancer with the shared experience of voice and affections that enable the movement to become familiar and relational. In this way, Speakingdance practice gives a presence to the matter and being of the dancer as a relational person. Cavarero's comments on actions and language illustrate how this relationality creates *communication* rather than signification:

And speech in turn, is an act that falls together with nonverbal actions under the category of action. It is the act of speaking to one another, rather than language. It is the act with which some unique beings do not simply signify something, but rather communicate to one another who they are.

(2005: 197)

Speakingdance practice speaks to and communicates with others about who *they* are *and* who the dancer is. This moves the dancer away from perceptions of being a signifying body and towards the presence of the Speakingdancer's unique being itself.

I think some care needs to be taken here not to dismiss language as unhelpful. Whilst I support Cavarero's argument which acknowledges the *action* of speech, and use that to understand the movement of Speakingdance, *language* remains a fundamental part of relational communication in the practice. Who we are can be shared through what we choose to say and the words we select to express that. Similarly, the movement in dance has to be chosen

in terms of the 'vocabulary'¹⁵ available for us to perform. Language, like movement and speech, is the result of our decision to act. Language and movement give form to those actions, but when thought of as contributing to communication in this context, language does not have to allude to fixed significations. Language can make our being present through the action of the voice, as it can through the movement of the body generally. A re-conceptualization of language, rather than a dismissal of it, is required here. This does not mean that I am claiming language as corporeal, neither am I arguing that dance is a language, rather I am conceptualizing language as ontological in a way that is similar to Cavarero's consideration of the voice as ontological. Language, as well as the action of the voice, is part of speech and its communication of our uniqueness with others. In Speakingdance, language and the voice, through speech and with movement, create a relationality between the matter and being of the dancer and their audience members.

As I have already acknowledged, dance and speech are interpretative performances of the affective response to the question of who am I? in the practice of 'just be' improvisations. Therefore, the intention of the practice is to disclose being, not perform the self through storytelling. The practice draws on autobiography as it is experienced in the act of improvisation in its fragmentary state, bound up with other features of the 'internal-being-construct', not as a temporally linear narrative about my life. Consequently, what I say is not structured to tell a story and the way I move does not need to mimetically signify the words I am thinking of. Through the rhythm of dance and speech, performed in response to the 'internal-being-construct', the dance shares its voice with others through a camera or in practice sharing events.

The rhythm that facilitates the 'voice' of the dance, like speech and movement, originates in the 'internal-being-construct'. The Speakingdancer has an awareness, through her experience as an improviser, of what to say, how to move and the rhythmic relationship between those things to communicate the affective qualities of the 'internal-being-construct'. In this rhythm, abstract contemporary dance can become more accessible when framed by the familiarity of spoken language. There is also a familiarity in the apparent affection present in the dance, that extends what words can expose and that makes the movement accessible on its own terms. The Speakingdancer plays this rhythm, poetically, to deconstruct, emphasize or stress particular gestures or words and further communicate her affective being. It is in this way that the dance speaks.

THE POETIC RHYTHM OF DANCE AND SPEECH

Reflecting on the movement's rhythm with speech during the research process, I wrote:

What is the movement's rhythm with speech? I'm standing in the studio, eyes closed, searching for who I am. In an authentic engagement with the question of who I am, I find affections – memories, experience and sensory information. I translate them into a language of words and images and perform them through the actions of speech and movement. Speech and movement rarely begin together. When the movement comes first it's like listening to an unknown language, but it is obvious it is trying to communicate. The movement needs to be performed long enough for that to be established before it is joined by speech for it to be

15. I think about this 'vocabulary' in terms of Jennifer Roche's discussion of 'moving identities' that dancers develop, which can be recognized in the choices they make, movement they recollect and a dancing 'signature' that emerges:

Therefore, the moving identity is the result of a dancing agency, the composite of choices conscious and unconscious that have been made throughout a dancer's career. It is the site through which dancers establish as self-in-movement and realize the potentialities of a creative dancing signature

(2015: 137)

16. The phrasing is a reference to Cavarero when she writes about reciprocity in the communication of our uniqueness as, 'Like a kind of song "for more than one voice" whose melodic principle is the reciprocal distinction of the unmistakable timbre of each' (2005: 201). Here, I have used 'with more than one voice' to indicate the 'voices' that fill the moment of performance with speech, dance, affect and relationality.

clear that the speech is communicating the same thing. If speech comes too soon, the movement doesn't establish a voice and the power of words drowns out what the movement has to say. When the speech comes first movement can join it at any time and it's clear that the movement is expanding on the speech. The rhythm here is different. These rhythms are creatively structured as they are performed. Once the movement has established its own voice, speech can be performed at the same time without silencing all other communication. Speaking and dancing at the same time shifts the presence of the Speakingdancer. That presence is full of action, the affections that drive that action, breathlessness and vulnerability. This is difficult to sustain. The dancer is singing with 'more than one voice'.¹⁶ She is performing unity through the multiplicity of voices and the resonance between them that she finds in her own solo practice of Speakingdance. The ripples of that resonance extend further when the affections of others are there to relate to.

(Hay 2022: n.pag.)

On 2 November 2016, I recorded an improvisation in which I began with the intention to 'just be'. I remember an experience from when I was 15 years old coming forth, attuning to the sensory experiences I had then in the moment of improvisation. The 'internal-being-construct' was not vivid, but it formed with words that the me in that moment wanted to say on behalf of a younger me.

The action begins with walking to find the place in the space that I will begin. I am looking around, noticing my environment. My hands hold each other as my thinking starts to slow down, focus and settle in on the 'internal-being-construct' that is emerging. Extended, sudden movements in the arms and legs, repeat and develop until the sharp quality becomes softer. Extended limbs seem to fragment and slow down to periods of stillness with an awkward, almost foetal aesthetic. There is a sense that something is being 'said', but what? 'Get off', 'fuck off' (these words are delivered with my natural, everyday voice, accompanied by an offensive hand gesture). 'I was 15'. These words are not speaking on behalf of the movement, but there is a sense that the words and movement relate.

I walk to settle in and begin again with what I have learned about the 'internal-being-construct' that is forming. My breath is audible this time, increasing the experience that the internal is becoming external. Speech punctuates the movement in a way that allows the repetition of each phrase to become more articulate. In this rhythm, the dance speaks.

PRACTICE SHARING #1: MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

The movement in this sharing appears in different ways:

- Mimetic movement, which illustrates the speech.
- Affective movement, which responds to the 'internal-being-construct'.

An example of mimetic movement appears soon after the start of the sharing, when I am sitting on the floor of the performance space with the audience and talking about my mum. I talk about how my sister and I used to get in bed with her at night time when my dad was working nights, and I used to twirl a small piece of my mum's hair which had not been hardened by hairspray, around my fingers. At the same time, I take my own hair out of the ponytail it

is in and begin to twist it with my fingers in the same way. This gesture illustrates the story of the past with me in that moment, but the movement does not speak of my being. Affective movement is particularly apparent during the first recording I share and the live practice that follows, in which I respond to being with my eldest daughter and being with my husband. This is the movement that speaks of being most clearly. My descriptions of the live and recorded material have no trace of commonality in shape, dynamic or quality of movement, but there is a shared presence that comes from attunement with the 'internal-being-construct'.

I realize that I speak more when I am practising for a live audience than I do for the camera in my solo studio practice. On my own, I hear the words in my head and voicing them seems strange without anyone with me to receive them.¹⁷ Whilst I am aware that the recordings the camera captures are potentially viewable by others, I am really performing for my own research purposes and, therefore, talking to myself about myself. The movement is different though. I do not see the movement in my head. I see shapes and forms and experience levels of tension with particular emotions, and it is this that forms the impetus for my movement, what I move in response to. Unlike what I have to say, the movement is not known to me until it is put into action. Voicing more of the words in my thoughts for a live audience is part of the way I take care of their experience. Speech supports the accessibility of affective movement and being.

PRACTICE SHARING #2: SPEECH ANALYSIS

When practising Speakingdance, I try not to speak with a voice that responds to the demands of performance. That is, I do not attempt to employ a trained voice, a voice that tries to project to the back wall, that pronounces each word clearly, with a measured pace that gives the audience time to process what I am saying. Neither do I use a microphone.¹⁸ Instead, I speak with my everyday voice, as my audience members do, even though that is not the voice that is at home in performance. I speak with an ordinary public voice, usually spoken and heard with indifference, a voice seemingly out of place in performative events.

Heidegger writes about everydayness in *Being and Time*, describing it through our relationship with *Das Man*, translated by Stambaugh as 'the they'¹⁹:

We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. But we also withdraw from the 'great mass' the way *they* withdraw, we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.

(2010: 123; original emphasis)

Everydayness is a way of being, in common with others, 'the they'. It is a public way of being that is subsumed into the public-facing world. It is everyday life, social norms and cultural expectations. Following the commentary above, Heidegger goes on to state (but does not explain) that: 'Publicness obscures everything, and then claims that what has been thus covered over is what is familiar and accessible to everybody' (2010: 124). In the context of a

17. A similar point is made by Derrida ([1967] 2011) in his discussion of interior monologues and by Cavarero ([1997] 2000) with regards to the narratable self.
18. The practice is for the benefit of the dancer and the audience, but practice sharings are purposely created as more intimate events, meaning that I can be heard without a microphone. Hearing the dancer's voice from a speaker rather than as we hear it every day is not the most effective use of the voice in this practice as I go on to discuss.
19. Other translations of *Das Man* include 'the everyone', 'the anyone', 'the nobody'. Heidegger uses *Man* as an impersonal pronoun to refer to societal ways of thinking and acting, culturally based values. Terms such as 'everydayness', 'averageness', 'publicness' and 'inauthenticity' are bound up in Heidegger's discussions of *Das Man*.

20. In terms of being a mother, teacher, wife, dancer – for example – the ‘labels’ with which we might identify.

Speakingdance sharing there is a paradox here. The everyday voice is the voice of ‘the they’ that obscures what is familiar and accessible, yet it is also relational despite not belonging in a performance setting.

A Speakingdance sharing features the everyday voice, but in a more abstract form as it is deconstructed and integrated into a poetic rhythm with movement. Therefore, the environment of a Speakingdance sharing is clearly not of the everyday. Nevertheless, the attuned audience member can relate to the Speakingdancer through the sound of their voice and perceive the authentic, affective narration that the practice exposes through the rhythm of speech and movement. Speech fragments create a frame for hearing ‘the voice’ *in* the movement, connecting voice and movement in the same affective narration. The exposure of affect in the movement is reminiscent of Heidegger’s writing about ‘the they’, as a disguise of everydayness that can be fractured to reveal ‘authentic being’:

In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially ‘given’ to ‘myself’. Initially, Dasein is the they and for the most part it remains so. If Dasein explicitly discovers the world and brings it near, if it discloses its authentic being to itself, this discovering of ‘world’ and disclosing of Dasein always comes about by clearing away coverings and obscurities, by breaking up the disguises with which Dasein cuts itself off from itself.

(2010: 125)

Heidegger’s view is that, for most of the time, we are ‘the they’. We go about our everyday lives without giving much thought to its meaning and purpose, or who we are. We just get on with things. Speakingdance asks the dancer to attune to the question of who they are, revealed as an ‘internal-being-construct’ in the moment of improvisation and performance, to disclose their world and authentic being. The rhythm of speech and movement performed through Speakingdance exposes an affective sense of authentic being and breaks up the everyday disguise with which we live as ‘the they’. In this way, the practice of Speakingdance enables the dancer to perform who they are, rather than tell a story of what they are.²⁰

PRACTICE SHARING #3: DEVELOPING THE VOICE OF DANCE

There was a much more conscious use of mimetic and affective movement material in this sharing. All of the movement material in this sharing speaks when it is performed in a rhythm with my voice, but the mimetic movement is more superficial in what it brings forth. This was appropriately used to speak of the banality of work routines, but affective material was needed to disclose deeply rooted experiences of my relationship with my husband, for example. I introduced the use of ‘hook’ gestures in this sharing too, which are created by repeating particular words or phrases with specific movement gestures. This structural feature supports the accessibility of the practice for the audience. Once ‘hook’ gestures are established, they can be repeated without the use of the voice and maintain the clarity of what they are referring to. At the end of the sharing, I revisit dance material from earlier on in the work and it ‘speaks’ without my voice because it is reminiscent of the affective experiences and life-stories already disclosed.



Figure 1: Photograph from practice sharing #3. Courtesy of David Gazarov.

SPEAKINGDANCE: TO CONCLUDE

The Speakingdancer interprets the 'internal-being-construct' through a poetic rhythm of affective movement and everyday speech, carefully crafted to enable the dance to speak of the dancer's being. The everyday speech is not only relatable and accessible but also uncanny in the sense that it is unfamiliar and not at home in performance. Therefore, the use of everyday speech, rather than a trained, performative voice, can facilitate a connection between the dancer and individual audience members. This connection, along with the sense of the uncanny created by everyday speech in performance, challenges body-object perceptions of the Speakingdancer that might otherwise come into view. In a poetic rhythm with otherwise abstract contemporary dance, this everyday speech provides a frame with which to hear and understand the affective voice performed through the movement.

The movement communicates more of the Speakingdancer's 'internal-being-construct' than words alone are able to, because of the way that dance, framed by speech, can allude to meaning that is more expansive and inclusive than words. In Speakingdance practices, affective movement communicates with audience members through a system of resonance based on Cavarero's (2005) considerations of speech that communicates uniqueness. This affective resonance is how dance speaks of being in Speakingdance. Autobiographical stories can emerge from this practice, but the intention of Speakingdance is to communicate a sense of being rather than storytelling. The focus is on the dancer's performance of who they are, rather than the roles or labels they undertake and assume in life. Affective movement, in a rhythm with everyday speech, performs something of who the dancer is through the tension, energy, shape and quality, triggered by the 'internal-being-construct'. The rhythmic relationship with speech means that dance and speech collaborate to communicate the dancer's sense of being, so affective movement does not serve as a mimetic illustration of what the dancer has to say.

Cavarero's ([1997] 2000) notion of the narratable self argues that the sense of being we create for ourselves is relational, unfolding through spoken

communication *with* others. This challenges the understanding of the voice communicating *between* people articulated in voice studies. In the context of Speakingdance, Cavarero's notion provides a way for the dancer to share their sense of being and to be 'seen' in light of that, beyond the perception of their body as an object. This understanding of being as relational also demands that the performance of being and, therefore, the performance of Speakingdance, requires 'a necessary other' ([1997] 2000: 84).

In the practice of Speakingdance, affective movement is conceived as speaking of the dancer's sense of being, through a reconceptualization of the physicality and ontology of the voice. The relationality experienced between the dancer and individual audience members is facilitated by the poetic rhythm of movement and speech performed by the dancer, in which the everyday voice makes otherwise abstract dance accessible. In the performance of practice sharings, beings 'see' one another.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

De Montfort University research ethics committee approved the research (tracking number: 3 16/17). All participants gave written consent to participate in the study and publish the results.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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Spiritual echoes in motion: Integrating voice and movement in Chinese poetry and Kunqu dance as an eco-somatic practice

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, exploring the profound spiritual undercurrents within Chinese artistic expression, specifically through the lens of traditional poetry and Kunqu dance. At the core of this investigation is the potential of Kunqu's embodied practice, which weaves together poetic voice and dance movement, to transcend mere aesthetic pursuits and become a conduit for spiritual experience, fostering self-awareness and a deeper connection with nature. Employing an interdisciplinary framework that combines theoretical insights with practical experience, this research examines the symbiotic relationship between voice and movement within Kunqu Opera. Through critical analysis and eco-somatic practice, it addresses pivotal questions concerning the connection between poetry and Kunqu dance, the significance of poetic voice and the potential for a renewed practice that integrates poetic voice and Kunqu dance to facilitate a spiritual journey rooted in historical, philosophical and aesthetic foundations. The findings suggest that reimagining Kunqu through an eco-somatic lens not only rejuvenates these traditional arts but also

KEYWORDS

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voice and movement
integration
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opera
Chinese poetic
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Chinese cultural
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dance

1. Kunqu traces its origins back to the local melodies of Kunshan, Suzhou, in the fourteenth century. This art form experienced significant evolution, rising to national prominence, thanks to the pioneering contributions of literati artists Wei Liangfu (魏良辅, 1489–1566) and Liang Chenyu (梁辰鱼, c.1521–94). Their work in refining the opera's tunes, tones, musical instruments, performance techniques and the aesthetic elements of costumes and settings propelled Kunqu to new heights. Influenced by the aesthetic sensibilities of the era's elite intellectuals, Kunqu became a deeply ingrained 'social obsession' (Yu 2004: 4).

underscores their relevance in addressing contemporary spiritual and ecological challenges across cultural boundaries. This study aims to expand the understanding of cultural practices as vehicles for spiritual exploration, advocating for a more nuanced appreciation of traditional arts within the modern spiritual landscape.

INTRODUCTION

In the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, where the echoes of the past resonate with the consciousness of the present, there lies a profound exploration of spirituality. Within the rich tapestry of Chinese artistic expression, traditional poetry and ancient dances, as recorded in historical texts, are not merely artistic pursuits; they are significant vehicles for spiritual exploration and the embodiment of the natural world. This article embarks on a comprehensive journey into the symbiotic relationship between poetic voice and dance movement, examining their integration within the intertwined realms of Chinese poetry and Kunqu Opera.

Central to this inquiry is the examination of whether Kunqu dance, as a conventionalized practice, can be transformed into a spiritual experience enriched with self-awareness and deeper connectivity to the natural world. This article explores the potential of Kunqu dance to evolve beyond its traditional form, offering a renewed practice and a pathway for spiritual enrichment.

Drawing from the realms of philosophy, poetics, dance practice and history, ecology and somatics, the exploration aims to illuminate these traditional arts through an eco-somatic lens. The investigation unfolds through a series of pivotal questions:

- What underlies the connection between poetry, voice and Kunqu dance?
- What makes the poetic voice significant?
- How are movement and vocal sound integrated in Kunqu?
- What potential does the poetic voice-dance form have to evolve into a spiritual journey?
- On what historical, philosophical and aesthetic bedrock is it grounded?
- What justifies the integration of ecological and somatic perspectives in rejuvenating this art form?
- How does my own eco-somatic practice and experience contribute to understanding the potential for transformation?

This article illuminates the spiritual 'in-between' that these disciplines traverse, thus enhancing our comprehension of the significant role occupied by traditional arts in the contemporary spiritual landscape.

ROOTED IN THE HEART-MIND: KUNQU DANCE AND POETIC VOICE

Kunqu (昆曲), also known as Kunqu Opera or Kunju (昆剧),¹ stands as a seminal form of traditional Chinese opera that flourished from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Recognized as one of the oldest surviving forms of Chinese opera, Kunqu is often hailed as 'the ancestor of one hundred types of Chinese opera' (Hu 2012: 102). This accolade is not solely due to its antiquity but also to its substantial influence on the evolution of Chinese theatrical arts. Theatre scholar Yu Qiuyu describes Kunqu as 'the supreme paradigm of traditional Chinese dramaturgy' (Yu 2004: 4), noting its creation by the literati-erudite scholars and intellectuals of the era, renowned for their mastery in

composing poetry. This poetic prowess infused Kunqu with a distinct literary quality, enriching its narrative and lyrical depth.²

Central to Kunqu is the seamless integration of singing and dancing, underscored by the philosophy that ‘there is no sound that is not singing, and no move that is not dancing’ (Qi 2005: 101). By asserting that all sounds within a performance qualify as singing and all movements as dancing,³ this philosophy elevates each element to an artistic expression, inherently laden with meaning. Such careful crafting ensures that every gesture and sound is not merely a display of technical skill but a deliberate embodiment of the cultural and spiritual ethos that Kunqu seeks to transmit.

Kunqu traces its origins to the ancient ‘Yue (乐yue)’ system, a sophisticated amalgamation of poetry, song and dance that dates back to the eleventh century BCE.⁴

This tradition underscores the inseparable nature of these artistic elements, each deeply rooted in the ‘heart-mind (Xin, 心),’⁵ as detailed in the ancient text *Yueji* (乐记):

Poetry is the expression of *one’s heartfelt thoughts* (zhi, 志), song is the chanting of the poetic sounds, and dance is the manifested actions; all three have their roots in the heart-mind (Xin, 心) before the musical instruments follow.⁷

(Zheng 2021: 498, translation added)

This foundational text not only articulates how poetry serves as the expression of heartfelt thoughts, but also articulates how song vocalizes these sentiments, and dance physically manifests them, illustrating the profound philosophical underpinnings of this integrated art form. The Yue system essentially encapsulates the holistic nature of artistic expression in traditional Chinese culture, where the fusion of poetic, musical and dance elements coalesces into a single cohesive performance, deeply ingrained in the spiritual and emotional fabric.

The singing style of Kunqu has its roots deeply embedded in the Chinese poetic tradition.⁸ The majority of lyrics and lines in Kunqu are, in essence, poems, adhering to the venerable tradition of ‘expressing heartfelt thoughts’ (Zheng 2021: 498) articulated in *Yueji*.

The integration of poetry into performance is why Kunqu Opera is often described as a form of ‘theatrical poetry’ and ‘theatre of mind-expression’ (Yu 2004: 8).⁹ The impact of poetry on Kunqu performance extends significantly into the realm of mind expression.

Voice plays a pivotal role in the expression of heartfelt thoughts in poetry and, consequently, within the Kunqu tradition. Chinese poetry scholar Xu Jianshun observes that vocal delivery in poetry – referred to as ‘chanting and reciting (Yinsong 吟诵)’ (2011b: 75) – is essential not only for aesthetic delivery¹⁰ but also for conveying the emotional content of the text deeply. Xu (2011a: 60–65) highlights that the modulation of voice, including its tone, pitch and rhythm, is closely aligned with poetic structures to enhance the emotional resonance of the words. By vocalizing poetry, performers can express a richer tapestry of emotional nuances, making the experience more immersive and emotionally impactful for the audience, thereby reinforcing the poem’s intended effect and deepening the connection between the performer and the listener.

The performance of *Flee by Night* (Yeben 夜奔)¹¹ exemplifies the intricate interplay between poetic voice and physical expression in Kunqu. This

2. These individuals’ literary and artistic innovations established an aesthetic standard that echoes through subsequent opera forms and profoundly influenced various aspects of Chinese operatic traditions (Yu 2004: 102).

3. Every movement is viewed by practitioners as dance, inherently embodying the essence of dance (Hu 2012: 101). This principle has been absorbed and applied by the later opera forms such as Beijing Opera and Sichuan Opera (Niu et al. 1996: 106–55).

4. The works of Yue in the *Classic of Poetry* (诗经) were composed after King Wu of the Zhou dynasty defeated the Shang (which took place in 1066 BCE). The well-known ‘Dawu (大武)’ was a grand Yue which incorporated dance, music and poetry together in depicting King Wu’s expedition to overthrow the Shang dynasty (Yin 2018: 170–81).

5. David E. Cooper (2003: 63) in his work *World Philosophies* points out that the Chinese word *Xin* (心), commonly translated as ‘mind’, also embodies aspects of ‘heart’. He proposes that ‘heart-mind’ or ‘thinking heart’ might be more fitting translations. This highlights the integrated approach in Chinese thought that combines what are often viewed as separate in western tradition: the cognitive functions of the mind and the emotional qualities of the heart.

6. *Yueji*, also known as *Records of Music*, was penned during the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE) and constitutes the

nineteenth chapter of *Liji* (礼记, *Book of Rites*). *Yueji* encapsulates the aesthetic philosophy underpinning Yue since the pre-Qin era (c. 2100–221 BCE).

7. The original text: ‘诗言其志也，歌咏其声也，舞动其容也，三者本于心，然后乐器从之’.
8. Chinese poetry has its origins in the *Shijing* (诗经, *Classic of Poetry*) and the *Chu Ci* (楚辞, *Verses of Chu*) and forms a long literary tradition represented by Tang poetry, Song Ci poetry and Yuanqu poetry (You 2005: 10). This lineage is formally recognized as ‘a mode of intensified, rhythmic speech or song’ (Chang and Owen 2010: 17). Scholar Xie Yufeng (2021: 382–83) highlights that the scripts of Kunqu, known as ‘Chuanqi (传奇, lit. legend)’, are profoundly influenced by the principles of Chinese poetry. Thus, the songs in Kunqu represent a seamless continuation of this poetic legacy (Xie 2021: 387).
9. Yu Qiuyu (2004: 8) notes that a fundamental aesthetic principle in Kunqu’s performance paradigm is the extensive poeticization of its various elements. As a result, the inherent poetic nature of Kunqu’s literary texts extends into its music, singing and dance movements. This integration of poetry enhances these components, weaving them together into a cohesive and expressive ensemble.
10. This vocalization taps into the intrinsic rhythms and sounds of the language, establishing ‘chanting and reciting’ (Xu 2013: 160–67) as both a crucial pedagogical method

piece, noted for its complexity, requires performers to align their vocal delivery precisely with choreographed movements, showcasing Kunqu’s essential quality of conveying narrative and emotion simultaneously.

The protagonist, Lin Chong,¹² opens with a monologue laden with metaphor and rich emotional undertones, setting the stage for a performance where voice and movement are deeply intertwined, each enhancing the understanding and impact of the other.

This can be found at (Hou 1975):
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eugmj30n1mue-gJ8dKekEU0c5cFpFv9z/view?usp=drive_. Accessed 22 April 2024.

The poem recited by Lin Chong captures his tumultuous emotions as he embarks on a nocturnal flight, seeking refuge from persecution. Below is the poem, presented with Pinyin annotations¹³ for each character to aid in pronunciation, followed by its English translation.

yù	sòng	dēng	gāo	qiān	lǐ	mù
欲	送	登	高	千	里	目，
chóu	yún	dī	suǒ	héng	yáng	lù
愁	云	低	锁	衡	阳	路。
yú	shū	bú	zhì	yàn	wú	píng
鱼	书	不	至	雁	无	凭，
jīn	fān	yù	zuò	bēi	qiū	fù
今	番	欲	作	悲	秋	赋。
huí	shǒu	xī	shān	rì	yòu	xié
回	首	西	山	日	又	斜，
tiān	yá	gū	kè	zhēn	nán	dù
天	涯	孤	客	真	难	渡。
zhàng	fū	yǒu	lèi	bú	qīng	tán
丈	夫	有	泪	不	轻	弹，
zhī	yīn	wèi	dào	shāng	xīn	chù
只	因	未	到	伤	心	处

Ascending height, seeking a distant sight,
 Yet on Hengyang road, gloomy clouds block the light.
 No letters found their way to ease the mind,
 Coursing through autumn, words my heart can’t find.
 Turning back to the western hills, seeking the sun’s last light,
 Wandering alone, through tough paths by night.
 They say a strong man seldom lets his tears depart,
 Yet it’s because his deepest sorrows dwell in his heart.

(Chen et al. 2011: 889, translation added)

The sound of Chinese poetry adheres to a structured set of rules, among which the patterns of rhyme¹⁴ and tone¹⁵ are especially the key (Wang 2019: 5). Through the analysis of the tone pattern¹⁶ of *Flee by Night* provided below, we can discern the organizing principle that governs the flow and variation of rhythm, which contributes to the melodic cadences of the poetry (– represents a Level [平 píng] tone, which is typically sustained at a lower pitch with a longer duration; + represents an Oblique [仄 zè] tone, pronounced at a higher pitch and has a shorter duration; R represents the rhyme).

1.	+	+	-	-	-	+	+R
2.	-	-	-	+	-	-	+R
3.	-	-	+	+	+	-	-
4.	-	-	+	+	-	-	+R
5.	-	+	-	-	+	+	-
6.	-	-	-	+	-	-	+R
7.	+	-	+	+	+	-	-
8.	+	-	+	+	-	-	+R

With these aspects in mind, I categorize the interplay between movement and voice in *Fleeing by Night* into three distinct types,¹⁷ each enhancing the expression of heartfelt thoughts and emotions.

In *Flee by Night*, three distinct voice-movement coordination strategies, which I refer to as Propelling, Engaging and Emphasizing, enhance narrative and emotional expression. (1) The *Propelling* type sees spoken phrases like ‘欲送 (yù sòng)’, meaning ‘seeking (to project a distant sight)’, drive dance actions that symbolize spiritual aspiration, such as the performer moving backwards to signify reaching for expansive views. (2) The *Engaging* type is demonstrated when movements resonate with the emotional content of the sound, like using hand gestures to represent swirling emotions while reciting ‘今番欲作 (jīn fān yù zuò, literally now I wish to express [my feelings through words])’. (3) The *Emphasizing* type captures tonal dynamics and accentuates rhymes, intensifying movements

for appreciating Chinese poetry and a fundamental technique in poetic composition.

11. An excerpt from the Kunqu play *Baojianji* (宝剑记, *Tale of the Rare Sword*). Authored by Li Kaixian (李开先, 1502–68 CE), a distinguished literary scholar and playwright of the Ming dynasty, the story of this work is based on the celebrated Ming dynasty novel *Shuihuizhuan* (水浒传, *Water Margin*).
12. The protagonist Lin Chong is a martial arts instructor for the Imperial Guards. He has been wrongfully ensnared by the Grand Marshal Gao Qiu, who not only concocted a treacherous plot resulting in Lin's exile but also orchestrated attempts on his life.

Table 1: Voice/Movement nexus in the *Fleeing by Night* performance (line 1).¹⁸

Types of nexus	Words with meaning	Dance action*	Voice rhythm	Movement quality**	Emotions and thoughts
Propelling	欲送 yù sòng Seeking	Stillness, Turn, Travel	++	Flexible, Flow, Strong, Sudden	Hoping to gain spiritual relief by ascending the heights
Propelling	登高 dēng gāo Ascending height	Stillness, Transfer of weight	--	Direct, Light, Sudden	
Engaging	千里 qiān lǐ Distant sight	Transfer of weight, Close-Open (right arm and left leg in circle), Lean	-+	Sudden, Strong, Flexible	Expressing the ideals and aspirations of serving the country
Emphasizing	目 mù Gaze	Stillness, Isolation (head) Gesture (arms and legs)	+R	Bound, Direct, Sudden	

Note: *The term ‘action’ here is derived from choreological studies and refers to ‘dancing structures’, as defined by Preston-Dunlop (2013: 27), which categorize various types of movements. According to this framework, there are eleven units of action: stillness, travel, jump, turn, twist, transfer of weight, isolation, close, open, fall and lean (Preston-Dunlop 2013: 28).

** Laban Effort characterizes the dynamic quality of motion using four key descriptors (Preston-Dunlop 1998: 115), each with associated extreme values: Space (ranging from direct to indirect), Time (from sustained to sudden), Weight (from light to strong) and Flow (from bound to free).

13. In Kunqu performance, some characters are traditionally pronounced differently from the Mandarin pronunciation represented by Pinyin.
14. The foundational role of rhyme in creating harmony and musicality in Chinese poetry was emphasized by Liu Xie (刘勰, 465–520 CE), a scholar of the southern dynasties. In his treatise on literary theory, he distinguished the dynamics of sound by stating, “[t]he subordination among disparate sounds is termed ‘he (和, harmony)’”, while the response among similar sounds is referred to as “yun (韵, rhyme)” (The original text: ‘异音相从谓之和, 同声相应谓之韵’; Zhou 2015: 548, translation added). Through this mechanism, rhyming words not only resonate with each other but also interweave to craft a cohesive sense of musicality, underscoring the aesthetic essence of the poetry.
15. From the Tang dynasty onwards, the metrical structuring of Regulated Verse (律诗, lǜ shī, five- or seven-syllabic) in traditional Chinese poetry has emphasized the strategic arrangement of tones (Liu 2022: 6) to enhance both rhythmic integrity and aesthetic appeal. Historical Chinese phonology identifies these as four fundamental tones: Level (平 píng), Rising (上 shàng), Departing (去 qù) and Entering (入 rù) (Baxter 1992: 33). The Level tone, characterized by a steady pitch, contrasts with the other three, collectively known as Oblique (仄 zè) tones, which indicate variations in pitch (Wang 2019: 6).

at key points where words rhyme to reflect the Oblique tone’s portrayal of desolation and anger, thereby deepening the overall emotional impact.

The analysis is presented in Table 1, providing a concise overview. Due to space limitations, I will focus solely on the first lines, which exemplify all three types of the voice-movement nexus.

The analysis above shows an intricate integration of voice and movement, each element intricately enhancing the other. At the core of this symbiotic relationship is the poetic experience, deeply rooted in the spiritual landscape of human existence. The voice/movement nexus embodies the Yue philosophy, where the external performance manifests the performer’s inner emotional and spiritual state. This underscores the tradition’s ability to connect the physical with the metaphysical, and the expressed with the unexpressed, blending emotional and spiritual elements. Through such performances, Kunqu transcends mere artistic expression to explore and convey the depths of human emotion and spirituality, resonating with audiences across time and space.

TRANSFORMATION TO SPIRITUALITY AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

If we are to explore the spiritual nature behind the voice-dance form in Kunqu, then a philosophical question has to be asked: What is the form for? From an external viewpoint, it is clear that the voice’s nuanced tonalities, pitch and rhythm, harmonized with the dynamic qualities of movement, become a potent tool for expressing a wide range of emotions, from joy and love to sorrow and despair. Additionally, the importance of rhythm and rhyme in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of poetry and fostering empathetic connections with the audience is well acknowledged in various poetic traditions.

However, does this perspective fully capture the essence of artistic expression? Is it the ultimate goal of art to convey, to communicate, to inspire resonance and gain external validation?

Voice as connection of body and spirit

In answering these questions, we must first consider how, in classical Chinese culture, the voice serves as a connection between the body and mind. This question is explored within the framework of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which underscores the intrinsic linkage between emotional well-being and physical health. TCM elucidates how each emotion is linked to specific internal organs via their respective energy channels or meridians. The theory suggests that imbalances or blockages in these pathways can lead to emotional disturbances and organ-related issues. Remarkably, voice acts as a vital indicator of these internal and less visible conditions. This concept is encapsulated in the *Huangdi Neijing*¹⁹ (Li and Liu 2005: 62–68), which, under the Five Agents’ conceptual scheme, outlines ‘Five Voices’ – sighing, laughing, singing, crying and groaning – as representative of the Five Emotions, each corresponding to the Five Organs: liver, heart, spleen, lungs and kidneys, respectively (as illustrated in Table 2). Through examining the voice, TCM practitioners gain insights into an individual’s emotional and physical states, as variations in vocal expressions can signal anomalies in organ function, underscoring a holistic approach to healing that integrates care for both mind and body.

The inherent power of voice in Chinese poetry often acts as a therapeutic agent for emotional healing. This is vividly demonstrated in *Flee by Night*, where a consistent rhyme pattern – appearing at the end of the first, second,

Table 2: Comparison table of the 'Five Voices' and other elements.

Five agents	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Five organs	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
Five emotions	Anger	Joy	Thought	Sadness	Fear
Five voices	Sighing	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning

fourth, sixth and eighth lines in accordance with the seven-syllabic-regulated verse – reflects the TCM principle that vocal expressions mirror internal states. Transcribed as 'u' in Pinyin and vocalized as/u:/, the rhyme acts as an onomatopoeia for weeping and sighing, resonating with the protagonist's deep feelings of despair, sorrow and isolation. Furthermore, the choice of Oblique tone in this rhyme subtly yet effectively conveys the protagonist's anger.

From the TCM perspective, this rhyming sound symbolizes sorrow and weeping, associated with the Metal element, which efficiently counteracts the protagonist's emotion of indignation linked to the Wood element. Therefore, even if the poet did not deliberately apply this healing principle, the lyrical quality of the poetic voice naturally incorporates elements of emotional purification and balance.

The therapeutic effects of the human voice are also explored by sound scholar and practitioner James D'Angelo (2005: 18–19). In his work he posits that its subtle yet powerful vibrations serve as an ideal force for resonance. D'Angelo argues that these vibrations play a crucial role in stimulating, purifying and harmonizing energies, thus facilitating the holistic integration of body, mind and spirit. He emphasizes that the 'highest form of healing vibrations using the voice lies in toning and chanting' (D'Angelo 2005: 18). Such practices, distinguished by their intensely focused and repetitive sound patterns, create the optimal conditions and duration for the vibrations to fulfil their healing purpose. This effectiveness underpins the reason many religions incorporate mantra-chanting into their daily meditation practices.

In the analysis of Chinese poetry, it is evident that the sounds of poetry-chanting, with its repetition in rhyming and tonal patterns, largely embody the characteristics identified by D'Angelo as the 'highest form of healing vibration'. Thus, the poetic voice can be viewed not only as a rhythmic or narrative layer within dance but also as acting as a conduit to the spiritual realm in harmony with the dance itself.

Art form as spiritual transformation

Regarding the spiritual purpose of art forms, insights from the artistic journey of John Cage (Larson 2012: 150–218), a revolutionary in modern sound and performance art, could provide a meaningful perspective. Cage questioned the traditional view that art primarily serves communication, observing that his compositions intended to evoke sadness often elicited laughter instead. This disparity led him to reconsider the purpose of his work.²⁰ His contemplation led him to a pivotal moment of clarity, provided by Gita Sarabhai, an Indian musician, who suggested that the purpose of music is 'to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences' (Larson 2012: 150). He was similarly inspired by philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, finding that 'the responsibility of the artist is to imitate nature in her manner of operation' (Larson 2012: 157). This early encounter with Indian art and philosophy has

16. In *Flee by Night*, the tonal variation largely adheres to the metrical standards of the seven-syllabic regulated verse. There are deviations from the norms of the seven-syllabic regulated verse starting with an Oblique tone (shown as follows), occurring in the fourth and eighth lines (with the second, fourth and sixth syllables opposite). The tone pattern of the seven-syllabic regulated verse is generally fixed; some flexibility is permitted for syllables in less critical positions (the first, third and fifth syllables of a seven-syllabic line). However, the tones at crucial positions (the second, fourth and sixth syllables) usually remain fixed.

```

++ - - + + -R
- - + + - - R
- - + + - - +
++ - - + + -R
++ - - - - +
- - + + - - R
- - + + - - +
++ - - + + -R

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17. Given the representative nature of this piece within the Kunqu repertoire, these strategies are likely applicable to other classical pieces as well.
18. To investigate the nuanced relationship between the poetic voice and movement in Kunqu, it is worthwhile to consider several key dimensions that categorize this form: (1) the semantic content of the poem's words; (2) the choreographed dance actions and

their arrangement in time relative to the words; (3) the rhythmic texture of the voice; (4) the quality of the movement and (5) the emotional and spiritual experiences conveyed.

19. *Huangdi Neijing* (黄帝内经, *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*) is an ancient Chinese medical text that has been treated as the fundamental doctrinal source for Chinese medicine for more than two millennia until today.
20. He also noted the diversity in composers' styles, likening it to a Tower of Babel where mutual understanding was unachievable. This prompted him to either redefine his artistic goals or abandon his endeavours entirely (Larson 2012: 147).
21. The original text: '欲令诗语妙, 无厌空且静。静故了群动, 空故纳万境'.
22. The original text: '至人用心若镜, 不将不迎, 应而不藏, 故能胜物而不伤'; translated by Feng Youlan (2012: 99).
23. The original text: '君子可以寓意于物, 而不可以留意于物'.
24. The original text: '譬之烟云之过眼, 百鸟之感耳'.
25. The original text: '岂不欣然接之, 然去而不复念也'.

kindled an interest in integrating spiritual concepts into his work. This exploration was deepened and expanded as he delved into Buddhism and Taoism, which further informed his approach to music, composition and the role of silence and chance in art.

Across time and culture, John Cage might have found a kindred spirit in Su Shi (苏轼, 1037–101 CE), an eleventh-century Chinese literati artist masterful in poetry, calligraphy and painting, who discussed the spiritual experience of composing a poem in his verses (Su 1982: 906, translation added):

Seek wonder in your verse,
Shun not the void, nor the tranquil universe.
In stillness lies the key, to grasp the cosmic move,
In emptiness, a path, to embrace each realm's expanse.²¹

As a venerated scholar, Su Shi was deeply acquainted with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, incorporating these philosophical tenets into his life and creative endeavours. This integration served as the cornerstone of his artistic expression. These lines from his poem highlight the significance of 'stillness' and 'emptiness' as essential mental states in the poetic process. While 'stillness' and 'emptiness' might appear straightforward and accessible at first glance, they are underpinned by a profound philosophical foundation, encapsulating core aspects of Buddhist and Taoist ideology. These concepts, though articulated differently in each philosophy, share a fundamental similarity in their understanding, reflecting a deep convergence of thought between Buddhism and Taoism on the nature of reality and the mind.

First, let us examine the notion of 'stillness', a state that confronts the tumult and intricate emotions fuelled by human desires. Buddhism and Taoism both provide deep insights into navigating this emotional maelstrom to foster spiritual growth. In Buddhism, Chan meditation is a key method for acknowledging and neutrally observing the transient, deceptive thoughts. The objective is to return these thoughts into silence, thus pacifying the restless mind – an essential step towards wisdom. Taoism, particularly through Zhuangzi's teachings – a philosopher greatly esteemed by John Cage (Larson 2012: 203) – draws a parallel between a serene mind and a mirror, highlighting the value of preserving mental clarity and reflectivity (Feng 2012: 99, official translation):

The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It does not move with things, nor does it anticipate them. It responds to things, but it does not retain them. Therefore, he is able to deal successfully with things, but he is not affected by them.²²

Su Shi delves into Zhuangzi's philosophy in his essay on inner cultivation, asserting that 'a gentleman may invest passion in things, but his mind never remains trapped by them'²³ (1986: 356, translation added). He advocates for perceiving valued objects 'as if they were mists and clouds passing before the eyes, or the chirping of birds briefly heard by the ears'²⁴ (Su 1986: 357, translation added). He further advises, 'Why not welcome them with joy? When these things disappear, one should not dwell on their absence'²⁵ (Su 1986: 357, translation added). This approach echoes Zhuangzi's teachings, offering a vivid illustration of embracing detachment and the ephemeral nature of worldly attachments.

What, then, does 'emptiness' signify? In Buddhism, 'emptiness' represents wisdom, serving as the foundation for 'stillness'. It encompasses the understanding that all phenomena are conditioned and interconnected, existing solely through their interdependent relationships – a concept known as 'Dependent Origination' (Lu 2021: 138–39). Therefore, phenomena are 'empty' of an independent, self-existing nature. This realization enables one to pierce the illusions of permanence and selfhood, thereby diminishing attachment and aversion, which are fundamental sources of suffering (Zhang 2015: 27).

In Taoism, 'emptiness' is articulated through the term 'Wu (无)', translating to 'nothingness'. 'Wu' symbolizes the undifferentiated whole out of which all existence springs, viewed as a primordial state of potential and the source of all existence (Ye 1985: 24). This notion is intimately linked to the Tao,²⁶ the ultimate principle underlying and unifying the universe (Dong 2020). All things are considered interconnected with the Tao and, by acknowledging and reverting to this state of nothingness, one can discern the intrinsic unity of the universe (Ye 1985: 25).

Thus, 'emptiness' and 'nothingness' should not be construed as a void but as an acceptance of infinite possibilities. Similarly, 'stillness' signifies not stagnation but an acute awareness of the dynamics governing all existence. A mind steeped in the depths of stillness and emptiness can grasp the universe's wisdom, aligning with the natural flow of all things. Such a state liberates one from the turmoil spurred by erratic emotions and the confines of judgemental thoughts, unlocking the boundless potential of the mind.

Cage introduced chance and indeterminacy to composition, seeing these methods as aligned with nature's own processes. These approaches allowed him 'to release the tight fist of ego' (Larson 2012: 198) and 'to dissociate his music from his inner turmoil' (Larson 2012: 198). By inviting all sounds, silence included, without distinction, his work mirrors a deep philosophical appreciation of stillness and emptiness.

Cage's remark, 'instead of self-expression, I'm involved in self-alteration' (Larson 2012: 203), invites us to view art through a transformative lens. His shift away from focusing on communication towards embracing the spiritual power of art illustrates that genuine connections with the audience stem not from explicit emotional expression but from deepening and enriching the internal spiritual experience.

Building on this perspective, when revisiting the fusion of poetic voice and dance movement in Kunqu, I am driven to explore its potential beyond mere performance. Is it feasible to regard the voice-dance form not just as a means for external acknowledgement but also as an introspective medium that offers insights into our emotional landscape? Could this highly stylized form serve as a holistic practice that unifies body, mind, spirit and nature, rather than merely being a performative endeavour designed to communicate or provide spectacle?

ECOLOGICAL WISDOM IN CHINESE POETRY AND DANCE

To answer those questions we must examine the poetic tradition which gave birth to the sounds and movements of Kunqu. This involves examining how the Chinese poetical world-view assesses the relationship between nature and humans, essentially from an ecological standpoint. Though ancient texts do not explicitly use the term 'ecological', Chinese poetry encapsulates the

26. 'Tao (道)' is also known as 'The Way'. The existence of 'Tao' is a fundamental view in traditional Chinese thoughts. Tao can be understood as the source of the existence of all beings, referring to the ultimate order of the universe as a whole. Although the term 'Tao' is known to have first appeared and been elaborated in Laozi, there had been a tradition of seeking Tao in the words of various thinkers during the pre-Qin period (Dong 2020).

27. The original text, '门前迟行迹，一一生绿苔。苔深不能扫，落叶秋风早。八月蝴蝶黄，双飞西园草。感此伤妾心，坐愁红颜老'， was translated by Xu Yuanchong (2021: 6571), who put the English title of this poem as 'Ballad of a Trader's Wife'.

principle of ecological harmony: the inherent connection between humanity and the natural world.

Literary scholars have observed that Chinese written tradition is 'imbued with the capacity not only to express human emotion and thought, but to reflect the nature and condition of social and cosmological order' (Chang and Owen 2010: 6). This tradition is rooted in the origins of Chinese script, described in early mythology as not artificially created but discovered in nature, positioning writing as a component of the cosmic order (Chang and Owen 2010: 5). The belief that literature is an intrinsic part of nature's order has remained central to literary theory, significantly shaping Chinese poetry (Chang and Owen 2010: 6).

Chinese poetry, since the *Classic of Poetry*, has embraced the affinity between man and nature, a theme that runs parallel to the poetic expressions and nature imagery found in the *Book of Changes* (Chang and Owen 2010: 18). Nature imagery often acts as an implicit analogy for human experiences. The most emblematic techniques used are known as 'Comparison (Bi, 比)' and 'Evocation (Xing, 兴)'. 'Comparison' involves deliberately likening a natural scene to one's own emotional state, thereby illuminating those inner feelings. 'Evocation', on the other hand, refers to the process where natural scenes evoke or awaken these inner feelings (Xu 2019: 185).

In the poem *Flee by Night*, the imagery of 'gloomy clouds' serves as a 'Comparison', with the oppressive clouds symbolizing the protagonist's lingering sorrow, while the depiction of the setting sun over the western mountains acts as an 'Evocation', eliciting the protagonist's feelings of homesickness and prompting a deep reflection on his solitude and exile in a distant land.

Consider, for a more detailed insight, an excerpt from the Tang dynasty poem 'Ballad of Changgan' (长干行, *Changgan Xing*) by Li Bai (李白, 701–62 CE). Rendered from the perspective of a merchant's wife, the poem delicately conveys her deep affection and longing for her husband, who has been away on business for an extended period (Xu 2021: 6571, official translation):

Green moss now overgrows before our door;
Your footprints, hidden, can be seen no more.
Moss can't be swept away: so thick it grows,
And leaves fall early when the west wind blows.
The yellow butterflies in autumn pass
Two by two o'er our western garden grass.
This sight would break my heart, and I'm afraid,
Sitting alone, my rosy cheeks would fade.²⁷

Within these verses, the imagery of thick green moss and yellow butterflies act as 'Evocation'. The moss, having obscured the footprints left by her husband, reminds the heroine of the duration of his absence. The paired butterflies, in contrast to the solitary state of the poem's protagonist, heighten her sense of loss and melancholy. Additionally, the motif of falling leaves functions as a 'Comparison', signifying the fleeting nature of the woman's youth.

The natural imagery, mirroring and evoking complex emotional states, illustrates the intimate connection between the external world and the human psyche. Here the lines between the natural existence and the human experience are blurred; both are integral to the essence of the universe, following the same principles as they evolve and age within the cycles of the seasons, each bearing its own joys and sorrows.

As art scholar George Rowley observed: 'The relation between man and nature in Chinese art is characterised by harmony and communion' (1959: 20). For Chinese artists, man and nature are meant to interact on equal terms, implying that man is neither the conqueror of nature nor the victim of its formidable forces. Rowley suggests that this perspective stems from the ability of Chinese art to 'find a reality in nature' (1959: 20).

This ability was indeed influenced by the philosophical tenet that truth and wisdom are to be discovered as they inherently exist within reality. Artists utilize natural imagery to convey their emotions, yet their ultimate goal is 'clarifying the mind in order to have an insight into the Tao' (Ye 1985: 209), a concept put forward by the southern dynasty scholar-artist Zong Bing (宗炳, 375–443 CE) in his reflections on his experience with landscape paintings. Given that Zong's thoughts were influenced by both Buddhism and Taoism, 'clearing the mind' could be understood as reaching a state of 'emptiness' and 'stillness' (Jiang 1992: 99) through the philosophical perspectives as discussed previously in this article.

This principle has profoundly influenced subsequent generations of literati artists (Ye 1985: 209). Thus, rather than striving to conquer external circumstances, which unfurl according to their own natural rhythm, these artists aimed to master and dispel their own distracting desires. This process of inner purification allowed their spirits to harmonize with, and be receptive to, the Tao. Hence, for literati artists, the natural world, including the most awe-inspiring mountains and desolate countrysides, resonated as their spiritual harbour.

One day in Li Bai's later years,²⁸ he composed the poem 'Sitting Alone in Face of Peak Jingting' (Xu 2021: 5690, official translation):

All birds have flown away, so high;
A lonely cloud drifts on, so free.
Gazing on Peak Jingting, nor I
Am tired of him, nor he of me.²⁹

While seated before the Jingting Mountain, Li Bai appears to enter a wordless dialogue with an unspoken sage. In this moment, Jingting Mountain surpasses its physical existence as merely a landscape, evolving into a reflection of the poet's inner tranquillity amidst the vicissitudes of life. The boundary between Li Bai and the mountain fades, merging them into a unified presence engaged in silent discourse.

In fact, this spiritual purification, intertwined with natural imagery, has left its mark not only on poetry but also on dance. This integration was embodied in dance practices dating back to the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), as documented by the scholar Fu Yi (傅毅)³⁰ through the medium of Fu poetry³¹ (Yan 1958: 705b–706a, translation added):

They seek in dance both grace and virtue's light, to manifest the noble will in sight. Alone they gallop thoughts to realms afar, in pursuit of where their true aspirations are. In the mountains, lofty and high; in the waters, vast and wide. Movements shift as the mind decides; expressions crafted, not by random tides. Grasping poetry's essence, its intent they express. Sighing with breath, intense passion they unleash. Their qi-energy flows like clouds adrift, ambitions as pure as frost in autumn's shift.³²

28. The composition time of this poem has been subject to scholarly speculation, posited to be either 753 or 761 CE, with a consensus among scholars leaning towards the latter.

29. The original text, '众鸟高飞尽，孤云独去闲。相看两不厌，只有敬亭山'，was translated by Xu Yuanchong (2021: 5690).

30. Fu Yi's lifespan is estimated to have begun in an unknown year and concluded around c.90 CE.

31. Often translated as 'rhapsody' or 'poetic exposition', Fu poetry (赋) is a distinctive genre of Chinese rhymed prose, serving as a transitional medium between poetry and prose. It held prominence as the principal literary form throughout the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).

32. This is an excerpt from Fu Yi's work *The Fu Poetry of Dance* (舞赋). The original text: '修仪操以显志兮，独驰思乎杳冥。在山峨峨，在水汤汤，与志迁化，容不虚生。明诗表指，喟息激昂。气若浮云，志若秋霜'.

Drawing from the observations of Fu Yi, we are introduced to a far-reaching philosophy of dance that transcends time, in which the form of dance is transformed from mere physical expression into a spiritual dialogue with nature. Every movement and sigh of lament resonates with the rhythms of the earth and the changing seasons. Reflecting aspirations as lofty as the mountains and as boundless as the waters, the dance is steered by the dancers' subtle mental cues and the core intentions of poetry. Their breath and vitality, evocative of clouds drifting leisurely, and their ambitions, pure as the crisp autumn frost, unveil a pursuit of both aesthetic and spiritual purity.

INTEGRATING POETIC VOICE AND KUNQU DANCE AS SOMATIC EXPERIENCE

In Fu Yi's poem, dancers are depicted as synchronizing their bodies, minds, breath and voice with the rhythms of nature. The verses imply that the dancers engaged not only in dance but also in poetic song, as seen in: 'Grasping poetry's essence, its intent they express. Sighing with breath, intense passion they unleash' (Yan 1958: 706a). This is presented as an early incarnation of what would later develop into the Kunqu performance style.

However, since its inception in the sixteenth century, Kunqu performance has evolved into a highly conventionalized form, characterized by set movements, fixed sounds and established norms, transmitted across generations by practitioners. In this process, the foundational intent behind merging poetic sounds with dance movements – an intent that could hark back to the first century – has been somewhat overshadowed. This foundational intent was not aimed at exhibition, presentation or communication but rather at engaging with the spiritual realm. This philosophical approach to dance, probing the reasons behind the act, indicates that the core purpose lay in reaching towards the spiritual, far beyond mere performance.

When we contemplate returning to this philosophical root of dance-spirituality, it does not imply forsaking other artistic purposes and endeavours but rather considering dance as a medium through which to connect the spirit, body and mind. This spiritual perspective with its enrichment not only poses no contradiction with other objectives but can also enhance the fulfilment of Kunqu dance as a performing art and its transmission and dissemination as cultural heritage.

This return to the roots involves a deep exploration of the mind-body relationship within Kunqu dance, potentially transforming its stylized movements into a somatic practice. This practice centres on the inner perception and bodily experience (Hanna 1986: 4) and views the body and mind as an integrated process (Williamson et al. 2014: 314). Somatics places a strong emphasis on mindfulness and awareness of the present moment (Williamson et al. 2014: 441), principles that lie at the heart of many spiritual traditions. By nurturing a keen awareness of bodily sensations and movements, individuals can foster a state of mindfulness, thereby enhancing their spiritual insight and connection. This form can serve not just as a tool for communication but as a gateway to deeper spiritual and emotional awareness.

Therefore, I propose referring to this transformation as 'voice-dance meditation'. The ensuing question is: How can Kunqu movement be effectively integrated with voice to fulfil the purpose of meditation? In addressing this, I have endeavoured to combine theoretical understanding with my somatic

experience in practising Kunqu dance. Additionally, I have explored the integration of eco-somatic concepts within my practical experiments.

Sound waves and the body's energy flow

Elaine Colandrea, a somatic art practitioner and researcher, encapsulates the essence of sound's interaction with the body: 'Sound moves through space in waves. Each wave penetrates the varying densities of your body differently, creating a plethora of sensation' (Colandrea and Smith 2022: 7).

Kunqu dance is distinguished by its flowing movements, which exude a fluidity and continuity reminiscent of calligraphy. This quality stems from the principle of 'using the waist as the pivot' (Zou 1985: 8), wherein the body is conceptualized as a wheel. The waist functions as the central pivot, from which the inner strength radiates outwards, driving the movements of the spine and the entire body. Such motion is defined by its roundness (Su 1980: 88–89), necessitating the creation of a circular path both in the external space and internally within the body.

From a somatic viewpoint, the essence of this movement principle requires the spread of the body's energy from its centre to the limbs, thereafter extending outwards like ripples in water. This reveals a fundamental similarity between Kunqu movements and sound waves, rooted in their shared attributes of continuity and circularity. When the movements of sound waves synchronize with those of the dance, a reciprocal interaction is fostered.

From my experience of integrating voice with movement, the vibrations of my voice feel like an internal force moving through my body, opening channels for the flow of energy. The vocal process is intimately tied to the respiratory system, where I sense the inhalation nourishes the body with a steady stream of energy, while the exhalation drives the transmission of sound waves.

Viewed through this lens, the integration of dance with the poetic voice can be perceived as an expansion of the body's inherent vibrations and energies. This fusion captures the subtle nuances of our internal states, thereby amplifying practitioners' intrinsic somatic awareness.

Integrated eco-somatic practice

Indeed, it is through my somatic practice that I have perceived the energy channels which sound can unlock to facilitate dance movement. I participated in a somatic workshop led by Elaine Colandrea (Colandrea and Smith 2023), where she encouraged attendees to envision themselves as towering trees engaging in slow, improvised movements, and then to produce sounds at moments that felt natural, allowing these sounds to resonate through their moving bodies.

During this exercise, I visualized my torso as the tree's trunk, spiraling upwards following the pattern of the tree's growth rings; my arms, the branches twisting and reaching skyward, and my legs, the roots anchoring firmly into the earth. For me, sound is an extension of breath. Drawing a deep breath, I released a low, prolonged 'umm' as I exhaled. In that instant, I encountered a sensation entirely new to me. The sound waves I generated seemed to forge a pathway within my body, enabling energy to circulate and movements to unfold naturally, akin to the organic growth of a tree's branches and leaves.

Acknowledging the significance of experiential understanding, I translated my theoretical knowledge into practice by engaging in theory-led somatic

33. 'The Ballad of Changgan' was written in 725 CE.

exploration. This method served both as a means to test the theory and as a mechanism for weaving it into my research methodology. I embarked on a poetry-dance somatic practice, by choreographing movements inspired by Li Bai's poem 'The Ballad of Changgan'.

The video link is available at (Luo 2023):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1018sxYZJ5di7SRaH9S5L_ImOkk12Af7m/view?usp=sharing. Accessed 11 March 2024.

The poem's imagery of falling leaves inspired me to adopt the 'Spiral Hand (盘手, Panshou)' (Wan 2005: 80) movement from Kunqu dance as a central motif, symbolizing the leaves' spiralling descent through the air. This concept underpinned the development of the action, wherein the breathing patterns and dynamics of the movements were designed to 'engage' with and 'enhance' the voice's rhythm during poem recitation. Moreover, I employed spatial design and movement progression to encapsulate the poem's emotive essence.

I discovered that the act of integrating recitation with movement deepened my immersion in the poem's atmosphere, surpassing the experience of mere vocalization. The dance movement, infused with evoked force and energy permeating my entire body, enhanced the poetic delivery, amplifying its emotional resonance. The tonal cadences and rhymes of the verses, along with their healing power and interwoven with the flow of movement, transported me across time to the spiritual realm of the poem's protagonist, who embodies the essence of women from 1300 years past.³³ Beneath the sentimental words, I sensed a deep-seated concern and passion for the existential entities of the universe, which are always in a vibrant cycle of birth, growth, unfolding, withering and fading away.

Having acquainted myself with integrating movement and verse recitation, I ventured to immerse this practice within the natural backdrop of Greenwich Park. Transitioning from the confines of a classroom to the embrace of nature, the space around me opened up vastly. It felt like I was breathing with the trees and clouds, their gentle sway in the breeze subtly influencing the quality of my movements. Birds sang around me, their wingbeats as they ascended harmonizing with my voice, weaving into the poetic soundscape, serving both as a response to my movements and an amplification of the emotions conveyed.

In that moment, I experienced a profound sense of belonging within nature, cradled by its expanse. The melancholy expressed in the poem seemed to have dissolved amidst this natural nourishment. Amidst the opulence of nature and its perpetual cycles, human emotions appear transient, akin to clouds drifting across the sky; while our awareness remained as the sky – untouched in its purity and tranquillity.

CONCLUSION

Utilizing a framework that merges theoretical insights with practical experience, this study identifies the potential for integrating poetic voice and Kunqu dance into a spiritual practice. It advocates for a mindful reimagining of these traditional forms as dynamic eco-somatic interactions, thereby fostering deeper connections between body and mind, as well as between humans and the natural world.

This research seeks to broaden the understanding of cultural practices beyond mere artistic expression, highlighting them as pathways for spiritual exploration and deepened insight. It sets the stage for future inquiries

to develop a more refined and systematic approach to this renewed form. Consequently, it invites a thorough dialogue on how traditional arts, deeply rooted in centuries of history, remain relevant in offering insights and strategies for navigating the spiritual and ecological challenges of our times, especially within contemporary cross-cultural contexts.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This research complies with the ethical standards outlined by the *Journal for Dance, Movement & Spiritualities* and follows the guidelines provided in the Intellect Books Ethical Guidelines. The study includes content from a workshop attended by the author, which has been properly credited and cited. All information drawn from the workshop is used responsibly, with no inclusion of sensitive or confidential data.

The research also utilizes two types of video materials. First, a published video of a performance, which is publicly accessible and has been properly credited and cited in line with academic and copyright standards. To enhance accessibility for an international audience, English translations and pronunciations were added solely for educational and scholarly purposes. All rights to the original video remain with the copyright holder, and the adapted video has not been publicly distributed beyond the scope of this research. Second, a video created by the author in collaboration with a filmer. This video has also been properly credited and cited as part of the research materials. No human or animal subjects were directly involved in this research, and the study does not include interactions with vulnerable groups or personal data. Should there be any questions regarding the ethical use of materials, copyright compliance, or other aspects of this research, the author is available to provide further clarification.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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The embodied Jewish voice

ABSTRACT

V'Yomer רמאי' 'And God spoke'. In the Hebrew Bible, the creator established material reality through vocalization. Yet, before God speaks, a 'ruach' – wind or spirit – moves over the waters. Movement, breath, spirit and material existence are, thus, tied in this story. Later in this account humans are made 'in our image', referring perhaps to all that came before this. Humans were made from material reality as well as vocalization. Not surprisingly, within the Hebrew life portrayed in scriptures, both song and dance are a feature, as they involve breath, words and physical movement, often in songs of embodied praise. A religion of doing, Judaism has continued to use song as an important part of ritual, along with ritual actions, and dance. In this, voice serves as a completion of movement, as it is an embodied method of conveying spiritual reality. Within this article, I consider the intersection between religion, spirituality, voice, movement and dance within Judaism, looking first at specific understanding of speech as embodied in the Bible, a more detailed view of the relationship between voice and movement in Kabbalistic Jewish spiritual tradition, and a current return to a more holistic understanding of voice in embodied prayer. I review past critical scholarship of George Lakoff and Johnson's Philosophy in the Flesh and Eliot Wolfson's The Body in the Text, while also considering mystical and modern interpretation. The work of Storydance Theatre will be used to provide an example of a current iteration of Jewish use of voice as dance.

KEYWORDS

Judaism
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BACKGROUND

It is often customary to present scholarly criticism at the start of academic articles, but since this study is based on my own research as a dancer and performer, I want to begin with my experience in dance, choreography, study

of dance in Judaism and work in embodied storytelling. In this, I find it important to consider the work of David Abram as an organizing principle. Abram created the term the 'more-than-human-world' for his influential book *The Spell of the Sensuous*. A storyteller and anthropologist, by this phrase he means recognizing not only our relationship to nature, but the role of nature in our lives and our stories and actions. He postulates that overemphasis on word, in writing especially, removed us from nature. He points to exception to this concept of work, particularly in Jewish prayer.

Abram is very critical of certain Christian and Greek philosophical traditions which, he claims, separate humans from nature, but he also links Jewish tradition to a more holistic understanding. He presents a Hasidic 'commentary on prayer':

See your prayer as arousing the letter
through which heaven and earth
and all living things were created.
The letters are the life of all;
when you pray through them,
all Creation joins in your prayer.
All that around you is uplifted;
even the song of the passing bird may enter into such a prayer.

(Abram 1996: 248–49)

Abram comments on the use of 'wind' in Hebrew tradition, and wonders if 'the monotheism of Abraham and his descendants was borne by a new way of experiencing the invisible air, a new sense of the unity of this unseen presence that flows not just within us but between all things' (1996: 249). Abram is Jewish in heritage, but anyone who has read the Psalms in the Bible will know there is constant reference to being in nature, and nature as expressive of human emotion. Waves clap their hands and sing, calves skip on hills, the earth quakes in prayer and deer pant for the presence of the divine. The *Song of Songs* makes constant reference to fields, hills, plants, bees, trees and a lush garden, with the human story of love within the text almost overshadowed by nature. In Chapter 7, at the height of the song, the text presents a dancing Shulamite woman. Sensual experience and dance are within the tradition, and as Abrams points out, breath or spirit is a connecting factor. Breath gives life and allows for dancing and singing, yet breath is also increased through these activities.

The connection between dance, song and breath or spirit was clarified in my own training in working with scripture and dance, in which the relationship between movement and voice was a driving factor in creation of dance. First, there was Israeli folk dance, built on song and phrases from the Bible, and choreographed using interpretation of steps from various Jewish cultures. Next, there were my rudimentary attempts to work with biblical text to choreograph dances, sometimes with signed interpretation of Hebrew words with hand and arm gestures. Studying dance at Pacific School of Religion, I found more experienced choreographers doing the same, and at times this seemed forced and artificial, allowing text to drive movement. Finally, I encountered the sophisticated work of *Avodah*, a Jewish Dance troop, as well as the choreography of dancers working with deep theological understandings of movement. This included Judith Rock and Carla de Sola. Later, I also grew to understand the influence of Judaism in the works of renowned choreographers like Meredith Monk. My own work eventually led to a doctoral dissertation on

Jewish women's dance traditions and the concept of Embodied Torah, resulting in my book on *The Miriam Tradition*, where near eastern concepts of word were explored, which included an intimate understanding of the relationship between word, body and movement. I also considered modern theological view and the speech-thinking/movement connection presented by Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (Sautter 2010).

Through all my study, I was aware of the basic fact that in Jewish tradition voice did not supersede body, and that vocalization was always an embodied act. In Jewish history this included actions and gestures as part of ritual and prayer, and dance with singing as part of Jewish life. While words and *Devarim* were considered powerful enough to change reality and even be used as amulets, vocalization was physical. From a critical perspective, I was aided by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who in *Philosophy in the Flesh* provided a detailed account of all language as body-based, with religious metaphor clearly stemming from a movement base (Lakoff and Johnson [1990] 1999).

The concept of language being body-based did, of course, not originate with Lakoff and Johnson. Liljan Espenak is but one Dance Therapist who has already dealt with the idea, and also notably the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Kimerer LaMothe. However, Lakoff and Johnson's work was and is still important for dealing with philosophy, and for conducting research that paved the way for non-binary thinking, and also inclusion of nature and eco-systems. The weight of the insights they provided has sometimes been forgotten. I am recalling them here as it works well with what I will share on biblical texts and rabbinic and Hasidic thought. Lakoff is Jewish, and his thinking strikes me as amazingly rabbinic and midrashic, meaning that he is giving weight to multiple layers of text.

In Jewish thought, Torah – the Bible – may be interpreted in a number of ways, including metaphysical readings. Unsurprisingly then, in *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 1981) they found movement in the basis for language organization and conceptual, cultural expression. It is an idea consistent with Torah text. The rabbis claimed that the symbolic level of story offered deeper truths. Lakoff and Johnson share this is because 'spatialization metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience' (1981: 13, 17–18). In *Philosophy in the Flesh* they offer more specifics about how metaphors of motion are also the basis of thought, and that the 'mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical' ([1990] 1999: 3). I personally liked their example of happiness, which is almost always expressed in language of elevation, much as we had discussed in dance therapy class.

The metaphor used to describe 'happy' is up. In a 'metaphorical mapping' of this phenomenon, they note expressions like 'I'm feeling up today' and is equated with 'having an upright posture' (Lakoff and Johnson [1990] 1999: 50). In Jewish tradition, again, such metaphors abound in the Psalms, which are used regularly for worship. For example, in Psalm 121 'Esa Einai' – I will lift my eyes to the mountains, from where does my strength come. In a bit more complex metaphor from Psalm 99 'Romeimu, Adonai Eloheinu/vehish-tachavu la'adom raglav kadosh hu' one exalts or lifts up God, and bows down in humble worship. In both cases, looking up or going up is a metaphor of hope. Psalm 99 also suggests real physical motion accompanied the singing or prayer practice. In some Jewish communities, the singing of such verses is accompanied by simple line and circle dancing or might be sung in joyous procession of a Torah scroll. Lakoff and Johnson cautioned that cultural context

needed to be considered in assessing metaphor and movement, just as I had been taught in studying basics of Laban movement analysis. What was and is of great importance to me is their conclusion that religion is essentially physical, and spirituality is essentially embodied. More recent studies have focused on the effects of post-Enlightenment thought creating disembodied understandings of religion and spirituality. Results were that expressive religious practices like those of some Jews were considered primitive. In the process, voice became disembodied, the product of text rather than text being a product of the embodied voice.

In Jewish ritual practices, spoken word, gestures, dance and movement are partially prescribed by rabbinic writing in the first book of Talmud. The concept of 'bending the spine' in prayer was set in tractate *Berakhot*. Bending the spine is both a metaphor for physical involvement in spirituality, and literally as movement that serves as a vehicle for vocal prayer. Though limited now to small bends, voice and movement in Jewish prayer still involve bending the spine. But prayer movement is not the only instance of voice as physical in Judaism. There are dance traditions. In *The Miriam Tradition*, I explored how Jewish women's dance leadership in Sephardic communities served a spiritual function of joy at weddings and sorrows at funerals. The use of verse and movement offered a complete ritual activity that while not specific to rabbinic Judaism, was a fulfilment of the practice of Torah. This was controversial. Jewish women were not always taught to read, and less seldom schooled in textual study, yet as a religion with an oral tradition, extension of teaching through sung verse and dance is possible. With later research, I found an article by Eliot Wolfson extremely helpful. He presented medieval Jewish spiritual practices of Kabbalah as based not on words and text, but on understanding the relationship between the body and words.

Wolfson finds the authors of the medieval Spanish Jewish mystical text the *Zohar* connect movement and word in prayer to develop what he calls the 'angelic body'. The Jewish mystics understood their prayer motions would elevate them fully to a more enlightened existence. Wolfson notes they had a medieval disdain for the physical body, inconsistent with rabbinic and biblical thought. The classic rabbinic view is based on the biblical verse in Genesis/*Bereshit* stating humans are born in the image of God. This is understood to mean physical reality is positive. The *Zohar* practitioners did have a concept of *malchut*/mother earth as the indwelling of the Shekinah, the divine feminine. Yet they perceived of how the physical body might be transformed to be truly a reflection of God.

In the past decades, I have seen the development of 'Jewish Yoga' and somatic practices based on selective kabbalistic thinking, so it is important to consider the source material. According to Wolfson the kabbalists considered the body a means of enacting the words of Torah. These actions then affect God, and transformation occurs. Therefore, their ritual actions 'fortifies the divine attributes, which are imaginably envisioned as bodily limbs' (Wolfson 2005: 490, 492). It was the ritual performance that served 'an instrument through which the physical body is conjoined to and transformed in light of the imaginal body of God' (2005: 490–492). However, it is important to remember the ritual prayers involve vocalization if not singing or changing (*Berakhot* 6a).

In Jewish prayer, even the silent central Amidah includes murmuring of words. Wolfson offers that for the kabbalists the physical body 'becomes the perfect vehicle to execute the will of the soul and soul becomes the perfect

guide in directing the will of the body'. This produces the 'transformed angelic body' (2005: 492–93). The spoken words of prayer may be understood as the impetus for the actions, yet also as the completion of the ritual motions. For as Wolfson explains, the issue is not the text becoming embodied, but the conjunction of the text and body. Furthermore, Wolfson and others who study the kabbalistic texts have noted there was a conception of Hebrew letters of the text representing the human body, and the vowel points the human breath (Winkler 2003: 25, 27; Kaplan 1997: 161). In all, this suggests there was a tying together of body, breath and voice through movement. They understood breath as *ruach* and *neshamah*. Both refer to stages of spiritual growth. Yet, there are many examples within the biblical text that suggest movement and voice were frequently paired as a vehicle for conveying praise or prophecy.

SOME SPECIFIC HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Bible, Voice, Dance: Like all Judaism, the medieval Jewish mystics based their work on biblical text. Examining the Torah, many who study dance note how frequently dance terms are employed, especially the word 'machol'. It is used to describe the dance of Miriam and the women at the shore of the Reed Sea and also the term for dancing in front of the golden calf. Scholar Carol Meyers noted it almost always refers to women's dance and song leadership, and presumably with use of a frame drum or timbrel. Meyers calls this the Drum-Dance song tradition. Such and ensemble would have employed dance and voice (1993: 49–67). Before Meyer's study, Mayer Gruber published a now well-known essay on ten terms used for dance in the Hebrew Bible. One term he mentions, *hagag* or to dance in a circle, it used in Psalm 45 referring to shouting out praise (*rinnah*), which Gruber understands to mean a circle dance was done with singing (1990: 48–66). Clearly singing as part of dance was a part of ancient Hebrew practice. Yet, it is also possible to turn to the biblical prophets to gain insight into the connection between words and symbolic action in ancient Israel.

There are no specific texts describing the major prophets dancing, but often they receive *Debar Adonai*, the word of God. This word might impel them to take on symbolic actions. Jeremiah, for example, wears a linen belt and puts a yoke around his neck as symbolic of upcoming subjugation, and then offers prophetic words on this upcoming fate. When considering the symbolic acts of the biblical prophets, Ake Viberg comments that earlier studies noted the order of such prophetic acts, and that the actions preceded the prophetic explanation; voice completed actions. Viberg himself finds that there is a type of 'street theatre' quality to the actions ([2007] 2021: 13, 15). Jeremiah also called for mourning dances to be performed by professional wailing women (*qinot*) for the destruction and death during the siege of Jerusalem. Their actions were a specific type of dance of lament that included wailing, stomping of feet and clapping of hands (Jeremiah 9: 10–21). Yet, Jeremiah also prophesized the restoration of Israel, and in this he declared the young women would lead dancing once more (Chapter 31: 4, 13). In all, the biblical text conveys that dance, symbolic action, and 'word' are joined together. For it is both the body and breath that give life to words, with completion in vocalization.

KABBALAH SPECIFICS

After the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, Jewish leaders met to reconstruct Judaism. In some writings dance was

banned for the Sabbath, since it might lead to playing of musical instruments, which was not permitted out of mourning for the loss of the Temple (*Beitzah 30a*). Yet, dance was encouraged on Simchat Torah, a holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah, and also required for weddings. Despite the early ban on dance on the Sabbath, Judaism continued to associate speech and the somatic experiences. The rabbis of the Talmud set the course for post-Temple Judaism. One of the first writings they produced was *Brachot*, dealing with prayer and blessing. There, the rabbis insisted that prayer was to include ‘bending of the spine’, meaning physical participation (*B. Berachot 28b*). Many years later in medieval times, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) and Moses Maimonides would comment on this dictate. Two of the most famous Jewish scholars, they noted body–brain connections (Verman 1996: 80–92). But it was the development of spiritual and meditative techniques within Judaism where it is possible to discover what might be considered somatic exercises utilizing speech. As Wolfson explains, Jewish mystics, those who practised *Kabbalah*, sometimes used vocal and movement techniques for both prayer and meditation. Part of the connection made was that spirit was breath and understood to exist at different levels of development. *Ruach*/breath was a more basic level. Yet the Jewish mystics wanted to develop their *Neshamah*, a term also associated with breath and a more refined level of soul consciousness. The methods they developed were body based, yet could include vocalization.

Moshe Idel is a scholar of Jewish *Kabbalah* who examined some of these techniques, noting actions, gestures and motions that facilitate meditation. Isaiah Tishby and Daniel Matt note that some of the actions were done as part of prayer, where words and actions would be joined together. The *Tikkunei Zohar*, for instance notes when and how often to bow for prayer actions.

bow four times during the *Amidah*, twice during the initial three [blessings] and twice during the latter three. This corresponds to the four letters of [God’s name] [...]. They also straighten up four times, corresponding to its four letters. [...] One must bend the eighteen vertebrae each time, corresponding the eighteen benedictions, which are included in the eighteen worlds. [...] The spine is a *lulav*, for if it is split, it becomes defective... [from *Tikkunei Zohar*, no. 18:37a].

(Tishby 1995: 382; see also Matt 2004: 74–75)

Other examples of prayer motion come from the introduction to the *Zohar*, where one was to prostrate before entering the sanctuary for prayer (Matt 2004: 74–75). Additionally, full prostration for prayer is discussed as part of the central *Amidah* standing prayer. Prostration is also for modesty, as there is an imagined intercourse of the *Shekhinah* with the Divine presence (Idel 2005: 75). The *Shekhinah* is the feminine presence of God on earth, so the act of prostration recognizes an embodied reality of the divine on earth. Idel comments it was understood that the body’s movement had the potential, at least symbolically, to activate the ‘potencies, found in [hu]man, nature, and the divinity’ (2005: 149). He affirms prayer involved embodied actions, but confirms that vocalization was an important part of the process.

Idel presents methods for embodied vocalization for meditation outside of prayer services, including a focus on Hebrew letters and combining in different ways the letters of the Torah; with this, ‘the ecstatic kabbalist becomes part of the Torah and it is integrated within him’ (2005: 149), comments that

this method understands that the 'lower and the higher realms' of reality 'are interconnected by linguistic cords' in what he calls "'linguo-theologies" or "linguo-theosophies"' (2005: 122). Voice in prayer thus embodies the divine will in human reality. Idel summarizes this by sharing 'language can be envisioned as an expression of the soul, of the subjective, which nevertheless takes place in nature' and that 'language has a prominently connective social role' (2005: 206). Rather than limit the experience of the sacred to the individual, vocalization assists in relating the message to the reality of the community and world. While such methods for meditation and prayer are not full dance activities, they do present an extraordinary role for movement with vocalization.

Kabbalah scholar Tomer Persico follows Idel, first offering that meditative techniques are embodied. He moves beyond the medieval period though and provides an example of Jewish Hasidic technique of achieving an altered state of mystic consciousness that involved singing, prayer as well as dance (Persico 2022: 4). The Hasidim arose in eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offering a more accessible method for Jewish meditative practice. In Hasidic thought dance and song are an aid to achieve an ecstatic state, and physical existence is confirmed rather than denied. Not only are words embodied, but the Hasidim locate spirituality within the body. Persico notes that this method, which he calls ecstatic and 'shaivistic' (2022: 4), is present in many traditions, but he then examines specifically Nachman of Bratslav's methods for *Hibodedut* – being alone with God.

That the primary element of *Hibodedut* and the talk between him and his Maker in wholeness is that he lays before God blessed be He his words so thoroughly, that he will be very close to abdicating his soul, perish the thought (*Khas Ve'Shalom*), until he almost dies, perish the thought, until his soul is tied to his body only by a thread because of all his real sorrow and longing and craving to God blessed be He.

(2022: 8)

This passage seems to suggest negation of the body, but the technique is actually somatically based:

Here, talking before God brings the hasid into an ecstatic emotional fervor that begins with 'a great arousal in body and mind' [...] and ends with a state that is close to the loss of consciousness, perhaps even to the loss of life.

(Persico 2022: 12)

Persico examines Nachman's techniques, comparing them to two modern day interpretations, then finding the current versions focus on thought rather than whole-body engagement. Where he finds Nachman's methods 'extroverted' and 'ecstatic', he labels the modern interpretations 'introverted' and 'enstatic' (Persico 2022: 12). Persico does not criticize modernization of the method, but he clearly demonstrates that the original intent of *Hibodedut* was somatically based, with talking to God a physical practice. Once again, vocalization is completion of physical activity. In this case it is not necessarily dance, but might be inclusive of dance.

Idel and Persico offer fine insights into the physicality of specific Jewish practices, but they deal with those that were used by men who had access to

scholarship. During the medieval period in Spain, at the time of the composition of the *Zohar*, there is evidence of Jewish women joining voice and movement in the activity of Tanyaderas or celebration leaders, as well as Endechas or mourning leaders. The Tanyaderas offered music and dance leadership, where the Endechas conducted wailing dance and led symbolic movement at gravesites (Sautter 2010). Barbara Sparti also offers a story of Jewish women dancing for the Sabbath in Renaissance Italy, sharing traveller David Reubini's account of 'women playing harps and dancing to entertain him' as well as a report that a doctor's daughter 'who read and recite scripture every day' danced 'with joy' on the Sabbath (2012: 245). This little snapshot of the traveller reporting on women suggests that within the Jewish community it was normative for women to dance, perhaps with song, just as we see in the Torah.

The cultures in which Judaism existed changed, but active engagement with words and movement were still employed. Persico's interest is in exploring somatically based techniques for Hasidic meditation, yet he fails to mention Nachman's use of dance itself. While Persico does claim that meditation is an embodied activity, he perhaps undermines himself in not providing examples of Nachman's dance practices that once again demonstrate the connection between the voice and embodiment.

Nachman was a dancer. Many studies on dance in Judaism refer to him, and in *Kabbalah and Ecology* David Seidman also mentions Nachman's use of dance and how one's 'limbs' reflect the will of God, and actions complete the body of the *Shekinah* (2016: 21, 294–96). In a well-known article on Hasidic dance 'To jump for joy', scholar Michael Fishbane also presents a study of Nachman's dance (1997: 371–87). While there has probably been overemphasis on Hasidic use of song and dance, and much less attention given their body-based methods for entering meditation, it is a major oversight to not recognize use of singing and dance as a practice of ecstatic spirituality within Jewish traditions. Not only was meditation embodied for the Hasidim, it could also involve active, ecstatic movement.

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND MODERN EXAMPLES

Of the many theories I have read on the relationship between body, movement and spoken word, almost all conclude language is not primary but secondary to movement. In my overview of Jewish history and spirituality, my intent was to show how the relationship was active in somatically based ritual, cultural and spiritual practices. This might be contrary to the idea of those who understand Jews to be 'People of the Book', implying that sitting and reading a text is the primary activity of the tradition. In many ways this is true, but perhaps in modern times the association has become exaggerated within and outside the Jewish community. Scholarship is partially at fault, offering disembodied interpretations of embodied practices with lack of attention to specifics of movement. More philosophical or text-based scholarship might even reject ethnographic study of ritual and dance simply because it is not abstract thought about them. Some scholars of Jewish studies have also noted it has been too textually based. And while dance with singing has never really stopped being part of Jewish life, congregational worship often seems to have disassociated voice and body so that singing is primarily a cognitive activity. In congregational settings, I have witnessed congregations that do not sing at all, relying on a cantor, song leader or a choir to do so while they sit and listen. Reasons for this are many, including adaptation to post-enlightenment

1. rationalist culture within Judaism. Bruno Latour has noted this disembodi-
2. ment in scholarship and a bifurcated thinking even today.

3. Latour is not Jewish, and while his work did not focus on dance or ritual
4. his ideas clearly apply to issues in modern Jewish workshop. As with Abram,
5. Latour noted the importance of words as a connector of the inner and outer
6. world. This requires recognition of the body and language about the body.
7. Rather than philosophical epistemology of the body, Latour demands a more
8. integrated approach examining the epistemological and ontological reality of
9. being. His example is of those training to be perfume testers, and how it is not
10. their nose that is training, but their bodies.

11.
12. Bodies are our common destiny because there is no meaning in saying
13. without my body I could smell better. [...] A direct and unmediated
14. access to the primary qualities of odors could only be detected by a
15. bodiless nose. But the opposite of embodied is dead, not omniscient.

16. (Latour 2004: 209)

17.
18. Latour applies this thought, remarking that 'The body is thus not a provisional
19. residence of something superior – an immortal soul, the universal or thought
20. – but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and
21. become sensitive to what the world is made of' (2004: 205–06). Rather than
22. create a dichotomy of words and actions of the body, he finds language has a
23. materiality, and '[t]hrough the materiality of the language tools [...] we see,
24. feel, and act' based on 'differences registered in the world [...] but that does
25. not mean that words float arbitrarily over an unspeakable world of objects'
26. (Latour 2004: 210). You cannot have a nose without a body, nor can dance or
27. meditate without human physical participation; words must be understood as
28. articulation of material, physical reality.

29. Dance then may serve as a bridge between the non-cognitive and cogni-
30. tive, so that articulation of experience is possible, and to follow Latour, so the
31. materiality of language is recognized (see Walz 2021). Certainly, this is true
32. within Judaism given the history of dance in relationship to voice in Jewish
33. traditions, whether they are considered cultural or religious. Yet, modern
34. life and post-Enlightenment Jewish worship has tended to be disembodied.
35. Use of movement, singing and attention to embodied spiritual practices has
36. diminished. Rabbi Tamar Havilio wrote on this issue, noting in '(Re) Learning
37. 'L'Hitpaleil: The performance of prayer as spiritual education' the role of the
38. worship leaders in setting the tone of *Avodah*-service based on stance, and
39. that a change of the worship leader facing the congregation has created prayer
40. services of entertaining performance (2014: 190–206). Yet I have experienced a
41. counter movement to rationalized, disembodied practices as an active partici-
42. pant in progressive Judaism. Studying at a Jewish meditation centre, one of
43. the methods used to begin a silent meditation session was sitting and sing-
44. ing. The attention to the breath and body, especially moving from the singing
45. to the silence, forced attention to the physical as part of thought awareness.
46. Afterwards there was time for discussion and a lesson. But the experience came
47. first. At this same centre, Friday night Shabbat services contained time for
48. silent meditative prayer, but this was always preceded by very engaged move-
49. ment in line dancing around the sanctuary, clapping of hands, and swaying
50. of bodies, all done while singing. Such engagement felt complete, refreshing
51. and redemptive. The activity acknowledged the body and increased respira-
52. tion. Followed by prayer that included traditional or personal movements and

murmurings of words, there was time for a relaxation and calm. The spiritually was tangible and satisfying.

Within my own work as a performer who is Jewish, and often presenting Jewish stories, I have also found it important to complete my work in voice. I started Storydance Theatre for this very purpose. Storydance Theatre's mission is to entertain, educate and inspire through enacted story and dance. Presentations creatively combine acting, storytelling and dance to produce works that retell old tales in new and relevant ways. I purposely re-write old stories for a modern audience, to help think through the 'moral' and meaning of the story, often updating the allegory I find in the stories and increasingly focusing on ecological aspects of the story. The project was an outgrowth of my own choreography, which I often presented with a story introduction. Audience feedback was positive, but some suggested I integrate this into the work or simply dance. Through thinking about the relationship between movement, words and voice, and drawing from acting training that was heavily physical, the concept occurred to me of performance that moved fluidly from stories told actively with dance movement to dance that told a story.

Starting with short tales that used dance to share almost every word of a story, a more integrated technique evolved until I was able to develop full plays. In Storydance plays, gestures are used to relate words back to their bodily basis. In this, I understand words are actions, and actions are words (see Lakoff and Johnson [1990] 1999). So while other actors might first find the 'voice' of a character, I first work on a character's movement to find my voice. Originally, for acting technique I frequently used hand gesture, almost like in Kathak dance. I moved on to choreographing phrases that were more sophisticated. Devising the choreography of acting and script, the techniques are now set by the frame of the story. As one director told me, the idea is to choreograph an entire scene. I understood this to mean the script already contains motion as words are based on the body and actions, so breathing life back into the words creates the dance of my actions as I deliver my lines. There is nothing revolutionary in this technique and is partially influenced by classic British methods I was taught in acting classes. I simply focus more on the movement, realizing that vocalization is the completion of movement rather than the source. This is very different though than some current methods that emphasize spoken word and the psychology of relationship rather than the embodiment of words and relationships.

For the play *The Garden: A Refuge*, I was especially conscious of my choreography for spoken lines. Based on the biblical book of Job, the play was an allegory on our relationship to nature amidst the loss and re-creation we face as humans. The play moved from loss and 'winter' to hope and 'spring'. The props used, gestured employed, nature of solos and especially dances followed this rubric. First there was a prop and movement pattern for each segment of the play. They then all correlated to (1) the hot heat of summer and global warming, (2) dampness of winter, overly wet seasons, (3) spring and storms and (4) balanced weather and human acknowledgement of being part of nature. For instance, the first act dealt with a disastrous trip to Europe in the middle of a heat wave to portray loss and disaster caused by weather. When speaking, all my gestures were downward, moving from standings to drooping, to finally sitting down on the ground. Dance interludes between acts provided non-verbal commentary and conveyed that the words spoken were directed by the body gestures. In another play, *Golmah*, a retelling of the Golem story from a feminist perspective, running and swirling began the first act as I shouted

out lines from Macbeth's the Weird Sisters on 'posters of the sea and land'. This was to establish both the 'magic' circle of time we were entering as audience and performers and represent some of the chaos that would be shared. There was also fun with 'spelling', literally leading the audience in gestures that spelled out letter for Golmaha female golem and other words.

The effect acknowledging and emphasizing the relationship between movement and voice in my work has been a profound change in my performance. I previously found Martin Buber's insights helpful in understanding theatre as a community building event of listening and seeing one another. Buber wrote that when speech is embodied in such performance, a connection forms between the actors, audience and story, creating a relationship that overcomes separation (Sautter 2017: 28). Buber is quick to point out that the materiality of the speech is essential, and in this voice requires a body and the connections we make with others in speech are physical. As a performer, I see this when I look at the audience communicating to me by leaning forward, sitting back, tilting heads and offering an intent gaze. For me, as a performer their movements are completed in the vocal comments they share with me after a performance.

Buber did not write much about dance. When he did, it was often more as an ecstatic experience. Though, what he shares about the relationship of performance I find equally true of dance. As Sam Shonkoff writes about Buber's evaluation of the Hasidim, Buber does not separate words and spirituality and recognizes that sacramentality involves all of life. Specifically, Buber deals with over-focus on textual study, as well over-focus on spiritual experience as problematic. In translating a tale about a rebbe engaging in prayer and returning to the everyday word, Shonkoff says specifically 'Buber rejects the notion that there is some ontological abyss between religious and interpersonal realms' and 'avoided the propagation of ontological binaries between spirituality and language, he does so again [translating a Hasidic tale] with regard to spirituality and corporality' (2018: 11–12). This could equally apply to dance, which may serve as a means of spiritual exploration, or performance that allows for transcendence. The speech of dance, as one audience member once shared with me, is *within* the viewer. For dance allows those watching to make up their own story, and in this experience a spiritual moment. I understood what was meant, and I have received delightful feedback from those sharing what metaphors of motion they experienced when watching me dance. Their stories completed the journey of experiencing motion, literally moving them to speech.

CONCLUSION

Body, breath, soul and voice: somehow in modern consciousness they were separated into distinct entities. Times have changed, and within somatic practices there had been an attempt to look at the wisdom of religious and spiritual traditions. I have seldom seen somatic scholars look to Jewish traditions for insight. Perhaps the Hebrew language is a barrier, yet the movement practices have received new interest within the Jewish community in recent times, with some of the scholarship I referred to in this article as a base for academic study. Since ecstatic and joyful movement is woven into Jewish history, I also wonder if somatic scholars find this contrary to somatic techniques as slow and silent movement. Reviewing slices of Jewish movement history in this article, the evidence is that there have been a variety of movement traditions within various forms of Judaism, often associated with overall wellness. The traditions offer a range of experiences, from meditation to energetic dance and song. I find it

refreshing and meaningful to experience singing and line dancing within Jewish ritual settings, and the role of voice does not detract but enhances the experience.

Recently I see an attempt to re-include more body consciousness in Jewish life, as I often experience classes and Sabbath services where the leader has instructed people to breathe. Trauma therapists remind us of how important this is for healing and relaxation. Yet having experienced such a direction when breathing was strained due to illness, the command actually made me tense my muscles. The next time I was told to 'breathe', I realized why I was distressed. Breathing occurs with the body. I then stretched my arms and body up and out instead of simply breathing, and despite nasal congestion I was able to take a deep breath much more easily. Breath and speech that is separated from the body is incomplete. It is the movement of the body and breath that makes spoken word possible as an integral partner. And it has been so since the beginning.

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Voice as a vessel of the collective unconscious

ABSTRACT

In this article – a combination of video and text – I source from the Judaica project laboratory session above to analyse the phenomenon of voice as a vessel in the context of the Grotowski lineage of theatre practice. Using phenomenology and autoethnography, I bring together the reflections from two performers–researchers improvising in the session: Ben Spatz and myself.¹ The improvisation I refer to became prolific material for further scholarly and artistic work. Namely, it supported my process of formulating a notion of dreamvoice² discussed in this article. Therefore, I use the reflections from this session as a springboard to analyse the performative, psychophysical and spiritual aspects of the voice becoming a vessel of personal and collective unconscious.³

PREFACE⁴

An encounter of two practitioners carrying with them into the theatre lab session their shifting identities intersecting with religious and national heritage: american/jewish and polish/christian.⁵ An improvisation that opened territory for exploration of voice, movement, spirituality, feminism and whiteness. Material that inspired the performers–researchers to write and reflect in length about their perspective and perception of the same moment. Thoughts and associations that emerged in a powerful memorable way out of voicing and engaging with spiritual songs. Unexpected turn and realization of the meanings created.⁶

KEYWORDS

dreamvoice
spiritual experience
post-Grotowskian
theatre
performative arts
theatre laboratory
identity
spiritual song
feminism

1. The reflections and commentaries were made retrospectively in 2019, that is two years after the session took place.
2. In this article, I discuss both *dreamvoice* (marked throughout the article in italics) as a concept discussed further in the introduction and 'Dreamvoice' (marked in quotation marks)

referring to the title of a performance-installation devised in the final performance practice of my PaR Ph.D. on embodied voice (Krawczyk 2021).

3. I support this analysis with the reference to semi-structured interviews and the 'Dreamvoice' performance-sound installation – both conducted as part of my Ph.D. Between 2016 and 2017, I interviewed twelve performers of different nationalities about their experience of 'catharsis' (Staniewski and Hodge 2004: 67) while singing. I devised and performed 'Dreamvoice' with Brice Catherin, Cristina Fuentes Antoniazzi and David Velez between January and March 2019, consulting with Ben Spatz, my supervisor at the time and Martyna Majewska, associate director.
4. This article combines poetic, performative, reflective and analytical writing supplemented with audio-visual material. Due to the nature of the topic, I implemented a less linear structure. Except for the preface and conclusions, the main body of the publication consists of an annotated video. Through such a structure, I intend to give the reader space for their interpretation of performative and vocal work. Reflective, phenomenological writing has been marked by italics to help the reader gain clarity about the different modes of text. I also use italics to highlight the keywords and terms significant to the piece of work discussed in this article.
5. Lowercasing nationalities and religions is a conscious

VOICE AS A VESSEL

The word *vessel*, as defined in the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, can refer to a tube such as a blood vessel or a container holding liquid. Such a definition relates directly to physical objects or bodies. On the other hand, the *vessel* can relate to 'a person who has a particular quality or who is used for a particular purpose' (*Cambridge English Dictionary* n.d.: n.pag.). Hence, it can represent a person's certain abilities or purpose associated with the role of a messenger, a transmitter or a representative of individuals and communities. I extend here the application of the term *vessel* to the performative, psychophysical and spiritual properties of the voice expressed in the theatre context. As such, I suggest that the voice can bridge the internal and external, personal and collective, present and past.

In the post-Grotowskian theatre, the voice is an extension of performers' presence 'in a highly tuned-in, constant state of openness' (Dowling 2011: 247). It exposes the performers' *inner life*, the psychophysical process restaging itself dynamically in the moment-to-moment situations in response to each other. But when expressed through traditional songs, the voice becomes more than an extension of a performer's presence. It turns into a *vessel*, or – as Ludwik Flaszen named it – a 'vehicle' (Flaszen 2010: 149) that connects a performer to the *collective unconscious*. Personal merges with collective. A performer starts finding a *line of life* in songs that were 'inhabited by a lot of lives' (Staniewski and Hodge 2004: 67). They become a transmitter for inter-generational lived experiences bound within and expressed through a song passed in oral tradition for decades or centuries. But the performer not only sings the lives of the ones who created and sang the song in the past. If the performer chose the song for a particular reason or if the song resonates with them on a not entirely explicable level, it may become an invitation to connect with their unconscious or their ancestors. Such practice of 'singing ancestors' (Zubrzycki and Bral 2010: 258) in the post-Grotowskian theatre aims to liberate a performer's energy and reach a heightened state of presence and emotional release. In this heightened state, the voice is used as a vessel to affect the audience and the performers themselves within musical and rhythmic structures. However, I suggest that the voice becomes a vessel not merely within traditional songs, but even in its tiniest kernels when a performer's *dreamvoice* manifests.

DREAMVOICE

The notion of *dreamvoice* I refer to in this article is a term I formulated based on the phenomenon of *dreambody* conceptualized in process-oriented psychology (Mindell 1989) and extended from the Jungian dreaming while asleep. It refers to altered states and manifestations of archetypical figures while expressing vocally. It is an empirical phenomenon that appears through so-called inhibited, blocked voice or unintentional expressions, such as an unexpected crack in the voice or singing out of tune. The *dreamvoice* may reveal a performer's perception of their own voice's quality and capabilities, arising out of their personal life experience and also linked to their cultural background, in turn contributing to the way that a person expresses vocally. I suggest that the notion of *dreamvoice* offers an escape from the dualism of *right or wrong sounds*, contributing to the 'rediscovery of forgotten potentialities' (Laster 2016: 50) in embodying voice. But as much as in Grotowski's work these forgotten potentialities reflected the vibratory qualities of traditional

songs and the resonance of their musical structures, I refer to vibratory qualities of any kind of verbal or nonverbal expression that a performer unconsciously got rid of due to their shifting identity or was expected to block or stop using in a specific cultural context. Through such concept of *dreamvoice*, instead of focusing on *what the voice is or should be* – natural, authentic or organic – I reorient the question to *what the voice does, what it presses out* from the conscious and unconscious in the moment-to-moment situations and what communicational, emotional and transformational purposes in a person's process it serves.

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

In Grotowski's work, the voice singing traditional songs became a vehicle for 'the transgenerational transmission of collective memory' (Laster 2012: 216). It became a tool to restore a connection with ancestors that could potentially lead to personal transformation and reintegration of identity. However, claiming that such a process can only happen by singing songs from the cultural heritage that a performer is conscious of overlooks all the other identities that a person might not be aware of. If, following Grotowski, we assume that by singing a traditional song, a performer inhabits the lives of the ones who sang it centuries ago, it becomes impossible to consciously determine the cultural heritage of every person. Moreover, as Laster points out, throughout Grotowski's research, performers working with him sourced songs not only from their cultural or religious traditions but also outside of the culture they identified with. A song and the voice sounding through them become then a vessel, a microcosm of cultures and identities, their encounters and exchanges. In such a way there is a high probability that some of the identities a person may sound through the voice are experienced unconsciously. According to Arnold Mindell's interpretation of Jung's work, the more unconscious at play in a person's process, the more dreaming through the body and – as I suggest – through the voice happens. This in turn guides to the manifestation of images and archetypal figures in one's consciousness. As Mindell suggests: 'For someone in contact with the unconscious, the archetypes are body impulses and their wisdom. Otherwise, the archetypes become the root images of complexes and diseases' (1990: 168). What interests me in this context is investigating how the voice sounds out the collective unconscious and how one relates to the whole pallet of identities – familiar and unfamiliar, manifested through the voice. Does one accept them? Wrestle with them? Negate? Find peace in them? How does the voice express this relationship?

In the video that follows this paragraph, I source from my own experience of sounding, chanting and reflecting on the discovery of my *dreamvoice*. I do it in the company of another performer, Ben Spatz, reflecting on their experience and two witnesses, bringing all their identities into the laboratory studio (see Figure 1). As I suggest through this reflection, the voice acting as a vessel – a messenger sounding unfamiliar or neglected sounds – can bring the collective unconscious to awareness and potentially liberate the archetype.

VIDEO

Voice as a Vessel 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwlSQ-f6kYk>. Accessed 28 October 2024.

choice of the author and the practitioner mentioned here to highlight our shifting relationship with the identities we were brought up with.

6. In this preface, I refer in a performative way to a theatre laboratory session that became a foundation for the reflection and analysis in this article. The session took place on the 31 July 2017 and was a part of the Judaica project, founded and led by Ben Spatz. The following performers-researchers were involved in the session: Nazlıhan Eda Ergin (witness), Agnieszka Mendel (videographer), Ben Spatz (performer) and Ilona Krawczyk (performer). The whole footage from the session can be found in the Songwork Catalogue, Part II: Identity at <https://urbanresearchtheater.com/songwork/> (accessed 28 October 2024). Based on this session, an earlier video article has been published (Spatz 2022).

7. The definition of the *dreamvoice* presented in this article derives from my Ph.D. (Krawczyk 2021). It has been published in Krawczyk and Spatz (2021) and will be included in the forthcoming 2025 book chapter for *Creak: Theories and Practices of Pulse Phonation*, edited by Francesco Venturi.



Figure 1: Ben Spatz and Ilona Krawczyk, Screenshot from the Judaica Laboratory Session, 2017. Courtesy of the Urban Research Theatre.

VIDEO: TRANSCRIPT

[00:02] *On the one hand, I feel like my whole body is singing and on the other, like my body is not there and something else is singing* (Interviewed Performer 1: Bang 2016).

[00:09] *I become a pipe filled up with air, or a pipe which doesn't need air, a transmitter, a vessel. The sound flows, vibrates through me, and the whole of me is vibrating with it* (Interviewed Performer 2: Kurdej 2016).

[00:24]

Chanting has been used throughout the world for thousands of years for worship, ritual, strengthening community and healing. [It] is both a ubiquitous and ancient practice with many traditions such as Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, and Yogic traditions believing chanting to be a way of altering states of awareness and reaching full human potential.

(Perry et al. 2022: n.pag.)

[00:45] Footage from Judaica project | Laboratory session 31 July 2017

[02:53]

Grotowski [...] demonstrates the spiritual importance of physicality. His work literally maps the New Age experience into the body of the performer, renegotiating the terms of spiritual experience. The traditional Christian religions that manifest Augustinian theology are negated through the strength of his inclusion of the body.

(Christof 2017: 103)

[03:38] When the voice becomes a vessel, 'you don't know if it is you who is bringing about this voice or the voice that is bringing about you, and where the source of the sound is – ...

[03:50] ... in your mouth, [in] your chest, in your lungs, in your stomach, in your groin, or maybe in the room's walls, ceiling, or maybe in distant celestial bodies, in the crystal spheres of the universe' (Flaschen 2010: 149).

[04:50] Ben:

What arises for me now as the message from our paired dreambodies is the problem of the human shifted by a critical perspective into another formulation: the problem of whiteness. Now I see the whiteness of our bodies as undeniably related to our quest for the animalistic and our desire to recover our dreambodies.

[04:55]

The Bible, the Greeks: What is the nature of these texts' openness to the whole world? On the one hand, for Levinas, they are available to the whole world; on the other hand, they *are* the whole world. The whole world is in these texts and the refusal of these texts, the failure to enter into them is also a failure to enter into the world [...]. At issue is the possibility and desirability of avoiding song which is associated with intoxication, sleep, lack of seriousness, the technoprimitivity that attends modern audiovisual distraction.

(Moten 2018: 11, 25, original emphasis in Spatz 2022: 9:55–10:27)

[05:30] Ilona:

I see Ben approaching me and realize that I am standing between two columns. This realization, together with what I hear in my voice, leads me to visualize some kind of temple in which I am a sort of mediator between the worlds – earth and spirit – who calls upon heaven/ god/ demiurge, or perhaps this persona in me, who is from the spiritual world.

[05:49] *I direct my eyes and my hands towards the ceiling while moving my voice towards higher notes in the head resonator. Through this I try to connect with humanity's spiritual nature and, in a sense, get out of my body.*

[06:31] *I build up more and more tension in my muscles, particularly in the pelvic area. Somehow, I sense that this is the place of division and tear between the two worlds, animal and human.*

[06:56] Ben:

I too see a clash between lower and higher, between the animal and what I am wrestling with as the written word.

[07:04] *I am reading from a book, but I am speaking its words according to a melody: a wordless mystical melody from a Jewish tradition.*

[07:12] *In a very concrete way, I am using this song to create a bridge between an academic text and my own embodied sounds and rhythms, mirroring in my own way the vertical struggle Ilona describes.*

8. The dogmas, settled by the Roman Catholic Church, are Mother of God (431), Perpetual Virginity (649), Immaculate Conception (1854) and Assumption (1950).

[07:59] Ilona:

I listen to Ben chanting the text of the book. I am exhausted, feeling surrendered to some power that made me go through all of this. I realize the pain of being kept in this vertical world that does not allow me to howl: the pain of division, suppression, and the cost of being vertical.

[08:32] '[O]ne access to the creative way consists of discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation' (Grotowski [1989] 2001: 378).

[08:49] Footage from Dreamvoice performance-installation | Rehearsal 27 January 2019

COMMENTARY/CONCLUSIONS

The sequence from the Judaica project displayed in the video showed how conscious and unconscious phenomena of the *dreambody* and *dreamvoice* can manifest in an open or experimental context, generating a dramaturgy of performance practice through following and amplifying body and voice signals. More than that, it made me acknowledge something important about my identities. As a Polish woman who was baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith, and who at the same time has a close connection with nature deriving from Slavic Pagan mythology and beliefs, I often struggle with the perception and placement of the body in Christianity, particularly in relation to the four dogmas about Holy Mary.⁸ Looking at them from a feminist perspective, I perceive these dogmas as a tool for disembodiment, disconnection from nature and damaging women's connection with their bodies. Although during the session with the Judaica project, my intention was to work on the process of embodying voice, the realizations I made through the *dreamvoice* gave me a chance to touch upon some aspects of my cultural background and life experience. It also inspired my imagination and creativity to explore this sequence further in the 'Dreamvoice' performance-sound installation, which was the final piece for my practice-as-research Ph.D.

In the performance devising, the struggle of the division between the worlds and the paradox of the body's role in Christianity related to the figure of the Messiah, I, therefore, associated with Mary – the link between the worlds, the mother of the Messiah and the woman submitted to greater forces. On the vocal/musical level, I decided then to use *Ave Maria* by Schubert – a composition from classical music that would first require me to use a head register and from which I could then carry on with my *dreamvoice* expression manifested during laboratory session with Judaica project – the voice cracking and breaking between registers. The heightened state of presence I would achieve whenever I performed *Ave Maria* with the breaking sounds would turn my voice into a vessel but in a very different way from my previous experiences.

Singing has always been a means of expression that would transport me to a different world. In the past, at my younger age singing in church in a choir, I felt I was becoming a vessel, a transmitter between the people I sang to and God. Or I felt as if I was connecting to God through my voice while singing. As if I was becoming this voice, a vibration in which my whole body would disappear, or as if my voice was bigger than my body. Within that state, in these moments, my singing voice would touch people deeply, and move something within them, as they would often come to me afterwards to share

their experience. When I sang in theatre, I would often experience physical reactions, including numbness in my hands and arms. All my body would be trembling. When I was singing Vodou songs during workshops at Grotowski Institute, the spiritual experience of becoming a vessel would reappear to an extent I would almost faint out of its intensity.⁹ However, during the Judaica session and while singing Ave Maria, my *dreamvoice* breaking between the registers brought me to another dimension of a vessel. This time, my voice became a vessel of more physical aspect. It would return the Holy Mary to her body, to her humanity. It would express the pain of the oppressed, restrained voices and bodies of women but not – as in Grotowski's framework – of my ancestors. My voice would connect with women's experiences of tamed physiology, the taboo of menstruation, voices not permitted to express affective sounds and 'seeing them in relation to their social context' (Wehr 1989: 124). Engaging with the archetypal figure allowed my voice to become the vessel of collective experience across times, cultures and spaces. It inspired both Ben and me to seek ways of fulfilling our desire to recover our bodies in our respective areas of wrestling. Concerning all the above manifestations, the voice as a vessel escapes a static, singular definition. With the shifting and multiple identities, it has the potential to bridge different aspects of the collective unconscious, whether spiritual, social or psychological.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

The ethical committee of the University of Huddersfield has approved the research related to Krawczyk's Ph.D. (including the interviews in the article and the Dreamvoice performance). All the interviewees and performers signed Participant Consent forms which Krawczyk included in her Ph.D. submission before the viva. The University of Huddersfield has also been the institution for the Judaica project's ethical approval.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Voices and bodies as navigators and educators

ABSTRACT

Starting with the axiom that embodied knowledge is the only mode of knowledge we possess, this essay argues that courage is a key virtue for artistic and philosophical research. It is rare for our cultural institutions to recognise or reward this virtue. The exploration of our somatic relations to ideas has largely been sidelined as a 'merely subjective' pursuit. The most obviously embodied arts such as dance and song are generally presumed to have (at best) a trivial relationship to knowledge. I argue that these arts provide a vast network of under-explored roads to knowledge due to their proximity to the pre-conditions for being alive at all. Breathing, vocalising and moving are essential to thought and knowledge. The emergent field of performance philosophy explores how rigorous and repeatable experiments in somatic thinking are possible and desirable.

Truthfulness – I favour any *skepsis* to which I might reply: 'Let us try it!' But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit of any experiment. That is the limit of my 'truthfulness', for there courage has lost its right.
(Nietzsche 1882, original emphasis)

I have never felt at ease with the term *embodied knowledge*. It is a flag of convenience bearing the stain of an impossible distinction, for I have no idea what *disembodied knowledge* might be. It seems better to think of gradations: some ways of knowing are skin-deep and almost cosmetic. Others are neuro-linguistically encoded and many more are woven into our very bones.

KEYWORDS

embodied knowledge
performance
philosophy
ritual
somatic trust
courage

The wide and vital field called *performance philosophy* explores and elaborates these somatic ways of knowing via a range of activities which include, but are not limited to, drama, poetry, dance, music and voice. Professor Cull Ó Maoilearca wisely declines anything but the most provisional definition of the movement because ‘the great vitality of the field lies in its very multiplicity, mutability and openness to ongoing collaborative authorship’ (2020: 3).

Performance involves layers of ambiguous intimacies. Consider the world-class boxer surrounded by a howling crowd and the immense technical apparatus broadcasting this blood sacrifice. Or the school play, its simple narrative well-known to all in the audience yet capable of summoning tears which are very far from simple and well-known. Or the visitor beside the hospital bed neither knowing nor caring if his mumbled words are addressed to Jesus, Allah, Papa Legba or the Tao. In their variously strict and loose ways, these are highly ‘authentic’ performances related to rituals. No matter how subtle or wild a performance might be, it must bear some elements of ritual to be recognizable as a performance.

There are rituals in which the performative elements have been stripped out to the extent that the actions are deadened to a habit – the rituals of using a toilet or brushing our teeth every morning. These were once challenging performances aimed at pleasing a parental audience. There is a similar disavowal of performativity with the facial expressions and gestures we deploy in the world of work and from which Sartre (1993: 167–69) and Laing (1969: 44) developed nuanced lines of thought. As I write, I give names and dates in the ritual of referencing, seldom pausing to wonder how these dead strangers retain their powers to make me remember them.

Rites, rituals and liturgies affirm an established order. The habits of scholarship serve us well: the *tyranny* of convention prevents ideas from collapsing into vague blobs. As Hay points out in her contribution to this volume, language is not intrinsically unhelpful but, ‘a reconceptualization of language, rather than a dismissal of it, is required here’ (219 in this issue). We build our prose like upside-down bricklayers, line by line, top to bottom and the writings *house us*. We can be grateful that our rituals affirm our sense of living in an ordered whole, a *cosmos* rather than a chaos.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to allow the main function of rituals to eclipse all their *other* powers. Performances can also facilitate the destruction of the established order. Bataille knew this well: at the highest point of intensity, our *working model of the world* breaks up or breaks down or breaks through – into *communion* (cited in Trebežnik 2024). The fact that our performances tend to morph into unfelt habits or mere transactions is not the *fault* of the intensities and immensities with which the performance fails to resonate.

Our everyday actions – Nietzsche (1880) refers to them as the nearest things – remain saturated with sacred and philosophical potentials. To my way of thinking, this is related to Blake’s call, ‘To see the World in a grain of sand/ And heaven in a wild flower/ Hold infinity in the palm of your hand/ And eternity in an hour’ (1995: 208). Such infinities are not spatial or temporal models expanded to a maximum and then somehow ‘beyond’. They are co-performances with overwhelming intensities. Here the possibilities for encountering *the sacred* might multiply any banal incident into an act of greater-than-cosmic proportions. God or the Over-human or the Tao might be encountered in brushing one’s teeth or in an online dance class. The glory of the nearest things is frequently catalysed by the news that death is very close. McKenna (2014) said of his fast-moving brain cancer: ‘When it first happened and I got the diagnosis,

I could see the light of eternity, *a la* William Blake, shining through every leaf. I mean, a bug walking across the ground moved me to tears’.

Here is the diagnosis for all of us. Death is always close. And so is life. Whether we take time to acknowledge it or not, they are performing with us and we with them. Nietzsche asks us to attend to the nearest things, to seek in our breath and flesh and habits of the body all we might ask for from ‘heaven’ or ‘eternity’. In seeking relations to ‘the more-than human world’ (246 in this issue), we may encounter the far-out by exploring the far-in.

The contributors to this Special Edition have provided working examples of how ideas, affects and bodies can interweave and function through praxis. They are not concerned with telling us what to believe. The mode of education here is not based on pouring purified information into empty vessels. Their contributions are practical guides detailing courageous intimate struggles and laboratory processes. Messy laboratories, sure enough, as bodies will be, but filled with procedures which have worked for the writer-practitioners and their collaborators. These procedures can be re-tested and adapted by any interested party. Techniques can be evaluated right now, by you, for free. The somatic-pneumatic laboratory is open to all who care to use it.

Critics may object that there is something unduly mystical or too *personal* about claims that exercises in bodily expression may provide routes to new resonances, sensations and knowledge. Such criticisms can be met in the spirit of Nietzsche’s comment on truthfulness and courage. We need only to ask, ‘[h]ave you tried this?’.

If so and your results are vastly different – great! Let us talk! And if you have not tried it, why are you talking about it? In the latter case, it is like arguing about the merits of a musical performance one has seen a photograph of but never heard.

I anticipate another objection: ‘Have you not seen the news? What use is song and dance in a time of catastrophe, war and tyranny?’.

Setting aside the question of whether we should trust an aggregate of commercially driven journalists and internet algorithms to determine what the world’s most urgent problems are, we might respond that all suffering is linked. The micro-political, the somatic and the intensely personal are just as crucial to human flourishing as the ‘great men fighting great wars’ model of reality. Perhaps more so. The smallest things, the nearest things, retain their intimate claims on the sacred.

Artistic and academic courage is increasingly discouraged by an expansive managerial apparatus geared more towards institutional marketing than truthfulness and courage. Any performance, gesture or voice which resists the habitual reduction of bodies (of flesh, of thought, of work) to tokens and transactions is much to be encouraged, however small it may seem. I admire the courage of all involved with this Special Issue and I thank them for their commitment to risk and experiment.

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