



Libraries and Learning Services

# University of Auckland Research Repository, ResearchSpace

## Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognize the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

## General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the [Library Thesis Consent Form](#) and [Deposit Licence](#).



*“Sarvakhalvidam Brahman”*

Everything is Brahman

*“Aham Bhramasmi”*

I am Brahman (the absolute)



**Mouna in 15'40", Catapulted into a larger realm.**  
Creating a hybrid dance through silence

**Thamizhvanan Veshnu Narayanasamy**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Masters in Dance Studies, The University of Auckland, 2016.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the practice of silence: specifically the silence engaged in the creative process of choreographing a hybrid dance performance and, to discover the methodologies and significance of silence used in this form of dance. The choreography expresses my research question; **how can I create a hybrid dance performance through the choreographic ‘Practice of Silence’?**

The methodology of this practice-led research is that of *Silencing*, which I can best describe as the quietening of the body and the mind through meditative practices, to discover the manifestation of the ‘performance of silence’. The methodology is supported by a phenomenological hermeneutic study together with a rhizomatic arrangement of the ongoing insights through choreographic exploration. Within this structure a dance performance and a written exegesis make up the thesis and each part supports the other. The dance work is a solo piece presented as the output of reflections from journals kept by me, as the choreographer, after time spent in the rehearsal studio experimenting with dance movements following periods of meditative silence.

I set out to carefully describe the feelings and thoughts of my dance body, the awareness of how it feels to move following studio practise and reflective writing, using silence as the creative source in order to manipulate time and space. My background is that of a choreographer and dancer of Asian dance genre (Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Joget and Terinai) and martial arts (Kalaripayattu, Silat, Tae Kwon Do).

As part of my exploration into the realms of silence I reviewed the practices of meditation and self-reflection in dance. I am not alone as there are other researchers (Bright, 2010; Christensen & Weinman, 2014; Denesha, 2014; Lalitaraja, 2012) and choreographers (Lin, *Songs of the Wanderers*, 1999) investigating in this field of inquiry.

In my search for literature to the hermeneutical approach to this study I have looked into the findings of dance researchers (Andresen, 2011; DeLeon, 2005; McNamara, 1999) who have sought to discover the nature and importance of embodied knowledge in choreography and performance. The findings of other dance researchers demonstrate the acknowledgment of mind body centering techniques in the choreographic process, however there are occasions the notion of silence tends to be undervalued and may require greater appreciation for its contribution to my own creative journey. Nevertheless I found there is an expanding body of research and a growing number of adherents who are advocating the benefits of contemplative techniques across all modes of learning because it allows the individual time to process what they have learnt and transform it into what they believe and therefore become their 'knowing'.

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank my patience for having done this thesis/exegesis.

Gregory Keating, my partner in life for his encouragement to finish this work with dignity and who continues to support me in all my passionate under-takings, besides making sure I eat and have my glass of wine.

A special thanks to Dr Mark Harvey for his supervision regardless of many divergent moments between us, to maintain a cheerful, caring and safe position and to make sure I finish this work according to academic integrity.

Dr Alys Longley who first observed my creative writing abilities and coaxed me to a new level of expressing myself as an artiste.

Dr Carol Brown who with affability, exchanged warmth with substance towards my progress.

Dr Rosemary Martin for the promising conversation I had with her on telephone, the very first time when I enquired about this course, which has led me so far.

Dr Ralph Buck who related to me accordingly and appropriately when necessary.

Dr Chandrabhanu a reliable friend, for the stimulating discourse on dance anthropology and the many facets of dance and life in general.

Fred Harrison for his enthusiastic participation in engineering the sound.

My mother for her compassion, endurance, humility, strength and love.

My dance Gurus, from the Classical dance genre and the contemporary dance field.

My brothers for backing me up for choosing dance as a career.

My family and friends for their admiration towards me.

The staff members at Dance Studies, National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries,  
The University of Auckland, for their support.

And finally thank all who have showed their interest in my work to bring themselves forward with kind gestures to say, "How are you going with your Master's, Veshnu?"

Thank you.

## Table of contents

<b>1. Glossary</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. Notes to Illustrations</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. Introduction</b>	<b>25</b>
Cues	25
Positions	26
Backdrop	28
Staging	32
Lighting	33
Programme	34
Techniques	37
Dialogue	39
Mouna	41
Script	44
Presentation	45
<b>4. The Jewel of Silence</b>	<b>51</b>
Ritual or sacred silence	54
On the subject of sacred silence and sacred sound	55
Silence and Stillness	56
Forced or Oppressive silence	57
Performing with Silence	62
Creative silence	64
<b>5. Silence in Tacit Knowing</b>	<b>69</b>
Silence and Tacit insights in the work of other Choreographers	77
<b>6. The Praxis of Silence</b>	<b>83</b>
Silence of the Yantra	87
Noble silence in Vipassana	89

<b>7. Phenomenology of a Hybrid Dance Exploration</b>	<b>93</b>
Listen	112
Reflect	119
Internalise	123
The Performance Language	127
Fred and I	129
Reflections of the Actual Performance	134
Drawing the Curtain	140
<b>8. Return to Silence</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>9. References</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>10. Appendix: Programme Notes from Performance</b>	<b>150</b>



## **Glossary**

<b>Abhinaya</b>	The skill of expressive movements and gestures as an Indian aesthetic art form.
<b>Atman</b>	The Soul, the 'Self' within.
<b>Bhagavad Gita</b>	A 700 verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit that is part of a greater text called the Mahabharata. Hindu traditionalists assert that it was written in the third or fourth millennium BCE however that is contested by scholars who date it fifth century to the second century BCE.
<b>Bharatanatyam</b>	One of the eight forms of Indian Classical dance recognised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy of Music and Dance of India. It originated out of ritualised temple dances in South India 2500 -2000 BCE but fell into decline with the waves of incursions first by the Muslims from the north of India and then the British colonialists. It was revived into its current form in the early part of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.
<b>Bhava</b>	Emotions, feelings and moods conveyed by a performer.
<b>Buddhism</b>	A nontheistic religion or philosophy that encompasses a variety of beliefs, spiritual practices and traditions largely based on teachings attributed to Gautama Buddha who is accepted to have lived sometime between 560 to 480 BCE. Two major extant branches of Buddhism are generally recognized by scholars: Theravada and Mahayana. Theravada has a widespread following in Sri Lanka and South East Asia. Mahayana is generally found throughout East and North Asia.
<b>Brahman</b>	The ultimate reality, entirety of the universe, truth, divine, supreme spirit, cosmic principles, knowledge.
<b>Dravidian</b>	Native speakers of any of the Dravidian languages of South Asia. The most commonly spoken are Brahui, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil Telegu and Tuku. They form majority of the population of South India and have a distinctive culture compared to the Indo-Aryans who predominate North India.

<b>Guru</b>	A revered counsellor or teacher.
<b>Hindu</b>	In this text refers to anyone who regards himself or herself as culturally, ethnically or religiously adhering to aspects of Hinduism.
<b>Hinduism</b>	Variouly described as a religion, or a way of life, originating and found mostly in the Indian sub-Continent. Contains a broad range of philosophies, it is a family of linked religious cultures bound by shared concepts, recognisable rituals and textual resources. Within this classification there are various denominations each with an interwoven diversity of beliefs and practices.
<b>Joget</b>	Traditional Malay dance that originated in Malacca where it is better known as Chakunchak. It was influenced by the Portuguese dance of Branyo.
<b>Kalaripayattu</b>	A martial art which originated as a style in Kerala India mid-13 <sup>th</sup> century.
<b>Karanas</b>	Codified synchronised body movements. There are 108 classified ‘transitions’ in the Natya Shastra.
<b>Karmic</b>	The predetermination of current life circumstances according to actions accrued in a previous life.
<b>Kathak</b>	One of the eight forms of classical Indian dance traces its origins to the nomadic bards of northern India, known as Kathakars or storytellers.
<b>Kavadi</b>	A decorated bamboo arch or pole carried in Thaipooam Festival, usually with a brass pot of milk which is used in an offering at a temple dedicated to the god Muruga.
<b>Mananam</b>	Reflect, deep thought as in reflective practices.
<b>Mantra</b>	A sound, syllable, word or group of words, which when uttered are believed to have spiritual powers.
<b>Mouna</b>	In this thesis means silence. Alternate spelling is Mauna.
<b>Mudra</b>	Hand, finger or body gesture with a ritual significance. One hundred and eight mudras are used in regular Tantric rituals.
<b>Muruga</b>	A Hindu deity, the god of war, also known as Murugan, Kumara, Skanda or Subramaniya.

<b>Natya Shastra</b>	The distinctive Indian text on the performing, dance music and theatre. It written during the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE and is traditionally attributed to the scholar Bharata.
<b>Nidhidhyasanam</b>	Internalise.
<b>Odissi</b>	One of the eight forms of Indian Classical dance. It originates from the state of Odisha, in Eastern India. It is the oldest surviving dance form of India on the basis of archaeological evidences.
<b>Om</b>	One of the most important Hindu spiritual symbols and sounds. The primordial sound of the universe. It refers to Atman and Brahman.
<b>Pali</b>	Indo-Aryan language believed to have spanned a period 600 BCE to 1000 CE.
<b>Parampara</b>	Lineage of knowledge passed in oral transmission by Gurus to Shishya.
<b>Rasika</b>	A connoisseur who is able to appreciate, or enlightened knowledgeable spectator of Indian performing arts.
<b>Rasa</b>	Literal meaning is the essence, the juice or the taste primarily evoked in the observer of a work of art. Common emotions or the dominant emotional state in a performing art. The interpretation and usage varies widely according to the genre of work and the school of training of the artist.
<b>Sanskrit</b>	Indo-Aryan language believed to be a standardised lingua-franca of the “old period’ 2000 BCE to 600 BCE.
<b>Shaman</b>	A person who practises Shamanism.
<b>Shamanism</b>	The practice of entering an alternate state of consciousness, by way of a ritualised trance whereby the practitioner is regarded as having access to, and influence in, the spiritual world.
<b>Shantam</b>	Peace, quietness, tranquillity, solemn silence.
<b>Shishya</b>	Pupil bonded to a Guru for the purposes of acquiring knowledge.
<b>Shravanam</b>	Listening with intention.
<b>Silat</b>	A Malaysian art form of self-defence, practised as a martial art or accompanied by drums as a ceremonial display or dance.
<b>Tae Kwon Do</b>	A martial art from Korea.

<b>Tamil</b>	In this text refers to someone who is a member of the Dravidian language group who speak Tamil as their mother tongue and trace their ancestry to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
<b>Tantra</b>	An ancient Indian tradition of beliefs and meditation and ritual practices that seeks to channel the divine energy of the universe into the domain of the human consciousness.
<b>Terinai</b>	A court dance from Perlis, a northern state of Malaysia.
<b>Thaiposam</b>	Alternate spelling of Thaipusam.
<b>Thaipusam</b>	A Hindu festival celebrated mostly by the Tamil community on the full moon in the Tamil calendar month of Thai (Usually January or February).
<b>Theravada</b>	See previous notes on Buddhism.
<b>Vedas</b>	A large body of texts originating in India sometime between 2000 BCE and 1100 BCE. Composed in Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of scripture in Hinduism.
<b>Vedic</b>	In this textual context it references the mythology, philosophy and theology that arose contemporaneously to the recording and writing of the Vedas.
<b>Vibuthi</b>	Holy ash made from burning wood and cow dung usually applied to the forehead.
<b>Vipassana</b>	A practice in the Buddhist tradition which means an insight into the true nature of reality, seeing things as they really are.
<b>Yantra</b>	A mystical diagram from the Tantric traditions of India. They are used for worship of deities in temples or at home, as an aid in meditation, for the benefits given by their supposed occult powers based on Hindu astrology and tantric texts.
<b>Yoga</b>	A mental, physical, and spiritual discipline and philosophy which originated in India. The origins of yoga have been speculated to date back to pre-Vedic Indian traditions, most likely developed around the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.

## Notes on Illustrations

All the photographs of the dancer are that of the author/researcher are Screenshots taken from a video that was used to record the performance on Friday, 6 November 2015.

The video was recorded by the University of Auckland Dance Faculty and a copy of my performance was sent to me for my records. All the editing and manipulating of the final product was done by me with Photoshop.

The Shri Yantra on pages 20 and 131 is taken from:

*<http://4amh7laj9co8nzlx22wbwyc7.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/welcome.jpg>*

The Buddha head on page 88 is taken from:

*<http://nalandabodhi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Buddha-Ponlop-Statue-Head-WEB.jpg>*

The Om symbol on page 66 is taken from:

*[http://upload.wikimedia.org/Wikipedia/commons/o/od/Tamil\\_om.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/Wikipedia/commons/o/od/Tamil_om.png)*

The rest of the art illustrations are copies of my journal which I used to record notes in reflective moments and sketches that I used in studio research to work out ways of presenting the dance work and from personal objects photographed in my home.

Page	3	Veshnu
Page	20	Sri Yantra
Page	22	Veshnu
Page	28	Veshnu Journal sketch
Page	29	Personal Sculptures
Page	36	Veshnu
Page	43	Veshnu Journal sketch
Page	50	Veshnu
Page	59	Veshnu
Page	66	Om
Page	72	Veshnu Journal Sketch
Page	80	Veshnu Journal Sketch
Page	88	Buddha Head
Page	96	Veshnu
Page	100	Veshnu
Page	103	Veshnu
Page	120	Veshnu
Page	125	Veshnu Journal Sketch
Page	131	Sri Yantra
Page	137	Veshnu



*Mano Buddhi Ahankara Chitta Ninaham  
Nacha Shrotra Jihve Na Cha Ghrana Netre  
Nacha Vyoma Bhoomir Na Tejo Na Vayu  
Chidananda Rupa Shivoham Shivoham*

I am not mind, nor intellect, nor ego,  
nor the reflections of inner self.

I am not the five senses.

I am beyond that.

I am not the ether, nor the earth,  
nor the fire, nor the wind.

I am indeed,

That eternal knowing and bliss, Shiva,  
love and pure consciousness.

(Adi Shankaracharya)



*I am in an open ground.*

*Where non-interference and intuitive processes are taking place.*

*My dance has enriched me to follow the path of meditation and self-enquiry.*

*Where my silence becomes the director, my intuitions become the choreographer, my breath becomes the dancer and my awareness is the audience.*

*(Veshnu)*

---





Silence is an ocean.

Speech is a river.

When the ocean is searching for you don't walk into the language-river.

Listen to the ocean and bring your talky business to an end

(Rumi, 1995, p. 198)

# Introduction

This thesis explores the personal experiences of creating a hybrid dance work from the creative insights that silence yields.

## Cues

In my experience some contemporary dance work can arise from inspirational music, literature or concepts stimulated from studio rehearsals where dancers have discussed social themes or issues that give rise to the impetus or purpose of their performance art. I wanted to embark from a point of soundlessness, where I am only engaged with breathing and the movements created by allowing my body to access its physical memory of all past dance. I am also interested in the uses of silence in the performance outcome as a way of drawing the audience into the work.

The final dance work titled, *Mouna in 15'40"*; *Catapulted into a larger realm*, is choreographed from hours of solo dance rehearsal throughout the year leading up to the final exposition. The choreography expresses my research question; **how can I create a hybrid dance performance through the choreographic 'Practise of Silence'?**

*I want to be a craftsman, a maker, a doer, a wonderer, a carer, a worker and not just an artist.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **Positions**

I begin by introducing and positioning myself as a dance researcher born in Singapore and educated bi-lingually under the Cambridge International Examinations system with a South Indian cultural background (The Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education examinations are set by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, while mother tongue subjects in Chinese, Malay and Tamil, are set by the Singapore Ministry of Education).

I have been educated and have performed in several Asian dance styles, (Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Joget and Terinai) and trained in martial arts (Kalaripayattu, Silat, Tae Kwon Do) in Australia, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore. I have been an established professional performing artiste for over 30 years and have travelled internationally as a cultural ambassador for the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (Nowadays known as Singapore Tourism Board). The fortuitous period early in my career allowed me to see and experience other different cultural and dance performances in many cities whilst traversing the countryside in between venues.

Parallel to my development in Indian classical dance is an involvement with contemporary Western dance and experimental research projects. I have choreographed and produced new works for various dance ensembles and companies, and have opened my own dance schools in Singapore and New Zealand (Jaya Dance and Sri Vidalaya Foundation).

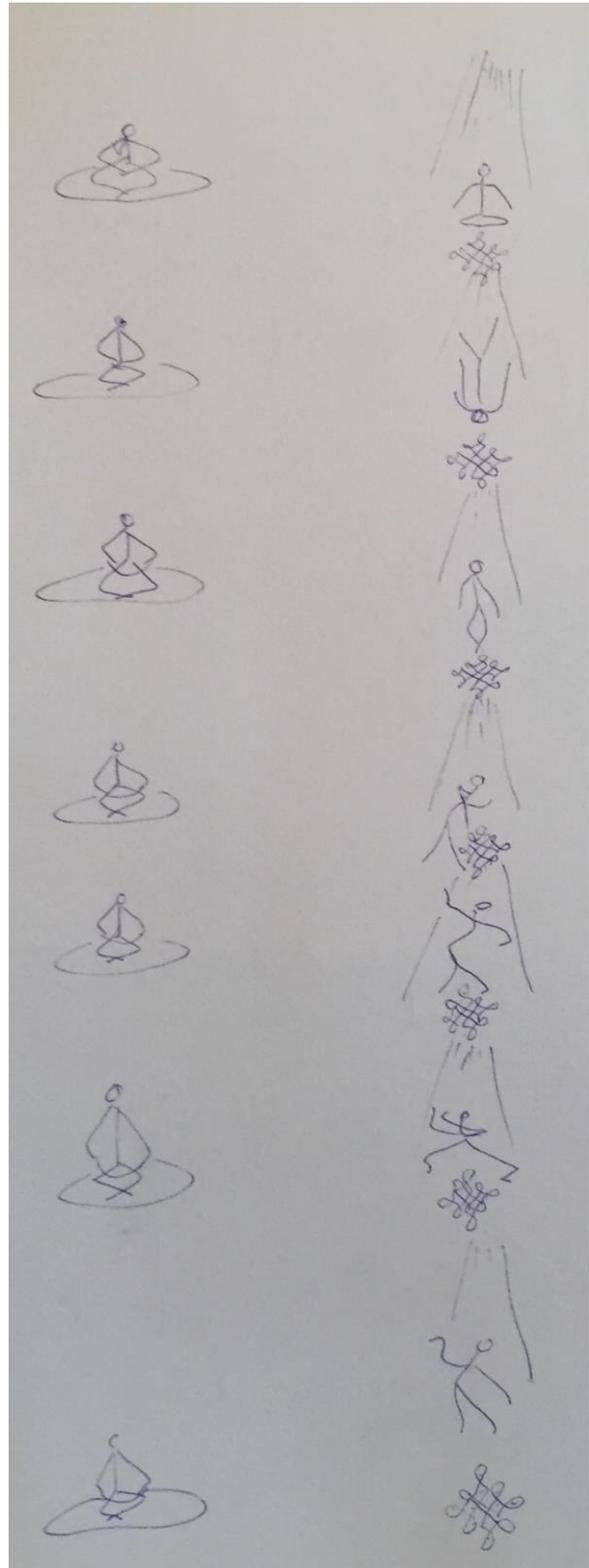
I am instilled in Dravidian culture with appreciation to Vedic traditions, simultaneously engaging into Tantric philosophy, practicing yoga and meditation. In this context I am referring to fact that I speak and write in Tamil, one of the Dravidian language groups found predominately in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent, distinct from the Indo-Aryan languages found in the northern part. Because of this, Dravidian culture is considered to carry arts, social customs and philosophies from the time of human settlement. My use of the term Vedic is to show that I have an understanding of The *Vedas*, ancient texts compiled before 1100 BCE, prior to the formative period that gave rise to ‘modern Hinduism (Doniger, 2009; Radice, 1981; Staal, 2008). In this writing I am using the word Tantric in its wider sense to show my belief in shamanic practices (Doniger, 2009; Frawley, 1994; Sinha, 1993; Woodroffe, 2002). The summary of all this, forms the contextual arena that supports this inquiry.

## Backdrop

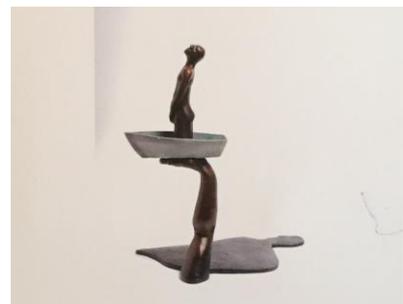
Like so many transnational artistes, I try and carry on my art practice wherever my nomadic wanderings take me and whenever I am confronted by the new gallery or stage, I reflect on what brought me to where I am, the present moment.

The answer for me is never a single simple response; rather it is an intricate weaving of the accidental opportunities together with planned choices of career prospects, personal relationships, a sense of adventure, spontaneity and an unbinding trust in *Karmic* destiny (predetermination of life). Personally I take comfort in my spirituality, my meditative practices which take me to a state of calm mindfulness, of non-judgemental observation of the milieu that I currently inhabit.

And then there is dance, which I describe as the elixir of my life. I have always danced for the sheer joy of the wholesome feelings that I get when I am engaged in moving my body. It does not matter for me if it is dance at a beach, night club, a temple, a wedding or a group performance, as long as I am dancing, even by myself, I feel euphoric.



I am known as ‘Veshnu the Dancer’ because it has come to define not only what I do to earn money, it is the artistic paradigm with which I relate to others and it is how I relate to my ‘self’ in my personal philosophy of life. In my dance these intertwining modalities, engage, reflect and energise in a spiral of self-knowing. It is within this setting of the quest for more self-knowledge that I hope I can contribute towards a learning pedagogy, which I propose to carry out in this research.





Whosoever knoweth the power of the dance, dwelleth in God.

(Rumi)

## Staging

This research is practice-led because I am now a researcher, who is first a practitioner, who has set out to discover answers to conceptual questioning that I have concerning the intersection of spiritual practices and dance performance. This is an expansive matter so I have tapered the inquiry to consciously explore the experience of looking at silence and the creative processes involved in a new dance performance.

I have come to understand and value the role that silence can play in dance both as theoretical device and as a source of creativity. Some of that early inspiration came from the writing of Jonathon Burrows:

One of the thoughts that I have, is how to present a work in silence or to have minimal accompanying music or sound effects as part of the performance... I am aware silence in dance is approached with as much intrepidation as nudity on stage... Silence during a performance can be uncomfortable for an audience; they can end up feeling like they are not allowed to breathe. (2010, p. 184)

I have been experimenting using silence to draw the audience in without the intention of making them feel uncomfortable. I am finding a balance between needing the silence as a dancer absorbed in the dance and providing the audience with a potentially contemplative and enjoyable dance performance. I found stimulation in the work of Stuart Sim, a critical theorist, who wrote on silence and how it can be used in apposite way, so in my work silence plays a role “as both a structural device and as a source of themes” (2007, p. 111).

## Lighting

I intend to carry out performative research, in the sphere of silence and in the realm of dance. I feel in witnessing and describing the actuality of the meditative processes and the experiment in the studio is important to me, not just to understand but also, to know that silence has the potentiality of being experienced and personally credible for me if I am to justify myself in the written part of the research.

This point is emphasised by Brad Haseman in his writing on practice-led performance research where he calls for clarification of arts investigation to be distinguished separately from orthodox research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research. “The ‘practise’ in ‘practice-led’ research is primary it is not an optional extra; it is the necessary precondition of engagement in performative research” (2006, p. 103).

The relationship between all forms of creative arts and that of research has seen much dialogue in the last two decades. The outcome of all the discussion has inspired several writers to interpret practice-led research and the importance of praxis, the ‘performing or performance of practising’. One such definition is given by other arts researchers as follows:

Thus a series of experiments, for example, is carried out in order to test a certain assumption, i.e. to solve a problem or answer a question. In the field of practice-led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived to be the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice is also the creator of the ideas. (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48)

Whilst the recording and routine of creative dance rehearsal is well underway, my intention in this exegesis is to further explore the praxis of silence. The interplay between the researching of literature and the documenting of findings in practice led research has been explored by Nithikul Nimkulrat and her advice on recording even sketches and photographs has been absorbed into my procedures (2007).

## **Programme**

In the first chapter I open by looking at the multifaceted ‘jewel of silence’ and interpreting several descriptions and opinions on silence. Silence has interdisciplinary perspectives and is subject to cultural variances.

In the second chapter I negotiate the research from writers who have looked at the arena of embodied knowledge as a way of assisting dancers to perform from ‘within their being’. The phenomenology of embodied experiences in the creative processes of dance choreography has been used by many dance researchers and I mention here just a few that I have investigated in my research. Janet Adler has written about it in regard to her discipline of ‘Authentic Movement’ (2011); Ann Cooper Albright has had three decades of experience with the phenomenology of dance (2011); Karen Barbour has written extensively about embodiment particularly from a feminist perspective (2004); Sondra Horton Fraleigh is known for writing about experiencing the ‘lived body’ (1999) and Maxine Sheets Johnson who was originally a dancer and choreographer turned to academia looking at the philosophy of dance (1984). Some of these studies and their phenomenological approach helped me to apply my findings and to understand the contextual analysis of literature from other academic writers and their performance studies.

In chapter three I survey the concepts discovered in my experience in the performing of the acts of silence. I will provide a brief description of the *Vipassana* meditation course which is becoming a popular method for anyone who wishes to understand the silence of themselves. There is a discussion on the significance of role that silence plays in learning practices and why there is an evolving literature around the need for a consideration of soundless reflection in creativity.

In the final chapter, I begin to illuminate the phenomenology of the work undertaken in the rehearsal studio when the hermeneutic processes of bringing together understandings of the research began to intertwine with the praxis of silence and the choreographic developments in creating the hybrid dance.



## Techniques

The methodology will be '**Silencing**' which I will validate by discussing the theoretical findings that other writers have made in their research, together with supportive commentary on my creation and enacting processes around the performed dance work. James Morley writing about conjuncture of embodied consciousness, Tantrism and Merleau-Ponty has noted, "Phenomenology needs a somatic methodology that can go beyond academic language..." (2008, p. 161).

I acknowledge that as I already have experiences and have formed my own meanings from them, I now need to review the experiences of others and interpret their sense of knowing. By theorising about their phenomena and looking for the overlapping shared understanding, I hope to bring to light some perception of the way we share the experience of watching a dance performance. The discursive output of my findings form an interweaving text, the reflective journal writing following studio practice and meditation, and the academic writing following research reading. The analysis and the interpretation of the texts and the way that they continually influence each other and form a 'hermeneutic circle' (McNamara, 1999) or as other researchers describes, it 'a hermeneutic spiral' (Andresen, 2011; Makela, 2009) as the process whereby the theory and the practice are overlapping one another in a supportive transcendence to come to the point of self-knowing.

*Silence is before and after. And it is more now.*

*(Veshnu)*



## Dialogue

The exegesis uses written language to explicate my thought processes whilst creating the work and from the synthesis of personal journal notes and findings. It is also used to converse with writings and insights by dance researchers and practitioners who are either equally intrigued, enthusiastic or activate reflections about the role silent reflection plays in the teaching of creativity.

This hybrid dance presentation employs a personal movement lexicon developed in an experimental/contemporary style whilst emanating from the embodied knowledge of dance movements that are remembered in my limbs from over 30 years of performing in Asian dance genres. Therefore on one level the exposition will be unique in the sense that I will dance something ‘created’ on the night of the performance, and yet some thematic motifs will be recognised as ‘known’.

At times I resist the word choreographer because in my earlier dance background we did not use that term, it was always *guru* (teacher) and that’s not because of a language difference or semantics. Traditional works were passed down by oral instruction from teacher to *shishya* (pupil) and within the special relationship other knowledge was also passed on, including esoteric knowledge and spiritual matters. The word used for a succession of teachers and disciples in ancient Indian culture is *parampara*. So it was not just the dance steps that were learned, but the motives and the mythology to permit further insight and inspiration. My work is not choreographed in the sense that I will produce the same movements every time, but neither is it casual improvisation. One researcher of performance studies, Juan M. Aldape Munoz, wrote that “Choreography is more than just a set of dance steps, it is also about embodied thought processes in formulating ideas and making choices” (2015, p. 62).

The audience may appreciate a work that draws them gradually into an understanding of my scripted intention, so the final stage of the work will have a core of slow and deliberate actions. It will begin the same way; have a central form which relies on the memory of many experimental rehearsals, before a planned conclusion. I am following the advice given by Burrows when he said “Choreography is a way to set up a performance that takes care of some of what happens, enough that the performer is free to perform” (2010, p. 105).

One key element of the whole exploration and dance presentation may be described as the spiritual dimension with which I approach and attest to my dance, and to my life. The research has included fieldworks from Eastern technique as in Vipassana meditation and by further analysing the yogic principals from Hindu philosophy. I found it useful to read the work of George Kalamaras because as a Western writer and educator he has researched meditation and silence from an Eastern point of view. Kalamaras incorporated his findings into a book that could be described as an ‘east-west crossover’, as it draws parallels in both philosophical approaches and tries to suggest that within silence and meditation there is no discrimination or bias, just acceptance of universal understandings (1994).

Silence during a performance can be uncomfortable for an audience;  
they can end up feeling like they’re not allowed to breathe

(Burrows, 2010, p. 184)

## Mouna

Mouna in 15'40" literally means, silence in 15 minutes and 40 seconds.

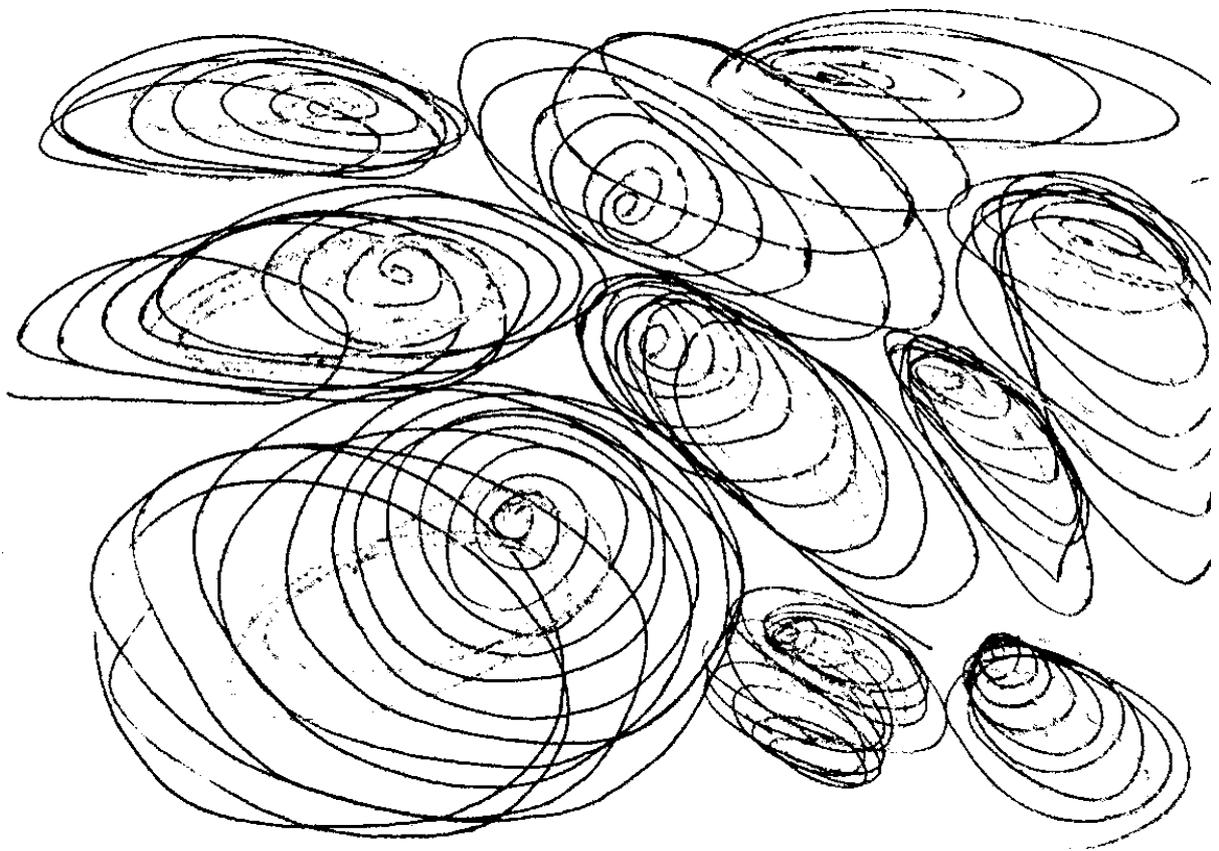
In Sanskrit the word **Mouna**, which is derived from the root word **mun**, which means to measure, has two meanings. The first is a silence, which is interpreted as a system, which embodies peace, strength, the only reality, and the aim and purpose of our existence. From this kind of silence comes a life force of power and a 'knowing'. The second meaning of Mouna is measurement as in the case of using 'measured words' whereby being in a state of mental awareness you remove what maybe unnecessary chaff from speech and say only what is required, which ultimately is powerful enough.

To this end I will comment here on the varied style of writing and presentation format that I have chosen in the following pages. As a dancer I communicate my creativity through my dance body and I find it linguistically unwieldy to put into words what the body expresses and what I feel. Phenomenological writing goes some way to addressing this quandary as it allows the author to express in his or her own words what can be described as a personal truth. On the topic of phenomenology in dance I began by researching the work of other Asian dancers who wrote about the transition of their traditional dance forms to the modern day theatre performances. One example is the work by Nandini Sikand (2010) is comprehensive in its detail and yet her engaging style of writing is inspirational because it seeks to demystify thoughts surrounding an esoteric dance and make it accessible to a wider audience. I have tried to use a similar approach in my work.

At certain points of the writing I have inserted a blank page with a red dot which I hope will encourage the reader to stop and become silent, to reflect on what has been said, to continue reading without pre-empting the unfolding presentation.

For dance students who struggle with traditional paradigms of academic writing, should use an “exploratory, risk taking and playful and interdisciplinary approach”

(Longley, 2011, p. 154)



## Script

As dancers we believe our bodies tell the story and our vocabulary is in the dance. What is required for the exegesis is some documentary evidence of the mental processes that gave rise to the physical engagement of studio practise, and finally to the performances. As an inspiration and guide to experimenting with different approaches to the layout of literature, I followed the advice and inspiration of Alys Longley, who argues for dance student who struggle with traditional paradigms of academic writing, to use an “exploratory, risk taking and playful and interdisciplinary approach” (2011, p. 154).

Interposed among the ‘academic writing’ is a sample of lyrical abstract thoughts from my personal journals, comments on the viewings of other dance work, musings on what I experience in the studio, poems of my mind and spiritual notes that help to keep me on the right track over the course of the year. Every now and then I have interspersed the writing with poems or quotes from scholars of other philosophies whose words resonated with me in my silence.

I found that keeping a personal journal both insightful and therapeutic to the major task of writing the exegesis. By practising writing often I was able to channel my focus and understanding of the choreographic process. These unedited and random ‘post-it-notes’ have been included because it is relevant to the process of my choreography. It too is part of the on-going process of sharing information of my creative experiences so that followers might expand on it if they wish. This also reflects the abstract, experiential and non-linear process that unfolded in the creation of the dance work. David Boud, a professor of adult education, encourages the use of personal journal writing in as a way of encouraging self-reflection. In considering what personal journal entries should be included in this writing, I am trustful that my “reflective activities should be distinguished from those graded” (2001, p. 17).

## Presentation

Finally a note as to the innovative presentation I have chosen which is deliberate, from an aesthetic viewpoint, and also reflects the way in which the research was conducted and the outcomes were assembled and comprehended.

The contemporary portal for inquiry has become the internet search for scholarly articles and references via a list of keywords devised after *silently* contemplating the direction my exploration will go. Or so I believed at the time. This kind of process, often referred as mind mapping, is designed to help the researcher catalogue the investigation and the source material, and keep the inquiry charted and coherent. A mind map is a diagrammatic representation used to visually organise information. Organised around a single concept the major ideas and themes connect to the centre by lines so that a spider web of ‘intelligence’ is produced. After an enormous amount of reading electronic articles and leafing through volumes of esoteric philosophy I became aware that the theory and the dance practice elements were not congruent because I had positioned both into separate silos in a seemingly one dimensional approach.

After many weeks of unenthusiastic scholarly research I was drawn to a recurring theme adopted by other arts researchers (Busch, 2008; Hagoood, 2009) who also express difficulty with restrictive analysis and sought a more multidimensional approach. The work of two French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, (1987) provided a much better map for me in understanding not only my question but also my methodology as I had been struggling to summarise my findings in a linear approach by following the work of others. The challenge of the phenomenological writing is to realise that whilst you have uniqueness in experience, it needs a shared knowledge for it to be interpreted and understood, and the map is the key.

The rhizomatic approach presents us with an altogether different map because it is not directing the reader to imitation as you would trace someone's footsteps. Perhaps it is leaving the field "open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" ( ibid p. 12). Rather than present a linear study which has a conclusion, I am presenting a work that has entry points and exits available to viewer in much the same way someone might browse a magazine.

This study maybe inspirational and relevant to dance teachers interested in mind body centering techniques as a creative driver and also practitioner researchers who want to promote the formation of their own hybrid dance styles. By understanding the methodology used in this study, dance researchers may be able to apply similar lines of inquiry and adapt techniques used in this template to create their own unique dance expressions in allowing or turning silence into a form of communication in dance. My final outcomes of this exegesis and the performance must also embrace inadequacies, since this is a work in progress and there is more to be discovered.

“You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold.  
That is how important you are!”

(Tolle, 2009, p. iv)



*I begin with silence.*

*Silence as in meditation.*

*I become aware of my breath.*

*In and out.....*

*I become aware of my body.*

*My arms, my legs, my head, my chest, my fingers, my toes.*

*I begin to move.*

*Slowly and quietly.*

*Deliberately and purposefully. I am aware of my breath, my body and my movements.*

*I am aware that I am dancing.*

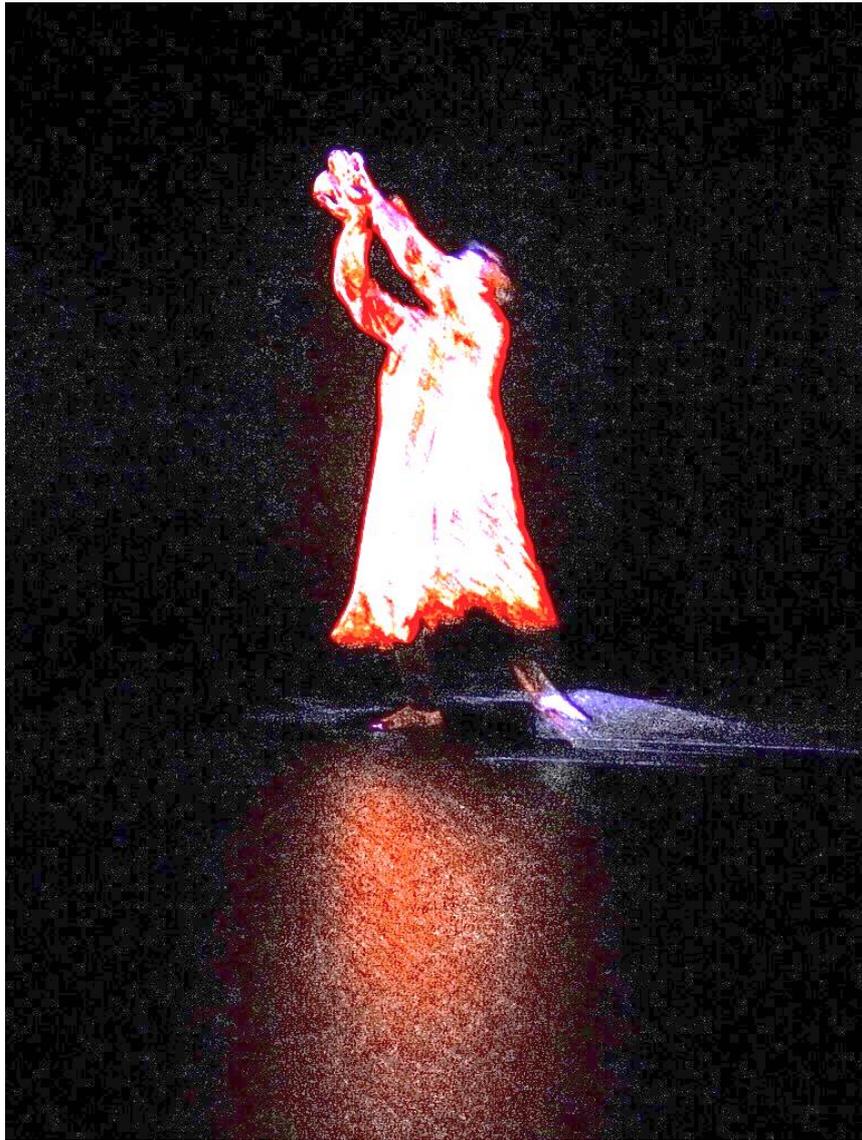
*I begin to create gestures with my hands and now I move my arms and my legs and my torso.*

*And then I begin to move my feet.*

*The new language has begun.*

*I am creating.*

*(Veshnu)*



# The Jewel of Silence

If you don't understand my silence how will you understand my words?

(Unknown)

*Silence is like a precious gem stone with many facets, many meanings that can be explored, and its significance should be valued as a treasure.*

*(Veshnu)*

This chapter starts with descriptions of practices in silence, which then contextualises my research processes, which in turn may shed some light onto another interrogation, why work with silence? In an attempt to provide some descriptions of silence I have examined as many viewpoints from creative artistes, dance choreographers, educationalists, linguists, religious and spiritual writers, as well as philosophers who delve into its ontological significance.

It can be problematic to define silence, as we have no measuring instruments or quantitative scales to measure silence with. On the one hand we can measure the quantity of sound, in decibels, or the speed at which sound travels in kilometres per hour. Perhaps this is what gives ground to the misconception that silence has negative aspects, the absence of form, and the deficit of assessable properties. However by framing silence qualitatively rather than just quantitatively it is easier to reconcile its constructive and positive aspects and its contribution and effect to our lives.

When describing silence most people would associate it with the absence of sound or the lack of speech. Definitions of silence often run into difficulties because of the complexity around the confining limits of language being applied to a phenomenon. This was noted by two psychotherapy researchers who were looking at the phenomenology of silence and solitude. “The experience of silence is clearly therefore not uniform, and is phenomenological in nature, often negatively interpreted” (Denham-Vaughan & Edmond, 2010, p. 8).

It can be challenging to give silence a singular definition because it can be interpreted in so many ways, it can be a personal understanding, which I will discuss with my own experiences or it can be referred to as a situation lacking in noise. Therefore I will provide several possible descriptions of silence, which are meaningful to me as they apply to my artistic awareness and my dance work.

Bernard Dauenhauer, a professor of philosophy, in his seminal text on the significance of silence, points out in the introduction that “Silence is a complex, positive phenomenon” (1980, p. vii). I will acknowledge that silence in a positive character rather than the lack or absence of noise or speech. Silence can be a positive activity that occurs in conjunction with other activities such as reading and writing. In performing arts such as mime and Butoh, silence is fundamental to the performance experience. In non-performing arts such as painting or sculpture, the artist often ‘performs’ in concentrated silence and the artistic result is quite often observed in the same manner. “Silence is not merely linked with some active human performance. It itself is an active performance” (p. 4).

*Settling into this moment is my God.*

*All beliefs are now useless, as it leads to further delusion.*

*Nowhere to go and nothing to do.*

*This is enough, be here, be silent.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **Ritual or Sacred Silence**

Liturgical silence in the Christian world is often associated with deep prayer and contemplative silence. There are several Christian religious orders founded on the belief that observing voluntary silence promotes a more meaningful approach towards a dialogue with God. Margaret Mary Funk, a member of a contemplative order, has written on the universal benefits of practising quietness in reaching out to a secular audience. She believes, despite her own subjective stance, that silence is not a dogma; it is an act, praxis of communicating wordlessly with the inner being. She felt when you observe someone who is silent; we are viewing the exterior of the being involved in an action. When we practice silence we are entering into a realm of the mind by disciplining the random thoughts and contemplating only the present space. “This praxis is the total contemplative rest of the body, emotions and mind. This is the inner work of the mind within the exterior observances and practices” (2013, p. 68).

## **Commemorative silence**

Closely related to liturgical and sacred silence is the quietness that anyone can express in secular situation such as a one minute of silence on ANZAC Day out of respect for the dead. People stop doing any activity and silently reflect on events of the past, some perhaps to relive embodied memories of time spent with loved ones no longer living.

## On the subject of sacred silence and sacred sound;

This is the symbol for the word *Om* (pronounced *ah-oo-um*) written in Devanagari script in Sanskrit, which is a spiritual icon in Hindu religion.



In my mother tongue Tamil, we write the same word as:



This word and its usage are sacred, as it is said before, during, and at the end of prayers. It is simultaneously an affirmation to the divine, the infinite, the all-encompassing, the whole world, the truth, the ultimate reality, the essence of life and the past the present and the future. This cosmic sound is believed by Hindus to have existed before the Universe was created, and from which the Universe sprang.

## Silence and Stillness

Silence is not merely an absence of sounds, words or utterances, so that it represents an absence of activity or a lack of discourse. Silence in Eastern philosophic traditions is regarded as important as the achievement or the creative consequence that manifest from silence. In Indian traditions, silence occupies a prominent position in a person's being. "The Sanskrit word "*Shantam* ", means more than the English "silence". It also means peace, quiet, restfulness, etc., and has the connotations of considerable solemnity" (Dauenhauer, 1980, p. 110). Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who also an author and teacher, has written on the Buddhist philosophies approach to the positive processes of silence and he explains it as; "Silence doesn't mean not talking and not doing things; it means that you are not disturbed inside. If you are truly silent, then no matter what situation you find yourself in you can enjoy the silence" (2009, p. 77).

From this perspective a second and more concrete observation is made that silence is as much a part of the performance as the auditory or visual aspects. That is to say those performances are bracketed by elements of silence on either side of the discursive or achieving elements and are therefore part of the whole (Dauenhauer, 1980). "Silence is a critical part of our character in this respect, intimately connected to our inner conception of ourselves; our private version of the unsayable" (Sim, 2007, p. 143).

Eckhart Tolle, a well-known author of spiritual books, says that silence can be seen either as the absence of noise, or as the space in which sound exists, just as inner stillness can be seen as the absence of thought, or the space in which thoughts are perceived (2009). Again the position of silence as a positive aspect is reinforced by Wreford Miller, an academic who chose the contemporary soundscape of silence as his subject, wrote "Silence is not simply the absence of sound or communication; it is an intrinsic part of any communication system" (1993, p. 3).

From a Western conceptual dance perspective, the well-known writer on performance studies, André Lepecki, calls for the stilling and in one sense the silencing of dance modernism's propensity towards movement, or its tendency for choreography to have movement for the sake of itself. (2006) In one way this relates to me, as for Lepecki, I believe in the stilling of my dance is to allow for the choreography to reveal and invite the audience to experience and observe rather than attempt to conceal all the background concepts through moving.

This perspective can be seen as a point of departure here due to its primarily Western ontologies, as I draw my research primarily through my Eastern dance experience and cultures that run largely parallel to Lepecki's analysis, in a number of ways; cultural values, lineage of techniques, spiritual insights and not locating my practice through modernist Western choreographic perspectives. (For instance, I do not use dance phrases, unlike modernist Western contemporary dance.)

## **Forced or Oppressive silence**

Because there is a popular notion that silence means an absence of sound, or a lack of discourse, there is an erroneous assumption that studying the sphere of silence would produce no relevant data as there is an absence of language or symbolism to analyse. In fact the lack of discourse serves only to prompt some researchers to discover if there is a conspiracy, an unusual circumstance or a forced situation at play.

Oppressive silence is a well-represented theme in feminist studies as it refers to the denial of a voice being heard in patriarchal dominated societies. Michal Pagis writes that this becomes the theme of a struggle to give voices to women and therefore silence is seen "as a forced situation, the outcome of power relations and the opposite to freedom" (2010, p. 311).

Silence of conspiracy occurs when there is a problem or controversial issue which is obvious to everyone who is present at the time but is deliberately ignored because if anyone spoke it would cause embarrassment, trigger arguments or is a social taboo. The idiomatic phrase that is common in this situation is 'the elephant in the room'. In all these descriptions of silence even though there is no sound uttered or noise made, there is intentionality in all the participants to perform in a soundless act.





*You know silence, but do you know noise?*

*Of course !.... without it, you will not know silence.*

*(Veshnu)*

## Performing with Silence

John Cage was a composer and performing artist who was concerned with sound and the absence of sound although he ascertained that there was no such thing as silence. In 1951, Cage visited an anechoic chamber, a room designed in such a way that the walls, ceiling and floor absorb all sounds made in the room, rather than reflecting them as echoes. Such a chamber is also externally sound-proofed. Cage entered the chamber expecting to hear silence, but he wrote later, "I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation" (1961, p. 8). This is interesting because when Cage could not find an external sound he found himself turning and listening inwards, to the sounds of his own body. Eric Voegelin was another philosopher who was concerned with the deep listening, to the silence within you, and then one begins to hear previously unnoticed sounds beginning to emerge.

Silence is not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening. This is listening as a generative process not of noises external to me, but from inside, from the body, where my subjectivity is at the centre of the sound production, audible to myself. Silence reveals to me my own sounds: my head, my stomach, my body becomes their conductor. (Voegelin, 2010, p. 83)

In my case, when my silence reveals to me the sounds of my body, I want to spontaneously respond with movements, to initiate all parts of me in such a way as to respond to the flow of ideas and move ecstatically through the performance space.

Two examples of silence in other arts performance are 4'33" by John Cage and *Breath* by Samuel Beckett which I have witnessed (Breath, 2015). The work by Cage was originally 'scored' for piano but requires the pianist to sit quietly at the keyboard for 4 minutes and 33 seconds (Larson, 2012). In *Breath*, the curtain rises on a stage filled with rubbish. There is a faint cry followed by a drawing then expiration of breath followed by another cry, all which originates off stage, then the curtain falls concluding a performance of perhaps 35 seconds. In both circumstances silence is deliberately constructed to have an effect on the audience, drawing them to come to their own interpretation by silently reflecting on what they are experiencing.

Silence should not be perceived of as a withdrawal from the world, but as a means of engaging more fully within it.

(Sim, 2007)

*In the performance space it's the presence. The intersubjectivity that unites one another, without speech...The presence that you have for that moment... your presence is what is being magnified in the performance that people are in awe. At the same time their presence by watching you contributes to the sharing of an experience in intersubjectivity. So it is a moment of being present together. This being present together creates a performance space, an aura...embracing us together in silent celebration.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **Creative Silence**

Although I have danced with others in group work, most of my professional work has been as a solo artist. It is easier to slip into a mode of silence when there is no one else in the performance or even to rehearse with. In my studio routine I begin by centering myself with a short sitting meditation followed by stretching exercises carried out in silence. The improvised dance is the final part of this creative process.

Silence plays a significant role in the creation of my hybrid work and I have used it as my creative partner in a way that Stuart Sim described when he wrote “creative artists are very aware of silence as a living presence” (2007, p. 9). I find silence in the gaps that I have in the day. It is possible to do this by being in a meditative state just after quietening the mind for instance after having finished a telephone call or after finishing a conversation in a meeting or walking home quietly after an intensive session in the gym.

*Listen as silence speaks...*



*In my observation, the I or me functions through the soul, mind, body and ego*

*Soul - life or presence,*

*Mind – analyse and emotional,*

*Body – action and sensations,*

*Ego – protection or self-importance.*

*Knowing that, I begin my dance,*

*By identifying with my presence (soul),*

*My mind examines the situations (analyse),*

*The body is in action (sensations),*

*My ego is involved with the dance etiquette (Self-importance)*

*Note: here the self-importance refers to the ego or pride, which is different from the “Self-Realisation”, that which is identified with the Soul or Presence.*

*(Veshnu)*



# Silence in Tacit Knowing

Krishna spoke.... the body is called the field, Arjuna; the one who watches whatever happens within it--wise men call him the Knower. I am the Knower of the field in every body, Arjuna; genuine knowledge means knowing both the field and its Knower.

(BhagavadGita, p. 149)

I begin by stepping through the epistemology of knowledge to find definitions in a universal context in an attempt to describe the ontological significance of silence in my understanding of the dance. The Platonic philosophical requirement for knowledge is *justified true belief*. Even though the following descriptors maybe accepted as justified, there is much relating to my own experiences of embodied knowing, the awareness and familiarity of what I feel to be real and true, that I cannot articulate it because I accessed it beyond the realms of customary cognizance. One text for organisational management provides for my study a very practical and more universal definition, as a starting point.

Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information, expert insight and grounded intuition that provides an environment and framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the mind of the knowers. (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p. 5)

Those concerned with learning pedagogies have further characterised several types of knowledge according to the way it was acquired, applied, communicated or transmitted. Explicit knowledge is readily articulated and easily transmitted and is found in books or manuals. It is information discovered by others who pass on their evidence of what they believe so that others may copy or follow. In dance we can learn movements or steps from a teacher or copy from a video what another dancer has performed. This copying or mimicking motions could also be described as the 'know-that', but what is missing from the final process is the 'know-how', the cellular body acquired knowledge that comes from experimentation, investigation and personal experience.

There are more things on heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

(Shakespeare, Hamlet, 1.5, 167-8 )

Implicit knowledge can then be defined as knowledge that which is not explicit, the ability to recognise phenomena, or to know how something is done, but without the means to articulate it easily. Tacit knowledge is that self-knowing and was introduced by a Hungarian born British academic called Michael Polanyi. In his writing about knowledge epistemology (1966), he believed that there is awareness and understanding within us that at times is difficult to articulate verbally.

Polanyi has defined the wordless experience of knowing what you know as ‘tacit knowing’ or ‘tacit knowledge’, and he declares in his writing that “we can know more than we can tell’ (ibid, p.4). Perhaps unsurprisingly according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of the word tacit is from the Latin, *Tacitus*, which means silence (Weiner & Simpson, 1989).

This imbued knowledge cannot be adequately or easily articulated, and it is often difficult to share because it is made up of beliefs, ideals, values, and mental models, which are embedded, in our individual psyche. Because we all have different thinking processes, as dance artists we strive to find something communal in all of us that can be emotively expressed and felt, in order to have our non-verbal vocabulary understood.

Tacit knowledge can be further refined into embedded knowledge which is concerned with processes and routines such as in organisational culture and, for the purposes of dance research, into what is known as *embodied knowledge*.

As a concept in its embryonic stages, embodied knowledge, was contested terrain amongst Western knowledge theorists who, following a classical Cartesian notion, saw the mind as separate, and inferior, to the body. An alternate view point to this dualist model was offered in the writing of yet another French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012) , who claimed it was through our bodies that we experience and learn to make sense of the world. Thus later dance researchers have been encouraged to expand the importance and role that embodied awareness plays in dance choreography and learning. Simply put, embodied knowledge is information gained through bodily experiences, and is best transmitted to others by having them experience circumstances as near to those as were originally accomplished. At a young age I learnt the Chinese maxim “Tell me and I forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I’ll understand.” Again I strive to ensure that the audience becomes involved expressively and knowledgeably in my dance by connecting my non-verbal vocabulary to their awareness of their own experience of movements intentions, meanings and symbols.



In reviewing the literature on embodiment in dance there was a high representation of women writers many of whom view the concept through the paradigm of feminist writing. Debbie Bright goes so far as to say in her research that she has surveyed the field and “Men’s experience of embodied knowing appears not to have been researched” (2010, p. 40). I did not set out to challenge who has entitlement to embodiment, or to be a pioneer in men’s embodied knowing. Instead I came to the research arena to place this and the processes of self-reflection within the field of silence to emphasise that all these notions arise from, and fall back, into silence. In my understanding silence has no gender.

In a later work authored by Kalamaras the significance of silence in tacit knowledge is elevated by the author as being axiomatic to the process of understanding this modality of learning (1994). In order to validate my understanding of silence and its importance in creativity I began by examining what has already been discovered by other researchers who have looked at silence in learning modalities and systems of knowledge around the creative processes and what role self-reflection plays in those developments.

A key influence in creative pedagogies has been the work of David Kolb author who believed in experiential learning processes. This is achieved where the individual discovers knowledge for themselves by building on concrete or recognised information already gained through the five senses and formulating abstract concepts or ideas (2015). His work has been summarised as ‘The Kolb cycle’ it has been used by two dance researchers to assist in the development of embodied ways of knowing. Karen Barbour has suggested that it will assist individuals in the reflection process and movement learning (2004) and Bright has applied the descriptors to dance learning (2010).

Although I have experimented with retitling labels on the Kolb cycle in order to personalise it, I found for me it can be a limiting paradigm because, from my silence I have the ability to reference knowledge from other realms of consciousness, specifically shamanic practices including trance dance. Again this is challenged ground as Fraleigh explains: “One might argue that trance dances are outside the range of conscious intentionality and therefore not performed. But there is some basic intention for inducing trance and a purpose (usually healing or transpersonal communication) in the trance dance” (1999, p. 15). I am addressing this issue because having had the experience of an altered state of consciousness, this too becomes an embodiment. It has been recognised in other research that, within the cultural context of my dance history, meditative or voluntary trance practices used for the induction of an altered state of consciousness, allow for the interpretation of my feelings and thoughts.

I emphasise that this is a visionary trance where I maintain my self-awareness, which is a psychological state, as opposed to a possessed trance which is a psychopathic condition which is highlighted in the writings of Larry Peters whose academic areas of specialty are anthropology and psychology (1989). Another researcher looking into trance dances in Asia is Kathy Foley who notes that within visionary trance there are two kinds, the first where the dancer is voluntarily induced into the trance state by an experienced shaman, the real performer, who controls the dancer in his or her minor role (1985). The second is where the dancer voluntarily enters into the trance state using a method that may require no assistance from others ( examples could be breathing techniques, chanting with or without percussion, fasting, meditation, narcotics, sweat lodges) (Peters, 1989).

In my own experience I have participated in activities related to the Hindu festival of Thaipooam. The festival involves carrying a *Kavadi* which is a bamboo arch decorated with flowers or peacock feathers at the end of which is a brass pot containing milk which is to be used as an offering to the Hindu deity Muruga. One of the key features of the festival is a 5km processional walk which involves devotees dancing or whirling with the kavadi across their shoulders.

This may include an element of body mortification as those carrying kavadi may pierce their tongues and cheeks with skewers until the walk is over. The prequel to the festival is a two week strict vegetarian diet and abstinence from other pleasures including alcohol and sexual activities. Devotees also pray and chant mantras to prepare themselves for the procession day when they will enter into a state of controlling their minds. On the day itself the rhythmic beating of percussion instruments and the chanting of the supporting crowd allows the devotee to enter into a state of trance. Many devotees cannot account for the time spent in the procession as they alternately walk and engage in a trance dance at various stopping points including the final one at the entrance to Muruga's temple. (Belle, 2004; Gopal, 2013)

“Thus shamanism is a cross-cultural phenomenon, Shamans were the first to explore inner space in a disciplined way, they utilized “embodiment” as well as “soul journey” techniques (Peters, 1989). “It is impossible to judge a shamanic oral tradition by the standards of a written tradition” (ibid, p. 128).

In creating a hybrid dance work I use the knowledge and cellular memory of countless hours of rehearsals and performances that I have done for over 30 years. This experience gained from these entire presentations gives rise to the embodiment of my dance consciousness. In the hybrid dance performance, I am seeking a transcendence of the subjective body into a phenomenological body as an experience.

The gateway to this conversion is having a presence in front of the audience, a presence that comes from within me as the result of entering into a state of mindfulness achieved by meditative practises. What will be witnessed now is not the physical body displaying metaphors, but movements, which echo my consciousness. I am setting out to guide the audience from being observers of a physical body dancing to having the experience of my movements, the dance has to be real and felt as an experience. I am setting out to create not just the dance movements to be witnessed as choreographic gestures, but also the transfer of my emotions and feelings, my thoughts and passions, my creativity and experiential forces, which give rise to the actualising of my creativity.

An “incarnation of creativity” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1981, p. 399), a synthesis of all that has gone before fused with instantaneous awareness of my body and its capabilities in the performance space are required in producing a hybrid performance. The body is capable of ‘thinking’ as much as the mind, there is a singularity needed to produce the momentary outcome that flows as the dance. I want the audience to have the understanding that it is not just about the observation of my bodily movements but to witness the embodiment of my consciousness. These movements may appear to some observers as being indeterminate and not based on any story narrative; they may appear even more obscure if performed in silence. However, those who experience the movements as meaning may feel the intensification of my dance consciousness.

## Silence and Tacit Insights in the work of other Choreographers

In *iTMOi*, a work choreographed by Akram Khan (2015) and performed as part of the Auckland Arts Festival in 2015, I witnessed a mesmerising sequence where the two dancers emerge from black stage in silence. There were moments of exhortation and nattering, yet amalgamated with intricate arrangements of dance movements. Even though Khan assembles a company of distinct dancers that display much technical skill from a hybrid Eastern and Western sense, and while there is a sense of conversation between his work and my own in terms of hybrid choreographic forms, only parts of his dance engages with silence from an internal Eastern range of perspectives. This for me is a key point of departure for my research.

I was able to identify with the dancer who portrayed the queen in Khan's work. She had a style which was grounded in stillness, that speaks to my own research, with small subtle gestures invoking nuances and a sense of refined skills in choreographic language and expression which I am able to recognise due to my own dance background and somatic/cultural conditioning. Another point of difference from Khan's work with mine is how I perform with a mature body and not one that conforms to Western norms of the body-beautiful (thin, athletic and so forth). A reason for this is that I have aimed to emphasize a sense of somatic experience above conventional beauty and athleticism, as this can activate in my experience a sense of deeper somatic and spiritual engagement in performing, and therefore with silence.

Unlike Khan's choreography, Pina Bausch's *Café Muller* echoes only silence (1978). While this work draws from Western dance theatre conventions, it draws my attention due to how I witnessed the application of stillness and forms of emotional silence, while a solo female dancer falls torn emotionally, and somewhat physically, between her male partners in a café setting again and again. The sense of turning inwards at every corner this work emphasises nuances of silence. The execution of details in the work can be seen to demonstrate the power of silence just by presenting simple gestures of human expression. While my work cannot be read under the same cultural and dance canonical lens as hers, her application of silence in her gestures provides me with points of reference –whereby gestures themselves can activate silence, just as I have explored through my own choreography.

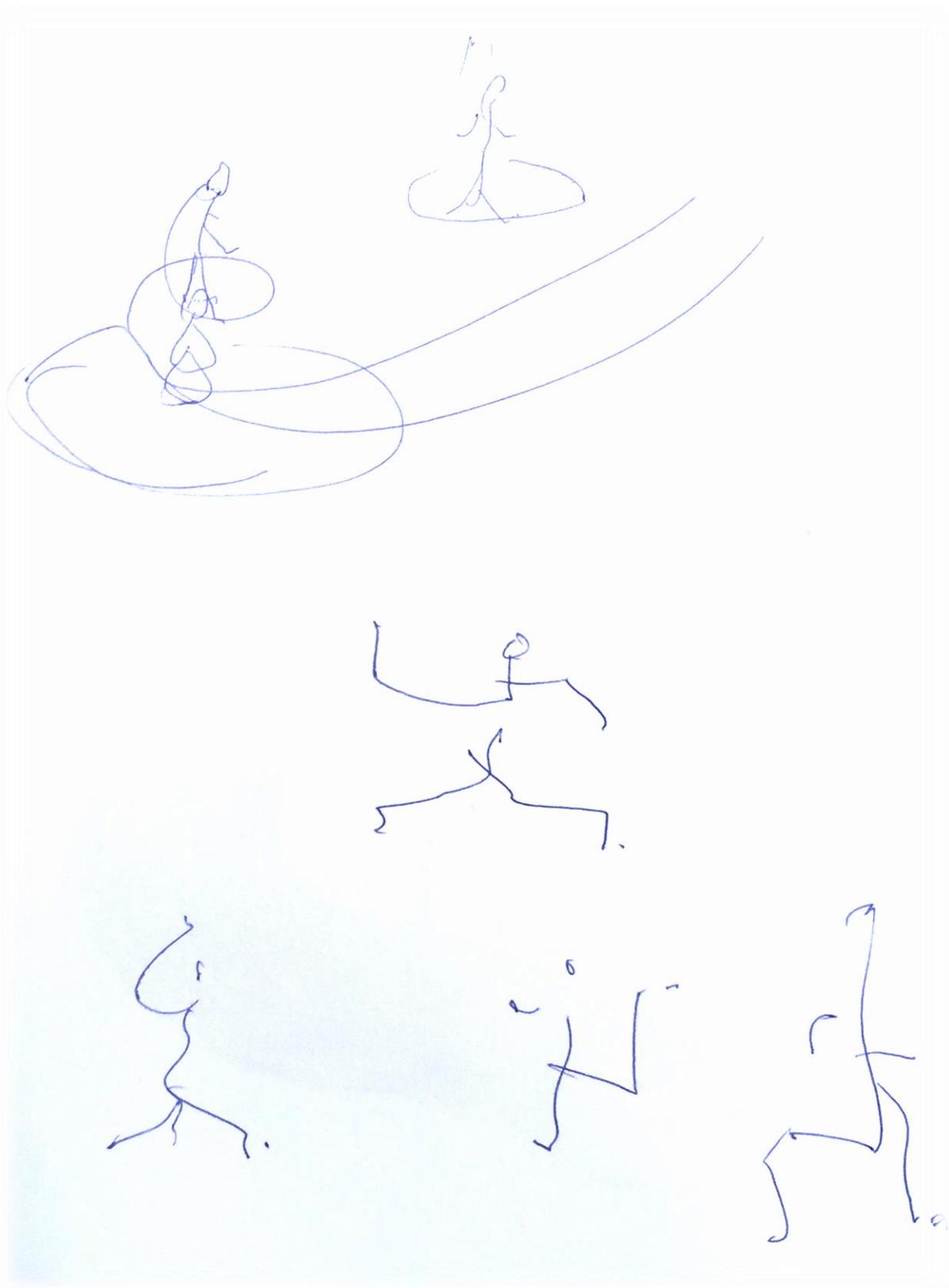
Comparatively to the intentions and sentiments of my work, the choreographic trajectory of Shobana Jeyasingh demonstrates movements based on a well-known effort to contemporise Indian dance for Western audiences. The structured movement patterns, perhaps imitating Western ballet techniques fulfil a need to occupy space. Shobana's work "Faultline", (2007) is modern maybe, but does not activate notions of silencing, albeit Eastern perspectives on silence that I have experienced. This is not to say that her work does not have historical or cultural agency and relevance through its hybridisation of forms. However, it could also be perceived to mix Eastern and Western dance forms without considering the nuances of Eastern philosophy and practices of silence, perhaps in order to fulfil dominant conventional norms of the Western modern and contemporary dance scene, where commercial processes often dominate.

This perhaps serves as a reminder that attempting to mix Eastern with Western forms does not guarantee an engagement with silence and can even prevent it. I have however attempted to develop my choreography from a mixed Eastern sensibility, that embraces Eastern philosophies first and foremost, rather than mixing it with an Eastern one towards activating subtleties in silence.

On the other hand, the director and choreographer Lin Hwai-min, the founder of the Taiwan based dance company “Cloud Gate”, emphasises the importance of contemplative silence in his choreography. The production “Songs of the Wanderers (1999)”, exhibits evidence of Buddhist meditation practices together with Chinese martial arts (Tai Chi), which demonstrated immense strength. The concentration on subtlety of movements, measured carefully to aid the very intention of the dance with precision. While I draw my genealogy from a different mix of Asian dance approaches, such works by Lin not only quieten me and my mind as an audience member but furthermore inspires my dance and my reflections on silence. Once again however, I differ from Lin in that I am not working with young, conventionally ‘beautiful’ balletic bodies in my quest for silence.

Who is borrowing from whom? That is a very interesting question! Modern dance, in the very beginning was inspired by the oriental theatre or dance, and of course, coming to our generation, Asian dancers are influenced by the Western. I think it is a wonderful dialogue going back and forward.

(Lin, 2000)





*Experiencing the fullness of this present moment, “Now and Here”*

*I trust the unknown, making myself vulnerable.*

*(Veshnu)*

# Praxis of Silence

Eastern traditions, especially, have cultivated highly refined practices to interiorize consciousness and heighten this sense of looking. Through various practices such as a focus on a *mantra* (a word or a phrase with a particular sound and/or verbal significance), a yantra (a geometric design with spiritual attributes) ones own breathing, or even silence itself. (Kalamaras, 1996, p. 23)

In Suzuki's teaching, and in all of Buddhism, "silence" and "emptiness" are shorthand terms for the inconceivable ground of luminosity – the Absolute "nothing" – out of which all the "somethings" of the world arise in their multitudinous splendour. (Larson, 2012, p. xvi)

In this practice-led research study my intention is to explore how a hybrid dance performance can be created by engaging with the techniques of contemplative practises and using silence in studio research. There is a growing body of dance research that demonstrates the relationships between somatic philosophies of mindfulness and body mind centering in the creative processes of contemporary dance practices (Adler, 2011; Dilley, 2009; Eddy, 2009).

In order to appreciate the potential of our inner selves, we must examine the process of extricating and exploiting the immeasurable reservoir of our wordless experiences.

If reflective exercises are a way to recognise our embodied knowledge, then silence is the essential key to unlock the practice. This is emphasised by two Swedish educational researchers, Eva and Jo'runn Eli'do'ttir Allerby, who were investigating the value of silence in the processes of reflection in teaching and wrote that "Understanding the importance of silence in the process of reflection is an essential element of learning" (2003, p. 41).

*Try not to question it. Let it be as it is. Allow it to function through you.*

*Watch what happens. What is happening is happening.*

*Let the happenings happen.*

*Just watch.*

*(Veshnu)*

Silence has always played a role in performing arts such as drama, film and music where silence is used as a theme or used as a key strategy in the outcome. My interest in silence in dance is not confined to the performance outcome but also in the inventive and choreographic processes and looking at its relevance to creative pedagogies in creating the hybrid dance.

By looking into mindfulness we can see examples of how meditative practises demand concentration on silence as a way to observe the cluttering processes of the everyday mind and to bring stillness into the creative space. Meditation is a conscious choice which requires persistence in directing the brain to slow down and enter a state of calmness which is conducive to those who are generating ideas from the core of their being, rather than from the noise of a chaotic environment.

The ability to think, to reflect and to create is all-dependent on being able to have access to silence. We live in an increasingly noisy society in which silence and stillness is a luxury. Noise pollution is a major problem and it threatens the creative processes by not allowing the thinking spaces, the reflective processes that are important in discovering a new idea (Sim, 2007). Educational researcher Jane Dawson discusses the importance of contemplative thinking in creative research in her article “Reflectivity, Creativity, and the Space for Silence”. She contends that, whilst education in the arts pays considerable theoretical attention to critical reflection and creativity, the reality is that educational settings seldom afford the ‘space for silence’ (2003, p. 33).

A point echoed by others “that it not often emphasised as a quality in reflective practise” (Alerby & Alerby, 2003, p. 42). And again another researcher, Lesley Saunders, discusses what is missing from the learning processes of creativity is the student’s right to have access and to inhabit a meditative inner world, where their creative personhood is nourished (2011, p. 218).

The repeated point being made by all the educationalists is that while we all acknowledge the importance of silence in creative processes the reality is that we live in a busy, noisy social environment that seldom affords the individual, unless they make a conscious effort, what is an essential need. Understanding the importance of silence in its place of reflective practise situates its place in the learning practices of creativity. By acknowledging the significance of silence means to value silence as a medium for reflection and recognise the meaning of silent expressions...it is to give time and space for silence and to use it individually and in groups in a creative and constructive way without being made timid by its quietness (Alerby & Alerby, 2003, pp. 46-47)

So if we were to imagine three concentric circles, then silence would be the inner most ring, then the middle ring would be reflective practices and the outer ring would be creativity. Robyn Tudor, an education researcher, has written on the importance of silence and mindfulness to the creative learning processes, and she believes that teaching of creativity in the arts needs to move away from the instruction of disembodied content information and routine technical skills and place more emphasis into the development of more holistic capabilities (2008).

*I am lucky to have come from a background of interdisciplinary practices which not only include dance training, but also the tradition of yoga and meditation as livelihood, these allow a deep self-knowing vision.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **The Silence of the Yantra**

One of the greatest applications of the Sri Yantra is in ritual worship where the objective is to realise the microcosm of the individual with the macrocosm of the entire universe. This is done by gazing at the central dot of the Sriyantra which is said to increase the communication between the two brain hemispheres, and by doing so the power of concentration is heightened (Rao, 1998).

In the West, for instance, there is a common perception that meditative practice strives to transcend symbolic forms, such as language, and locate some mysterious 'Other' outside the realm of discourse. However, this is not so; practices of silence actually attempt to deepen intimacy with symbolic form, although their route differs from that of discourse. (Kalamaras, 1996, p. 23)



## Noble Silence in Vipassana

*Vipassana* meditation is a Buddhist meditation popular in Theravada tradition which is the dominant school of Buddhism in parts of South Asia. It was made accessible to the Western world by the promulgated teachings of Mr S. N Goenka who first brought the previously restricted tradition from Burma to India in 1976. Today there are over 100 meditation centres worldwide which offer the 10 day meditation retreats identical to the one that I undertook. Vipassana is a word in the Pali language (the language which was in which most Buddhist teachings were originally transcribed) it means to see things as they really are, ‘the true nature of reality.’

There is a code of conduct to which all students must abide by which is to ensure the concentration of the mind on the process of self-observation. The most important regulation is the adoption of “Noble Silence” from the beginning of the course until the morning of the last full day. Noble silence means silence of body, speech and mind. There is to be no form of communication with other course members, whether by discourse, gestures, sign language or written notes. In the evening discourse which is given in the form of a recorded video of Goenka, students are taught that once leaving the course and re-entering the outside world it is important to follow the path of “Noble Speech”. This means to speak without telling lies, using rude language, slandering someone or gossiping. It is interesting to note that the course brochure offers the insight that, “Noble Speech is without doubt, much more difficult than silence” (Vipassana, 2015).

I found the 10 day course to be challenging physically, as there was a requirement of seven hours of personal meditation allowed for in your own private room plus four hours of obligatory meditation in the group hall, in a strictly timetabled day that began at 4.00am and finished at 9.30pm. However there was nothing mentally or spiritually problematic as my personal cultural background supports some of the philosophical contexts. In hindsight this was a useful course commencement of the research process because it enabled me to focus on the road ahead and think more about how I would bring silence into the work. In my opinion, it is not essential for anyone to undertake the course in order to understand silence as there are other alternatives to promote self-reflection.



*Hence, here and now I have tried to write down those experiences in a language, which is mysterious but yet meaningful. At times they seems spiritual...at times they were scientific...whenever I am in doubt, they appeared as pure consciousness.*

*(Veshnu)*

# Phenomenology of a Hybrid Dance Exploration

Phenomenology is concerned with the experience itself as it is lived and with bringing to light the essential nature of that experience

*(Sheets-Johnstone, 1984, p. 138).*

To be a dance artist, for example, is not to engage solely with a single activity, such as dancing, or perfecting technique, or exercising creativity, but involves constructing a simultaneous engagement with a multiplicity of elements. Engagement is never one thing or one field of knowledge in isolation. *(Vincs, 2007, p. 100)*

Phenomenology owes its conception as a separate method of enquiry in philosophy to Edmond Husserl who was interested in evolving the concept that reality is made up of objects and events as they are perceived through intentionality (the way an experience is directed) in human consciousness and not separate from consciousness. So he was trying to make the distinction between the experiences of the lived body separate from the anatomical body object (Kaylo, 2006). This relies on the subjective analysis or the first person point of view to describe their sensory awareness (or perceptions) of everything that they experienced through with their actions, emotions, desires and thoughts in their *performance* of the inhabited, 'the lived' body.

The benefit of this approach, which requires a description of the experiences of the lived body, is that they may be qualitatively revealed and made available for evaluation and understanding. Husserl developed a methodical approach to consider the way in which objects presented themselves to the mind and translated meaningful stimuli into meaningful experience (Kaylo, 2006, p. 1). From this idea we can see that an important element of dance, is establishing the difference between viewing the physical body as an object, or a subject, and the witnessing of the experience of the lived body as it moves in time and space. The lived body concept is not an alternative explanation to the objective-subjective body debate rather it “assumes an indivisible unity of body, soul and mind”. Whereas the Cartesian thought takes a negative stance on the emphasis of the body, Phenomenology attempts to redress by giving the body a concept that it is “meaningful and innately purposeful” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 4).

One of the principle intended outcomes of this study is to demonstrate choreography that has evolved through the creative practices of silence. From the movements generated in this research experience I will provide examples of how I ‘work on silence’. As I stated in the introduction the germination of some dance choreography owes its existence to music or to verbal discourse, which originates from a point of sound. Even within the choreography dancers sometimes are used to having accompanying music. They rely on this for their cues but in my perception, I believe that some in the audiences concentrate on the aural manifestation of the programme rather than the dancers.

*Nothing is wrong or right in creativity,*

*In fact it is always right. Naturally right. Nature is always right.*

*These are the promises from the universe.*

*You go for it.*

*(Veshnu)*



In my intentionality to explore a work from silence, I wanted the creation of dance movements to be formed by allowing the body to move to the natural rhythm of the breath, working on meditative qualities by listening intensely, and by silencing external interference of manipulative thoughts. Two fundamental propositions of phenomenology are that our body is an undeniable proof we exist and the interaction between our body and its environment allows us to interpret experiences which gives rise to our consciousness. Consciousness can be described as making meaning of one's existence, "our subjective tie to the objective understanding of experience" (Vezina, 2006, p. 32), so therefore I regard the body as the crucible within which the processes of my perception unfold.

A generalist view of dance might describe 'an art form that depicts the creative outcome in a kinematic process whereby the artist/dancer moves his body through the space, in a period of time, usually accompanied by musical rhythms.' This broad description acknowledges that dance is ephemeral as the synthesis of the body and the movements in the space over a period of time, but there is no sense of what was experienced by the dancer or the audience. Efrosin Protopapa, a dance researcher, in an examination of the philosophy of dance comments that other scholars were questioning this narrow definition which confines itself only to concerns of bodily movement. Allsopp and Lepecki suggest that choreography of dance now involves "the relationships between movement, composition and the production of dance" (2013, p. 274)

In this work I am contextualising dance phenomenologically and I have looked at the interiority of my dance and my embodied knowledge and how it gives rise to the performed dance. To move the phenomenon from the interior of the dancer to the exterior of the community we need to understand the terrain of the performance.

*This experience of dancing this moment is as if I am starting all over again to learn to dance. Even though all this time I have been dancing well and known well for my dance. This silent and mindful dance engagement creates an awareness, which I have never had before in dance making. Is it possible that in between the years I have actually forgotten how to dance?*

*(Veshnu)*

Fraleigh makes the point that as the dance emanates within the body first, as an “experiential essence”, dance is first and foremost for the individual whether there is an audience or not. (Fraleigh, 1999). As this study will realise some of its findings in a performance for others I chose the definition offered by Erving Goffman on performance in a larger realm that correlates to several notions I have. He defines performance as “the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a set of particular observers and which has some influence on the observers” (2004, p. 61) .

“Silence is a performance only when someone is watching you. Your silence stops being mundane, becomes meaningful, when there are eyes on you”

(Trahan, 2013)



One concern I have had with creating a hybrid dance performance is the anticipation that some in the audience may come with a preconceived notion that, given my previous public background, I may present a fashionable, highly stylised version of Indian Classical dance. Others may expect that I will leap about vigorously or roll on the floor, alternately expressing joy or turmoil in a dance lexicology that finds acceptance with many contemporary audiences. Will they disapprove of my desire to slow the dance down, to present less energetic movements; will I be too slow, too soft, for the aficionados of more boisterous dance works?

Undisturbed calmness of mind is attained by cultivating friendliness towards the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference towards the wicked.

(Patanjali)

*Standing backstage, preparing for the performance. everyone is waiting for the cue. It is quiet and I am breathing lightly concentrating on myself. Feeling the space... drawing deep within. I hear the silence; a pressure vacuums the air around. With my eyes closed I think of nothing. Stillness and being present are prevalent here. Just as I was being in the moment, a voice whispered...you are on in one minute, Veshnu.*

*(Veshnu)*



My stage butterflies are nothing compared to the apprehension I have for acceptance of a work that until now has been a personal exploration of silence, in solitary silence. Now I am baring my soul and trusting that others will be at least compassionate, even if they cannot comprehend.

In some sense, too, performance does not feel completely natural. There is a bit of work to it. There may be even a measure of discomfort, sometimes quite large, in performing actions in front of, and in the hopes of influencing, others. Part of this discomfort may stem from the fact that we can never know, in advance, the outcome of our performance. We can never know if our performance will be well received by our audience. And, since performance often means very difficult work, we can tend to second-guess ourselves before or during the performance. We can feel crippled by anxiety and wonder if we should quit. (Trahan, 2013)



I laugh when I hear that the fish

In the water is thirsty.

You wander restlessly from forest to forest while the

Reality is within your own dwelling.

The truth is here! Go where you will....

to Benares or to Mathura:

Until you have found God in your own soul, the whole world will seem meaningless to you.

(Kabir)

*I breathe and come back to myself...*

*(Veshnu)*

*A question; am I dancing for myself or for the audience?*

*(Veshnu)*

I would like whoever watches to suspend predetermined estimations of what they might expect and to engage with me in what I have come to accept as an act of energetic reciprocation. I have always acknowledged the capability of audience energy to absorb into my dance and for the interchange of vitality to enhance the appreciation and understanding of the experience. Each performance brings its own terrain by encompassing the diverse elements such as audience, lighting, sound and make up.

To interpret what they have viewed, observers of the human body and its experiences describe the outcome of their analysis according to their expectations, or their viewing lens, which is aligned to their philosophical interpretation. The viewing lens being used here is a subjective one, because we acknowledge that the body is essential to the outcome of the dance, we view the body not as an object outside of the dance, but as part of the dance material and it gives form to the feelings and emotions required by the language narrative.

To interpret the meaning of the dance requires some knowledge of cultural references so that the viewer can bring those understandings into the dance space and make their particular judgement. By introducing personal nuances the dance can be exposed or subjected to different personal analysis albeit from the same cultural foundation.

*Another question then; does my dance have a cultural identity? Does it need to have one?*

*(Veshnu)*

I strive to the ideal that Arbeau was describing when he was quoted as writing “that dancing is a kind of mute rhetoric by which means the orator without writing a word can make himself understood by his movements” (Hagendoorn, 2010, p. 221). I am apprehensive about the audience reaction to the hybrid work to be performed, as it may appear too exotic for some observers. Although this research is personal, it is not supposed to be esoteric, it requires being in a conversation with other who watch or read my essay. At times I struggle to portray myself under the cross-cultural gaze in a country far away from my spiritual dance roots.

In Indian classical dance we recognise that *rasas* are emotions common in everyone’s experience and the aim of a dance performance is arousing them in the *rasika* or knowledgeable spectator. Being an exponent of classical dancing and having been trained in the theories behind the *Natyasastra*, I appreciate the significance of the audience energy having an effect on the performance.

Uttara Asha Coorlawala has written on the ‘inter-influencing’ between performers and audiences, also known as ‘Rasa Theory’ (2010). A succinct explanation is that if any performance is to be successful there must be a “luminous communicative energy” which is “tasted, relished” (ibid, p119). The role of the performer is to communicate the prescribed *bhava* (emotional moods) but he or she is not responsible for arousing the *rasa*, rather the *rasika*, the discerning audience member is charged with savouring the emotion. “Until the poem is read it has no existence” (ibid, p 119). I am sensitive to energy sentiments being evoked in my performances and I appreciate when some can feed more energy into my dance, whilst others drain me.

*You need to be egoless in order to allow the amalgamation of the dancer, the dance and the audience energy to facilitate the ambience of the performance. Why would a professional artiste allow himself to be examined? After dancing professionally for over 30 years, I ask myself, why I would give others the priority of judging my performance.*

*(Veshnu)*

As a dancer and choreographer of Asian dance forms, I have often performed to live musical accompaniment that provides for an engaging spectacle for the audience. The background to any of my classical dance performances involves training in Vedic concepts of meditation and yoga that allow my mind to focus on being present and allowing the body to move with authentic expressive outcomes.

There are three fundamental approaches I observe as a daily practise in my dance and they are *Shravanam*, *Mananam*, and *Nidhidhyasanam*. These Sanskrit words, which can be translated as Listen, Reflect and Internalise, are relevant to my research practise. These three approaches have been used explicitly in my intentionality in relation to this dance making processes of creating this hybrid performance, and I will hereby elaborate.

*.....and silence said.....*

---

## Listen

I begin by sitting comfortably listening to the furthest sound I can hear and then bring my attention to the space immediately around me; I imagine that there is a protective bubble just wrapping around me which keeps out the unwanted distractions. I begin to focus on the subtler, softer sounds that are closer to me. Now I turn inwards and begin to hear just the sound of my own breathing. By consciously listening and just let go by listening to silence of 'no-thingness'. Listening to silence is in fact listening to the environment. John Cage the eminent composer, musical academic and writer inspired me to listen to the environment and then connect within myself in search to understand silence. His methodology of unconventional practice towards music and allowing interdisciplinary skills to create work of art with new ideas and experiences and his eagerness to suggest projects. He wrote:

Though some of the dances and the music are easily enjoyed, others are perplexing to certain people, for they do not unfold along conventional lines. For one thing, there is an independence of the music and the dance,.....this independence.....of the dance is not to be found in the music but in the dancer himself, on his own two legs.....the music sometimes consists of single sounds or a group of sounds which are not supported by harmonies but resound within a space of silence. (1961, p. 94)

Somebody referred to the sound of silence as a cosmic hum, a scintillating almost electric background sound. Even though it's going on all the time we don't generally notice it, but when your mind is open and relaxed you begin to hear it...But it's not a thing you have to find – rather you just open to it: it's the ability to listen with your mind in a receptive state, which makes it possible to hear the sound of silence. (Sumedho, 2007)

To create a body of dance work without sound is a challenge, because the choreographer may have to compensate with specific cues and allusions in order that the message of the work is interpreted as it was intended. I have resolved to begin the work with a minute of silence, and then I will introduce some sound to initiate the audience into the dance, with the yantra reflecting off me, I begin the dance slowly moving out of the dark black elemental of no-thingness, after that I will softly introduce a far off voice singing the Vedic chant. The voice will get closer and closer and as it does I will allow the dance itself to transcend. Then the music will begin to soften and I will slowly come back to no-movement. The music will fade away, stop and then there will be complete silence again. This is how I propose to demonstrate that the dance discourse emanated from silence and then, slipped back into “the Absolute “nothing” – out of which all the “somethings” of the world arise in their multitudinous splendour (Larson, 2012, p. xvi).

*There is always something to hear. I hear silence. I can dance for silence. I hear a humming sound in silence. Sometimes I refer to it as an out of the world experience. As though, I am staring at the world from space, floating in between the planets and stars. As weird as it may sound, this is the void and a space of ultimate potential.*

*(Veshnu)*



Sit still.....

stand.....be still

Feel the space.....

keep still and be present.

Listen intensely....

hear the sound, the pressure creates a vacuum in the ear.

Observe, your thought.

Be here.... Listen.

Feel the sensations in your body.

Breathe calmly...

allow movements....move intuitively, explore.

Start again.

Stop thinking.....

come here...now.

Follow the rhythm of your breathing...

Whenever you wonder....stop your movement...be still.

Keep listening....

not to the sound around, but to the silence within.

The silence within will eventually take over this dance.

Keep listening.....

this now and here, you are present.

This is your presence.

Lightness in your body....a field of energy surrounds you.

Be in this space...relax.

Move...move...move, that's all you need to do.

And yet being not moving at all, ha ha!

You are present.

This dance is a language.

Your language.

A unique lexicology.

Through the memories in your body, you created this language.

Silence helped you in this process....

It made you move with what you know

and what you have learned, without thoughts.

You trust the silence.

Keep moving...

You will not remember the body soon.

You have become the pure essence....

You are silence.

I had to plan this performance. I positioned myself on a mental layout on where

I want to be in the performance space, which I have put myself intentionally.

(Veshnu)

## Reflect

In a traditional Cartesian philosophy the mind and the soul are separate so dancer's body is viewed as an object that has the capacity to present an appealing performance of a choreographed dialogue of movements. The body therefore is just a blunt instrument, a servant to be instructed by a superior entity, the soul which lives on after the body's demise. This objective lens renders the dancer and the dance as separate identities, giving rise to the concept of duality (Fraleigh, 1987). What follows by bringing together body, mind or soul is a notion of non-duality, a singularity that the dancer becomes the dance and even if it is only momentary. There is flow as the artist dynamically orchestrates a unity of creativity from the body and its awareness of experiences, its intentions and purpose of movement in space.

*My body is thinking.*

*It is remembering, without my conscious effort, all that has gone before.*

*(Veshnu)*

By locating my hybrid performance in the field of a contemporary dance arrangement, that is "movements deliberately and systematically cultivated for its own sake" (Stevens & McKechnie, 2005, p. 243), I will start with absolute stillness before bringing out a series of deliberate slow actions. I have rehearsed in the studio a range of movements sympathetic to the background sounds, the effect of the lighting, and the costume that will draw the audience in with a deliberate hypnotic appeal to something mysterious.



And then before speeding up and in a moment of ecstasy, spin, and then slowly wind back down to stillness. This is not unarranged choreography in the sense that I have no background from which to make the movements. Nor is it improvised in the sense that there is no intention, no purpose or no structure.

There are cognitive processes in motion as discussed in the work of Steven and McKechnie (2005) when they suggest that creating and performing dance involves the enactment of both declarative knowledge (ideas becoming visible through dance movement, i.e. explicit knowledge of the dance) and procedural knowledge (knowledge exercised in the dance performance, i.e. implicit knowledge of how to dance).

In creating a dance work and presenting it as a performance from my own choreographic and dance experience I have found that it is not enough to rely on the accumulated memories of the past I need to transmute the autobiographical components in a choreographic process so that I can communicate to the audiences and achieve a communal understanding of the work. I explore how to describe the amount of control that I can exercise over my mind and how that translates into conscious control of my mind, body and dance. By reviewing the work in the studio and by re-reading the journal thought processes, I am able to revise what I am creating. Thus I construct a work of authentic intensity, which justifies the nuances of the processes; even though the final dance movements have not been pre-determined.

*Something has happened between me and my-self.*

*An experience I cannot comprehend but only to accept.*

*Despite all, I stand.*

*I stand just alone. Witnessing me.*

*(Veshnu)*

## Internalise

The revered source of Indian dance and theatre is the *Natyasastra*, a written collective of all aspects of performance stagecraft, which was transcribed in the Sanskrit language between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Dancers are taught that the body is a site of knowledge that is capable of reproducing many *abhinaya* (movements) and mudras (gestures), which represent a wide range of emotions or actions (Madhavan & Nair, 2013, pp. 153-154). In Indian performance studies there are some 108 *Karanas* (foot, leg and hand codified positions), which a performer can access to use in dramatic representations, so that the body is meant to be witnessed for the metaphors, which string out over the course of the dance work to tell the story (Tarlekar, 1991, pp. 182-183).

By bringing my attention into focus with an active process of reflective mindfulness, and having internalised that mind body connection, I begin to move with purpose. I am moving from the embodiment of all that has gone before.

Viewing dance as an art form leaves it vulnerable to any interpretation based on previous experience of watching other dance performances. As we have already defined dance as being fleeting due to the constraints of time and performance space, it is not possible to playback or review spontaneous movements. “A hybrid dance performance can be compared to an improvised work in that no choreographic script is being followed nor is a previous performance being replicated. I am dancing, “a dance that as it comes into being at this particular moment in this particular place” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1981, p. 399).

*In the studio*

*Sound of the vent*

*Sound of traffic*

*Sound of scribbling on the paper*

*Sound of vacuum*

*Who am I here in this space?*

*Where am I here in this space?*

*I am a listener, and everything around me is alive.*

*Listener as I am, music is every sound that surrounds me. Each and every movement around me creates sound. Each and every movement around me has its own dance. I am amongst them, breathing... dancing alone ....*

*The relationship here is through the silent nature, the unspoken unison of joy created simply by the subtly of movements.*

*I see these sounds surrounding me like a sine wave, and I am walking in between this wave as a single line.*

*Being in harmony and yet travelling in my own measured space.*

*(Veshnu)*



*Silence said, wait....and it never came back.*

*Silence said, write...it became right now.*

*Silence said, be present...it is now.*

*Silence said, be still...I moved.*

*Silence said nothing....it became everything.*

*Silence said, be quiet...it became my language.*

*...when I questioned... it said nothing.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **The Performance Language...**

I observe my mind. The constant clatter of nonsensical activities clouds the awareness. While moving my body however, yet controlled by stillness, I notice my core vibrates as the mind reconciles to settle. My bodily activities, my emotional attitudes and my mental concentration combine to create a resplendent energy that is luminous as “My Presence”.

### *And the elements used in my performance silence....*

#### **Vibuthi**

The holy ash is made of wood and cow dung. Sacred to the Hindus, it resembles death, and hence it advises detachment towards life, in particular towards the body and of any material possessions. It reminds one, of the impermanence of life and to attain self-liberation.

#### **Tantra**

Through Tantra, I recognise this universe and everything in it are the manifestation of the “One”, the universal intelligence. As this my body is a sacred creation, so is my mind and the senses, are all constructs of matter, pirouetting towards liberation.

#### **Sri Yantra**

Projected from above on the centre stage, the Sri Yantra an influential diagram formed by nine interlocking triangles, rotates on the floor where I am moving, drawing me into the hypnotic dynamism. At times extracting the essence of me, deep within to percolate the core of my being to rise high above my hermeneutic dance enquiry, as if I am being reborn to recreate myself (Visgnos, 2009).

### **Mantra (Saama Veda)**

The subtle breath control alerts the mind and opens a space, creating a void for pure potentiality. The chanting of the Saama Veda resonates and engages in a deeper arena in a comparable representation. Liturgically sung, the mantras deepen the silence undoubtedly clearing an area for performance in aesthetic wonderment (Saama Veda, 2012).

### **Red costume**

Made of chiffon, this lightweight fabric enhanced the sentiments of being dissolved, blended well with the texture of silence in me. I feel myself melting in the process. It further represents blood or life itself.

*The Music is “grounded”, and it reflects the depth of my meditation. The movements formed through this, mime the gravitational stand of my existence.*

*(Veshnu)*

## **Fred and I**

The first time when I overheard a Fred Harrison composition at an exhibition at Titirangi, I was convinced that he would be the right person to commission to make sound for my performance. We met and discussed about the ideas. I introduced to him the concept and the probable use of Tantra, Yantra and Mantra. As to my surprise he had some similar understanding on the subject matter through in his own Maori traditions. There was a related, logical and intelligible connectedness with the cosmos shared between our cultures here, that was intriguing besides unique for this work. After a few sessions in intense then passionate discourse the experiment levitated into an extraordinary piece of music that which only heightened the silence of this dance making further. Fred's engagement on electronics and instruments echoed cosmology, he has engineered the mathematical frequency of the geometry behind the Yantra alongside the sound of Mantras per vigilance, therefore synchronised in unison complimenting my precise intentions in choreography.

*Fred Harrison describes in his email .....*

### ***The sound of Sri<sup>1</sup>***

*Firstly I ask for the blessing and guidance of Sri, and the work I attempt to do here comes from a place of great respect for such ancient wisdom. I utilised 3 languages in thought to create this composition, Math, Geometry and Music, in seeking the heart of truth, from this perspective.*

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed explanation of the Sri Yantra refer to [www.aghori.it/Devi-Khadgamala-Stotram-eng.pdf](http://www.aghori.it/Devi-Khadgamala-Stotram-eng.pdf) (Sriyantra, 2015) and the work of C.S. Rao (Rao, 1998).

*The basis of this idea in composition is the de-coding of geometry of Sri, here the chords are calculated and converted into tone, and these tones are enforced by the sound of celestial bodies for example, a wave sample of Orion constellation was used to help build the layers of sound in multiple octaves, other celestial sounds are used also. These sounds are arranged in key to form synchronic connection with matching waveforms in his case we chose the G# of Sri, a matching waveform reflected reveals positive energy.*

*The brief of the work was partly about silence and non-rhythmical connection, a sound that defines or represents Sri, or the essence of.*

*Pulses, gongs and other tones represent the numerology of Sri, for example the 9 gongs at the beginning, each pulse represents each of these concepts*

- 1. Trailokya Mohan or Bhupur, a square of three lines with four portals*
- 2. Sarvasa Paripurak, a sixteen-petal lotus, which fulfils all the desires*
- 3. Sarva Sankshobahana, an eight-petal lotus, which agitates everything*
- 4. Sarva Saubhagyadayaka, composed of fourteen small triangles, which gives all the auspiciousness*
- 5. Sarvartha Sadhaka, composed of ten small triangles, which accomplish all purposes*
- 6. Sarva Rakshakara, composed of ten small triangles, which gives all the protections*
- 7. Sarva Rogahara, composed of eight small triangles, which removes all the diseases*
- 8. Sarva Siddhiprada, composed of 1 small triangle, which gives all the realizations*
- 9. Sarva Anandamay, composed of a point or Bindu, which is full of bliss for all*



*I have hidden or coded the numerology of the interpretation within around and underneath the chord tones, to also describe the physical element of Sri.*

## ***Mathematics of Sri***

### ***The Foundation***

*The sum of angles within a triangle = 180 deg the foundation of Sri equals 180 x 9 (levels) = 1620 cycles per second = G6#*

### ***The Body***

*The cosmos/abodes = 43 x 180 = 7740 cycles per second = b14 b28*

*Of course this only represents the 2 dimensional depiction, Sri can be viewed/heard in 3 dimensions or more as well, so for the higher octaves of harmony concealed until multiplied by 3.*

*Foundation = 1620 x 3 = 4860 cycles per second d14# d28#*

*Body = 7740 x 3 = 23220 cycles per second = d7 d14 d28*

*Here are your chords for Sri Yantra starting at the lowest denomination*

*G# B D# D in multiple octaves this chordal combination moves between 2 and 3 dimensions, through as what I would term the foundation and the body of Sri in modulation of sound wave and chordal tone. The sound begins and ends in silence as the tones and sounds build, to me it is a conversation between the universe and Sri, no form.*

*(Written by Fred Harrison, email; Oct, 2015)*

Silence is a condition of emptiness that is,  
paradoxically full.

(George Kalamaras, 1994)

## *Reflections on the actual performance.....*

*Keeping in mind, the requirements of a professional performance, I allow movements to be formed independently with minimum or no focus on choreography.*

*Come in....stand.....sit....dip hands in bronze bowl....rub hands together....apply Vibuthi on forehead.....stand....hands on the side.....*

*I began by taking a deep breathe. Gently I allow the breath to take a natural pace, following my own bodily rhythm. Settling into it, I gradually sift for my attention to my mind to be uninterrupted and be quiet, just watching every breath and sensations that occur in the body from the tip of my toes and fingers to the top of my head, still standing still.*

*Slowly the weight on my legs increases making it heavy and the body begins to fall. A Stir under my belly, an unknown fire penetrates my lower back pushing my spine up. The energy being amplified vibrates throughout my physique. My hip, chest and hands react, they begin to move in forming shapes of their own. Many shapes flow and fall on to each other creating a new form.*

*The silent manifestation of formless forms spread out to dance, dancing to be free, dancing to let it go, dancing like no one is watching. A swell of presence permeates the atmosphere, shining identical to an intense glow. Confident and fearless I step clearly, possessed in the now.*

*No intruders can trespass this, my ground.*

*My hermeneutic spiral is experiencing the pure existence of me, and the overwhelming execution of movements reverberates in sending me into a trance.*

*I begin to float; I can feel myself above the ground, I swirl. At this point I realise a need to pause, another move here, I will be stepping into an unknown terrain where I might get lost. My breath is so thin this moment. I cautiously examine the state where I am. Making vigilant steps placed moment to moment, I come back. I question this silence, its responsibilities and where it has taken me.*

*I sense the lights on stage now as if they are new. These lights designed to craft the work, to enhance the subtle nuances of stillness of the silence and the mysterious haze, formed by the smoke machine compliments to the realism of the performance and yet being daintily simple. I feel all that now, coming back to the same space inversely as though I was on a trip. I have had stared at myself from another dimension.*

*Still moving though, I am aware of my silence and the pin drop silence in the audience. We amalgamated to one. They are with me and I am with them.*

*We have bypassed the antithetical mode and I am pleased to acknowledge your presence. We have experienced an engaging performance together. Being transported to another plateau by just observing this moment. Catapulted into a larger realm in silence.*

*Keep it simple.....*

*Limited vocabulary is plentiful to create a dance in silence. The dynamics come from the energy that passes through you to the boundary-less space of honesty.*

*(Veshnu)*





*I am here as consciousness, you are conscious of me.*

*The experiences are between conscious selves,*

*Sharing the presence of each other, in a communal intersubjectivity.*

*(Veshnu)*

## Drawing the curtain.

There is an assumption amongst most dancers to have an age limit to perform, but I have never believed in this, neither did my dance colleagues, teachers or any dance companies that I have worked with. Within my cultural background and dance genre there are still examples of great exponents and gurus performing today. Dr Chandrabhanu is a youthful 65, and is based in Melbourne continues to dance and produce new works of high standings and has been a mentor for many young and aspiring dancers. Astad Deboo, a personal friend and pioneer in Indian contemporary dance is still performing on the global stage at 68, Birju Maharaj the renowned Kathak dance exponent is mesmerising his audiences even now at the age of 78 and C.V Chandrasekhar is creating new Bharatanatyam pieces and dancing at the age of 80.

What I do believe is that each individual artist matures according to their embodied experiences as they bear witness the silence within themselves, the illumination of which can happen at any age. The enlightenment of an artist is responsible for the silences or the practices of silences to appear within their dance, simply making it magical.

If the new art is not accessible to everyone, which certainly seems to be the case, this implies that its impulses are not of a generically human kind. It is an art not for people in general but for a special class who may not be better but who are evidently different.

(Arthur Schopenhauer)

# Return to silence

In conclusion I feel I have taken my audience on a journey to witness the mysteries of making dance in Silence, using minimum embellishments. It may be the lighting, the costume, the background and sound or the movements that I have created, I feel I, together with the dance have been enlightened in the process. I hope I have stirred something similar in each and every audience of mine whether it is contentment, engagement, curiosity or ultimately there may be more questions raised in what was not said and discussed but then, the ocean is greater than the language river.

I ask the reader to discover the personal journey that I undertook here, so attempting to find a result or a solution to a problem was not the motivation. Because I embarked on a journey of artistic research using the premise of an open-ended question to guide the work, the findings I submit may be considered within this context.

It would be honest to say that at times personal ambition in delving deeper into my own quintessence to find hybrid dance forms, rather than producing a research exegesis, provided the encouragement and the impetus to see a conclusion. I have articulated and contextualised the results of my experiences within the findings of other understandings so that mine can be resituated and interpreted by further researchers.

In this study I have poured across many articles and journals of those researchers before me who have embraced the discovery of self-reflection in the process of creativity and who enthusiastically encourage journal writing to support the retention of ephemeral thoughts or to capture a choreographic discovery. I am grateful to be able to relate to the passion with which they explain that through their stillness and meditative practises they can find within themselves an instinct for their art, a self-knowing.

My contention is that phenomenological artistic research provides many possibilities, known and unknown, which are influenced by subjective artistic considerations and judgements of the audience or observers. Rather than lay claim to have discovered a new way of approaching reflective practices, I submit that my discussions will provide an entry point for future practitioner engagement and research.

*Aham Nirvikalpo Nirakara Roopaha*  
*Vibhur Vyapya Sarvatra Sarvendriyanam*  
*Sada Me Saamatvam Na Muktir Na Bandhah*  
*Chidananda Rupa Shivoham Shivoham*

I am all pervasive.  
I am without any attributes,  
and without any form.  
I have neither attachment to the world,  
nor to liberation.  
I have no wishes for anything  
because I am everything,  
everywhere,  
every time,  
always in equilibrium.  
I am indeed, That eternal knowing and bliss, Shiva,  
love and pure consciousness.

(Adi Shankaracharya)

## References

- Adler, J. (2011). *Offerings from the conscious body*. Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions.
- Albright, A. C. (2011). Situated dancing: Notes from three decades in contact with phenomenology. *Dancing Research Journal*, 43(2), 7-18.  
doi:10.1017/S0149767711000027
- Alerby, E., & Alerby, J. E. (2003). The sounds of silence; some remarks on the value of silence in the process of reflection in relation to teaching and learning. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 4(1), 41-51.
- Andrésen, J. v. (2011). *Embodied knowledge in high-school dance students; communicating the bodily experience*. Masters Thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Humanities Department of Music, Dance Studies, Trondheim, Norway. Retrieved from [http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/243634/543897\\_FULLTEXT01.pdf?sequence=1](http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/243634/543897_FULLTEXT01.pdf?sequence=1)
- Barbour, K. (2004). Embodied ways of knowing. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 10, 227-238.
- Beckett, S. (2015, April). *Breath*. (E. Newborn, Performer) The Vault, Q Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Belle, C. V. (2004). *Thaipusam in Malaysia: A Hindu festival misunderstood?* PhD Thesis, Deakin University, School of Social and International Studies, Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30023239/belle-thaipusaminmalaysia-2004.pdf>
- BhagavadGita. (2000). *The Bhagavad Gita*. (S. Mitchell, Trans.) London, England: Rider Books.
- Boud, D. (2001). Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. *New Directions For Adult And Continuing Education*, 90, 9-17.
- Bright, D. (2010). *Exploring female art-making through reflective practice: A multidimensional cultural, spritual and embodied experience*. PhD Thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from [www.waikato.ac.nz](http://www.waikato.ac.nz)
- Burrows, J. (2010). *A choreographers handbook*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

- Busch, O. v. (2008). *Fashion-able: Hacktivism and engaged design*. Phd Thesis, University of Gothenburg, Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, Gothenburg, Germany. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/17941>
- Cage, J. (1961). *Silence: lectures and writings*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Christensen, C., & Weinman, E. (2014). *Organised chaos in the silence of solitude: A demonstration of meditation practice through modern dance choreography*. Oral Presentation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.umt.edu/umcur/2014/oralpres2e/6/>
- Coorlawala, U. A. (2010). It matters for whom you dance: Audience participation in rasa theory. In P. Chakravorty, & N. Gupta (Eds.), *Dance Matters: Performing India* (pp. 117-139). New Dehli, India: Routledge.
- Dauenhauer, B. (1980). *Silence: The phenomenon and its ontological significance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Davenport, T. H., & Prusak, L. (1998). *Working knowledge: How organisations know what they know*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Dawson, J. (2003). Reflectivity, creativity, and the space for silence. *Reflective Practice*, 4(1), 33-39. doi:10.1080/1462394032000053512
- DeLeon, J. (2005). *Dance and stillness*. Masters Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Health Sciences, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Denesha, J. (2014). Exploring silence in dance at KCB choreographic showcase. Kansas, MO. Retrieved from <http://kcur.org/post/exploring-silence-dance-kcb-choreographer-showcase#stream/0>
- Denham-Vaughan, J., & Edmond, V. (2010). The value of silence. *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand*, 6(2), 5-19.
- Doniger, W. (2009). *The Hindus: An alternative history*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Foley, K. (1985). The dancer and the danced: Trance dance and theatrical performance in West Java. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 2(1), 28-49.
- Fraleigh, S. H. (1987). *Dance and the lived body: A descriptive aesthetics*. Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press.
- Fraleigh, S. H. (1999). Family resemblance. In *Researching dance: Evolving modes of enquiry* (pp. 3-21). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Frawley, D. (1994). *Tantric yoga and the wisdom of the goddesses: Spiritual secrets of ayurveda*. Dehli, India.

- Funk, M. M. (2013). *Discernment matters: Listening with the ear of the heart*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Goffman, E. (2004). Performances: Belief in the part one is playing. In H. Bial (Ed.), *The performance studies reader* (pp. 59-73). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gopal, N. (2013). Music, trance and dance in the Thaipusam kavady festival: Reflections of a select group of South Africans. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 4(1-2), 159-166.
- Hagendoorn, I. (2010). Dance, language and the brain. *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, 3(2/3), 221-234.
- Hagood, M. C. (2009). Researching directions: Mapping a rhizome of 21st century language arts: Travel plans for research and practice. *Language Arts*, 87(1), 39-48. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/41484229](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41484229)
- Hanh, T. N. (2009). *Answers from the heart: Practical responses to lifes burning questions*. Berkley, CA: Parrallax Press.
- Haseman, B. C. (2006). A manifesto for performative research. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research"(118), 98-106.
- Jayasingh, S. (2007). *Faultline*. (S. J. Company, Performer) Retrieved from <http://www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/works/faultline/>
- Kalamaras, G. (1994). *Reclaiming the tacit dimension: symbolic form in the rhetoric of silence*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Kalamaras, G. (1996). Meditative silence and reciprocity: The dialogic implications for "Spiritual sites of composing". *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, 2(1), 18-26.
- Kaylo, J. (2006). The body in phenomonology and movement observation. *E-motion Association For Dance Movement Therapy (ADMT) UK Quarterly*, XIV(18), 5-11. Retrieved March 10, 2015, from [http://www.labancan.org/articles/The%20Body%20in%20Phenomenology%20and%20Movement%20Observation%20\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.labancan.org/articles/The%20Body%20in%20Phenomenology%20and%20Movement%20Observation%20_2_.pdf)
- Khan, A. (2015, March). *iTMOi (in the mind of igor)*. (A. K. Compnay, Performer) ASB Theatre; Aotea Centre, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Lalitaraja. (2012). A Buddhists approach to choreography as a spiritual practice. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, 4(1), 143-154. doi:10.1386/jdsp.4.1.143\_1
- Larson, K. (2012). *Where the heart beats*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.

- Lepecki, A. (2006). *Exhausting dance*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Lin, H.-m. (1999). *Songs of the Wanderers*. (L. Hwai-min, Director, & C. G. Taiwan, Performer)
- Lin, H.-m. (2000). Cloud Gate Dance Theatre - Moon Water: Behind the Scenes. Reiner Moritz Associates. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPnIXPgB2IM&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPnIXPgB2IM&feature=em-share_video_user)
- Longley, A. (2011). *Moving words: Five instances of dance writing*. Doctoral Dissertation, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved April 25, 2014, from [http://vuir.vu.edu.au/19355/1/Alys\\_Longley.pdf](http://vuir.vu.edu.au/19355/1/Alys_Longley.pdf)
- Madhavan, A., & Nair, S. (2013). The kinetic body: Foot, memory and the disposition of the body in performance. In S. Reeve, *Body and performance* (pp. 149-162). Axminster, England: Triarchy Press.
- Makela, M. (2009). In between art and research: Integrating two realms of knowing as a process of inquiry. *IN: Interogations: Creative Interdisciplinarity in Art and Design Research: Proceedings of AHRC Postgraduate Conference* (pp. 111-124). Leicester, England: Loughborough University and De Montfort University. Retrieved from <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/5376>
- McNamara, J. (1999). Dance in the hermeneutic circle. In S. H. Fraleigh, & P. Hanstein (Eds.), *Researching dance: Evolving modes of inquiry* (pp. 162-187). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkdz2.9>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *The phenomenology of perception*. (D. A. Landes, Trans.) Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Miller, W. (1993). *Silence in the contemporary landscape*. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada. Retrieved from <http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/miller.thesis.pdf>
- Morley, J. (2008). Embodied consciousness in tantric yoga and the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. *Religion and the Arts*, 12, 144-163. doi:10.1163/156852908X270980
- Munoz, J. M. (2015). Choreographic mobilities: Emdodied migratory acts across the USA-Mexico border. In S. Whatley, N. G. Brown, & K. Alexander (Eds.), *Attending to Movement* (pp. 61-74). Axminster, England: Triarchy Press.
- Nimkulrat, N. (2007). The role of documentaion in prattice -led research. *Journal of Reserach Practice*, 3(1), Article M6. Retrieved from [www.http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/58/83](http://www.jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/58/83)
- Pagis, M. (2010). Producing intersubjectivity in silence: An ethnographic study of mediatation practice. *Ethnography*, 11(2), 309-328. doi:10.1177/1466138109339041

- Patanjali. (1953). *How to know God: The yoga aphorisms of Patanjali*. (S. Prabhavananda, & C. Isherwood, Trans.) Hollywood, CA: Vendanta Society.
- Peters, L. G. (1989). Shamanism: Phenomenology of a spiritual discipline. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 21(2), 115-137.
- Polnyi, M. (1966). *The tacit dimension*. New York, NY: Doubleday & Co.
- Protopapa, E. (2013). Choreography as philosophy. In J. Bunker, A. Pakes, & B. Rowell (Eds.), *Thinking through dance* (pp. 273-290). Binstead, England: Dance Books.
- Radice, B. (Ed.). (1981). *The Rig Veda*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Rao, C. S. (1998). Sriyantra - A study of spherical and plane forms. *Indian Journal of History of Science*, 33(3), 203-227.
- Rumi. (1995). *The essential Rumi*. (C. Barks, Trans.) New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Saama Veda. (2012). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBNEizCsor0&list=PLWk-Z-D\\_p73LDRqPzHhLYrxE3k-SkdzP&feature=em-share\\_video\\_in\\_list\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBNEizCsor0&list=PLWk-Z-D_p73LDRqPzHhLYrxE3k-SkdzP&feature=em-share_video_in_list_user)
- Saunders, L. (2011). Silences and silence in creativity. *London Review of Education*, 10(2), 215-225. doi:10.1080/14748460.2012.691285
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1981). Thinking in movement. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39(4), 399-407.
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1984). Phenomenology as a way of illuminating dance. In M. Sheets-Johnstone, *Illuminating dance: Philosophical explorations* (pp. 124-145). Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press.
- Sikand, N. (2010). *Dancing with tradition: A global community of Odissi dancers*. Phd Dissertation, City University Of New York, Faculty of Anthropology, New York, NY.
- Sim, S. (2007). *Manifesto for silence: confronting the politics and culutre of noise*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.
- Sinha, I. (1993). *The great book of Tantra*. Rochester, VY: Destiny Books.
- Sriyantra. (2015). *Devi Khadgamala Stotram*. Retrieved from <http://www.ghori.it/Devi-Khadgamala-Stotram-eng.pdf>.
- Staal, F. (2008). *Discovering the Vedas*. New Dehli, India: Penguin Books.
- Stevens, C., & McKechnie, S. (2005). Thinking in action: thought made visible in contemporary dance. *Cognitive Processing*, 6(4), 243-252. doi:10.1007/s10339-005-0014-x

- Sullivan, G. (2009). Making space: The purpose and place of practice-led research. In H. Smith, & R. Dean (Eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* (pp. 41-65). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.
- Sumedho, A. (2007). *The sound of silence: The selected teachings of Ajahan Sumedho*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Tarlekar, G. H. (1991). *Studies in the Natyasastra: With special reference to the sanskrit drama in performance*. New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tolle, E. (2009). *The power of now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. Sydney, Australia: Hodder Australia.
- Trahan, H. A. (2013). The silent teacher: A performative, meditative model of pedagogy. *Liminalities: A journal of Performative Studies*, 9(3). Retrieved from <http://www.liminalities.net>
- Tudor, R. (2008). The Pedagogy of creativity: Understanding higher order capability development in design and arts education. *Proceedings of the 4th International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education*. Barcelona: GUNI. Retrieved from <http://www.guni-rmies.net>
- Veziņa, D. (2006). *The phenomenology of dance*. Burnaby, Canada: Simon Fraser University.
- Vincent, K. (2007). Rhizome/my zone: A case study in studio dance research. In E. Barrett, & B. Bolt (Eds.), *Practice as Research: approaches to creative arts enquiry* (pp. 99-112). London, England: IB Tauris.
- Vipassana. (2015). Retrieved March 2015, from Vipassana Meditation Centre: <http://www.medini.dhamma.org>
- Visgno. (2009). Sri Yantra 3D Video. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8FZ1XbOGpM&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8FZ1XbOGpM&feature=em-share_video_user)
- Voegelin, S. (2010). *Listening to noise and silence: toward a philosophy of sound art*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Weiner, E., & Simpson, J. (Eds.). (1989). *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Woodroffe, J. (2002). *Principles of tantra*. (A. Avalon, Ed.) Dehli, India: Shivalik Prakashan.

# Appendix

## PROGRAMME

### 1. MOUNA 15:40: Catapulted into a larger realm

**Choreography and Performance:** Thamizhvanan Narayanasamy  
An experiment in silence (MOUNA). Travelling deeper within, into the multi-dimensional realm of nothingness and yet everything is possible. Here presence of the performer makes the dance. The creative, nonphysical power is primeval in time and will always be new.

**Music:** *Silence* by Fred Harrison (2015)

**Video:** *Sri Yantra*, by Visignes (2015)

**Programme:** Masters in Dance Studies

Intermission

### 2. Fieldwork for (extra) ordinary folk

**Choreography:** Claire O'Neil

This experimental performance event develops and tests the dancer's agency through specific and intrinsic conditions and processes extracted (predominantly) from Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *field*, *habitus* and *capital*. It queries how a choreographic practice can dig alternative routes for acclimatising and aligning the social body to build a creative toolkit for the performing body, and pursues a curiosity for crafting collective experiences and potential disturbances within an improvised performance landscape.

**Made in collaboration with performers:** Adam Naughton, Kelly Nash, Chancy Rattanong, Georgie Goater, Jonny Almario, Josie Archer, Kosta Bogoevski, Rose Philpott, Aloalii Tapu, Tallulah Holly-Massey, Zahra Killeen-Chance.

**Sound improviser:** Kristian Larsen

**Programme:** Masters in Dance Studies

**Thanks:** to my supervisor Carol Brown, the research participants, Custom Teez (t-shirt printing), MAP research series, and Katrina from Wellesley Street studios.

### 3. As BLACK as EBONY?

**Choreography and Performance:** Ebony Kite-bell

How do dancers search for, locate, and activate their identities? *As BLACK as EBONY?* is a performative lecture that travels through multiple performance modalities in exploring this question. It is natural to want to know yourself, and we often ask ourselves 'Who am I?' and 'What does it mean to be me?' Issues that I explore within this mahi (work) include, 'Is identity given, developed or interwoven?' Come with me as I 'MOVE' through the steps that unpack my identities to form a multiplicity of the 'selves'.

**Programme:** Masters in Dance Studies

**Note:** This performance contains nudity and language that may offend.

**Thank you to my friend:** Simone de Bouvoir

Intermission

### 4. A female, a pole, and a cross

**Choreography and Performance:** Natalie Schiller

An obsession of the body, mainstreaming sexuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a Western society, and a jungle of assumed signs (constructed?) inspired the investigation of deconstructing pole dance with the symbol of a cross. This journey travels within the spectra of gender performativity, multiplicity, becomingness, and rigidity.

**Music:** Marleymusik - Medusa (Free Beat), male voice: Stefan Nagler, Nine Inch Nails - Closer, female voice: Natalie Schiller

**Pole/cross design & engineering:** Seaton Lawrie

**Programme:** Masters in Dance Studies

**Note:** Performance contains explicit language that may offend.

### 5. PITCH: How do I curate my selves?

**Choreography and Performance:** Camelle Pink

To ask how I curate my selves, I take on the imaginative child who tricked, toyed, and tried on the stories in the books and the media that she devoured. She. Her. Me. I. We are layered. Leaving the question, how do I history myself?

**Music:** *Atom Dance* by Bjork (2015)

**Programme:** Masters in Dance Studies

### 6. Whakakotahi

**Choreography:** Jade Whaanga

Whakakotahi is a collaborative choreography exploring an indigenous worldview and ways of knowing. It follows a journey faced by many Māori to discover their whakapapa. Performers embody and explore concepts of whakaahua (coming to form), whakakotahi (unity) and the interplay of masculine feminine energies through three sections: Te awa (the river), Te maunga (the mountain) and Te iwi (the tribe).

**Performers:** Jas Ofamo'oni, Tony Pati, Trudy Dobbie and Elijah Kennar

**Sound:** *Whakakotahi* by Jade Whaanga and Brendon Husban

**Programme:** Bachelor of Dance Studies (Honours)

**Thank you:** Louise Potiki-Bryant for her inspiring mahi in collaboration with Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, Carol Brown for her supervising, Brendan Husban for music development, Alex Henry and Vivian Aue for their help and all the dancers for their contributions.

**Thank you:**

All supervisors and staff at Dance Studies (NICA) and TAPAC, family and friends.

Lighting design advice: Sean Curham

Lighting and AV technician: Patrick Minto

Stage manager: Seren Powell-Jones

Show producer and coordinator: Mark Harvey



<http://www.creative.auckland.ac.nz/en.html>

**TAPAC**  
the auckland performing arts centre

# Seriously Human

*a corpus of brief ideas*

*Dance Studies Masters and Honours degree performances  
7pm 5th-6th Nov, TAPAC, 100 Motion Road Western Springs*