Artistic Sādhanā:

A Praxis of Embodied Awakening

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the practice of Sādhanā within an arts context. The practice of Artistic Sādhanā—art and spiritual practice together as one practice, is a journey of attunement and refinement—breathing both art and artist awake—cultivating each alongside the other—refining one through the other. This embodied and performative arts-based inquiry of Sādhanā follows the path of resonance, weaving together a spiritual and aesthetic questing through body, breath, text and tone, beyond the separations of mind and body, self and other, to the transformative presence of Being—an awakened space within the self wherein spiritual revelation and creative insight abound. Through the practice of Artistic Sādhanā, the art medium becomes an extension of the bodymind self, and the creation process doubles as an allegory for recognizing, reflecting, and reflexively crafting the practitioner-self into a work of art towards an awakened presence. Through my thesis, I offer a vision of Artistic Sādhanā—art practice as spiritual inquiry—as an embodied, subjective, and performatif inquiry into the nature of the self through artful processes. What begins as a subjective, inner, personal quest and focused discipline evolves through Sādhanā into a dynamic intersubjective experience of self in relation with self and other and self as other.

This research thesis journeys through several Sādhanās, and is written with the intention of inspiring the reader towards an Artistic Sādhanā of their own.

Keywords: Arts-based research; Performative inquiry; Embodied inquiry; Spirituality in Arts Education; Sādhanā
 Invocation

अः

या कुन्देन्तु तुषार हार धवला
या शुभ वस्त्रावृत्ता
या वीणावर दण्ड मणिदत करा
या श्वेत पद्मासना ।
या ब्रह्माच्यत शंकर प्रभृतिभिर्
देवैः सदा पूजिता
सा माम्पातु सरस्वती भगवती
निःशेष जाड्यापहा ॥
Dedication

To my husband Patrick~

My Partner in Life, Love, and Art

As I am prepared to explore deep core issues within my artistic process using myself as medium, subject, and witness, I need to work with one whom I trust and with whom I can express myself intimately, who is empathetic to my vision, who tunes into each ritual event to capture the imagery with sensitivity and expression, and one who is in his own right, an artist. I am the one who holds the vision, he is the one who supports and adds to it. I am fortunate that I am married to my artistic partner who accompanies me in all my embodied artistic explorations through to postproduction and installation. He is the artist/ witness who follows each exploration closely through the lens of a camera, who sees and senses deeply into the direction of my inquiry, and fearlessly accompanies me across the threshold into the liminal spaces of inquiry.

Thank you Patrick, my love, my witness and my artistic partner in all that I do. Thank you for your loving and generous support in making this dream of mine a waking reality.
Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Celeste Snowber for your caring response to all that I have asked of you. Thank you for your deep receptivity in matters spiritual, your sensitivity in matters emotional, and for your heart-felt artistry in matters of the body creative. Thank you for truly seeing and hearing the depth of me. I have flourished in your care.

Thank you Dr. Lynn Fels for being an inspiring mentor and for always giving me provocative feedback on my work. Your responses have challenged me to take risks and to be integral to my own voice—to pay attention to the choosing and placing of my words—to exchange the oppressive “should” with the irrepressible “could”.

Thank you Dr. Heesoon Bai for being the internal/external examiner for my defense. Your voice is valuable in my ongoing research, and I have immense respect for you as a scholar and contemplative practitioner.

Thank you Shri Yogi Hari for your wisdom that all is Sādhanā, and for blessing me with the name Saraswati.

Thank you Pandit Uday Bhawalkar for the teachings of Dhrupad and morning Sādhanā. The depth of your artistry continues to inspire and guide me.

Thank you my dear teacher Kalpana Prasad, for teaching me Sangeet Sādhanā week after week, year after year; for sharing the mysteries within the stories through Satsang; and for the sweet perfection of your voice that forever guides my practice.

Thank you Pandit Rattan Mohan Sharma. Your exquisite devotional sound and your generosity in sharing show me how one person’s Sādhanā can change the world.

Thank you Tarchin Hearn. Your radiant teachings have opened my heart to experience the fullness of embodied belonging within the community of interbeing.

Thank you Loretta Jackson for your friendship and support in the making of Clay Creek Rituals. You found the perfect location for my work of art.
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“The creative process, like a spiritual journey, is intuitive, non-linear, and experiential. It points us toward our essential nature, which is a reflection of the boundless creativity of the universe” (Loori, 2004, p.1).
Reader’s Guide

“Pedagogic relationality and the transformative potential of research rest in the quality of evocative GRAPHIC renderings of research—that is to say that research must be presented in provocative forms in order to move the reader/viewer” (Sameshima, 2008, p.51).

Writing across and through disciplinary and textual boundaries, my desire here is to "conjure alchemic spaces where language, pedagogy, and place connect the textures of lived experience... “ (Miller, 2003). This thesis, being autobiographical, embodied and performative, intends a dynamic textual event that is reflective of the nature of my inquiry.

It takes Life as its inspiration, and as Denzin (1992) posits,

Life is not lived realistically, in a linear manner. It is lived through the subject’s eye, and that eye, unlike a camera’s, is always reflexive, nonlinear, subjective, filled with flashbacks, after images, dream sequences, faces merging into one another, masks dropping, and new masks being put on (Denzin, p. 27).

My research has been captured in a variety of autobiographical, narrative, and textual forms: short stories, field notes, contemplative reflections and interjections, poetry, musings, meanderings, and theoretical writing; and you will find the visual page transformed with changing fonts, photographic image, and links through to video and music. Thus, this thesis is compiled in much the same way as my research was conducted. It is a multi-voiced textual weave intended as an evocative and affective expression of the dynamic and multidimensional experience of my inquiry. My thesis journey is punctuated throughout with moments of stopping (Appelbaum, 1995)—space-moments (Fels, 1998, 1999)—unexpected moments of insight into “possible new worlds” (Varela, 1987) and ways of being, brought forth into consciousness by the very act of performing my inquiry. And I
mark my journey, creating both a trail and a mapping of my wanderings, my wonderings, and my understandings, through a variety of narrative styles, and a multiplicity of voices—each recognized by its own particular font—with the intention of invoking the dimensional depth of the original experience and evoking a response within the reader. Thus paradoxically moving beyond the personal individual experience into the realm of the collective, to connect through resonance with each individual.

The occasional blank page between each Sādhanā journey sits as an opening and offering of contemplative space for the reader to dwell and reflect for a moment before proceeding into the next Sādhanā exploration.
The Voices Within this Thesis

— their respective fonts (for visual recognition)

Cambria—represents the explanatory voice, the voice that clarifies and discusses my own theories and those of other scholars.

Gill Sans Light — represents the storytelling voice that is used to visually evoke contemplative presence, stillness and ephemeral space. I use this font for first person present time performing of inquiry, including activated memory portal stories and field notes.

Gill Sans Light Italic — is the font used for Morning Sadhana Musings and Stop Moments that are performative and reflective first person narratives.

Cochin italic — for the occasional note, aside, or list — for example: the many uses of the Labyrinth — although I do not go into full explanation of all the uses named on the list, the list itself serves as a menu of possibilities for the form to which I am playing in, with, and through.

Cochin regular — I use this font for notes at the bottom of the page and the end of a section when more explanation of language and meaning is required.

Palatino italic — represents my thoughts and questions that arise in present time as each inquiry unfolds, this includes the reflective journey taken through the writing of this thesis.

Candara—represents the voice of the visiting scholar. Candara will be found whenever I use a large independent quote from an outside scholar.

Zapafino — the Poet’s voice — induction into the experience

Apple Chancery italic — is another flavour of the poet’s voice. Wherever there is a poem, it will be in the large Zapafino font that conjures open space and timelessless, or in Apple Chancery, which, to my mind, conjures a smaller magical and more intimate space.

Optima—is the font I use for Headers—for distinguishing the sections of this thesis.
Performing Inquiry

“Performative inquiry is a research vehicle that recognizes performance in action and interaction as place of learning and exploration. Our tools of inquiry are our bodies, our minds, our imaginations, our experiences, our feelings, our memories, our biases, our judgments and prejudgments, our hopes and our desires—simply, our very being, becoming” (Fels, 1998, p.5).

Performative inquiry is a research methodology and learning vehicle conceptualized and introduced into educational research by scholar Lynn Fels (1998) who posits, “The research methodology which we choose, shapes our understanding of our landscapes, our questions, our ways of being” (p.2). I have always been one to perform my inquiry...to breathe and sing my questioning...to move my desire to know through my own experiencing. Whatever that inquiry is, I must try it out for myself ...test it...experience it through my own active engagement. I prefer to cultivate knowledge through first hand experience, for I value the fullness, depth, and quality of knowledge that is generated through the living emergent process of the bodymind experience.

The bodymind position is a relatively new biology that stands in contrast to, and, within this thesis, in the place of Descartes' body-mind dichotomy—the idea that there is a separation between the mind and the body, and “a division between “doing” and the “knowing”, which belies the experience of learning” (Fels, 1998, p. 6). Performative inquiry leans into the theories of enactivists Maturana and Varela (1992) who posit, “embodiment has this double sense: it encompasses both the body as a lived experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanism” (Varela et al., 1993, p. xxvi). Here the
body's action and the mind's operation are not separate parts but are entwined as one expression of Being. And it is this being that engages in “an ongoing bringing forth” of multitudes of worlds “through the process of living itself” (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p. 11).

Artistic Sādhanā is at once both artistic and contemplative, yet also, active, engaged, and fully embodied. Here, embodiment is defined as “a mind-body unity” (Varela et al, 1991, p. 29) within the lived experience, with the body as integral to experiencing, and the experience through the body as integral to knowing (Maturana and Varela, 1992). It is a particular location of consciousness where “the body knows itself through the mind as the mind knows itself through the body…. The two are known through one another and are inseparable” (Zaporah, 1997, p. 129). In becoming aware of how I construct my realities...how I grasp the appearance of things, how and when I interrogate my lived and living worlds, and how I acknowledge the multiple perspectives that exist for making sense of this so called, common sense world (Greene, 1995, p. 65), I look to, through, and from the location of my embodiment.

**Bodymind Activation**

“Embodiment is a listening in the body, a presence of body in the pedagogy of practice... a dissolving of the contradictions of flesh and spirit into a unity of presence” (Denton, 2004, p. 137)

In the context of this thesis, embodied ways of knowing and being are activated through: physically moving...dancing...sounding and writing; and by performing each inquiry—consciously participating in the cultivation of knowledge through the exploration of bodymind, breath, muscle and bone—rousing from the depths, and bringing to the surface for examination, the embedded, individuated and identified consciousness that is in the
process of an engaged awakening. To this purpose, I have chosen a research approach based in performance, arts, embodied action, and first-person experience that is wide enough and deep enough to hold both, the initial explorations, and the potential outcomes of each Sādhanā practice.

**Embracing Experiencing**

“Performance is a journey of action-interaction precariously balanced between the known, the unknown, and not-yet-known world(s) of being” (Fels, 1998, p.10).

My interest in Performative Inquiry lies in the performance process itself. In my experience, it is the embodied and performative inquiry of, through, and within the processes of artistic practice and play, where the ways of activating insight can be found. In other words, the answers can be found in the inquiry process itself—in the way the question is performed.

For in performing ones inquiry there is an awakeness—an active awareness and full conscious presence (ness)—“a way of being through which our embodied awareness unfolds through engaging/embracing our experiencing” (Hocking, Haskell & Linds, 2001, xvii).

**Returning to Immediacy**

“Through performance we bring forth possible new worlds, space-moments of learning: an ecological interstanding which invites the co-evolving world(s) of performance and cognition in a transformative dance” (Fels, 1998, p. 10).

By approaching one’s art practice as Sādhanā, the participant is choosing to consciously participate in the cultivation of self-knowledge and self-understanding while actively seeking communion with a deeper sense of being. In the action of Sādhanā, one comes into conscious presence, and is therefore available to opportunity and creative insight that arise
as inspiration within the present moment. By engaging Sadhanā research as Performative inquiry, one is engaging a dynamic interactive process—activating movement and provoking chaos for the purpose of accelerating revelation and insight by way of “Stop” moments (Appelbaum, 1995), and “Space Moments” (Fels, 1998, 1999). Such moments of awakening—could be said to be moments of clarity in which one glimpses behind and beyond the “automation of conceptualization” (Bai, 2001, p.91), and where one has successfully interrupted habitual thought construction(s) (habitual patterns and reactions) and returned to immediacy. “This is the work of attention. Attention breaks and stops the trance of thought construction (Bai, 2009, p. 145). When we are present in awakened attention, we have broken from the “rational automatism” (Appelbaum, 1995, p. 17), and have returned, or awakened in the immediate moment, to the “present sensory experience” (p. 22). It is the work of Artistic Sadhanā to activate, enter, and extend the Stop moment—to dwell in the immediacy of the unfolding present.

Seeking the Transitory Space of Groundlessness

“Performance is the action-interaction that invites us into the interstices between the real and the not-yet real—through which absence (the not yet known) may be made present” (Fels, 1998, p. 11).

The “stop is not the negation of movement. It is movement itself, a form of movement purer than that of body, mind, or feeling alone. It is movement toward an embodied awareness. The stop is a movement of transition” (Appelbaum, 1995, p.24). It is within the stop as movement and transition where my research delves. It is here in the in-between transitory space of groundlessness “on the edge of chaos” (Waldrop, 1992, p.12), where “possible new worlds”(Varela, 1987) exist in their potentiality ready to be brought forth into an “endless dance of co-emergence” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 12), and where “organism and environment
enfold into each other and unfold from one another in the fundamental circularity which is life itself (Varela et al., 1991, p. 217). The transitory space of groundlessness that I seek whilst performing Artistic Sādhanā is a place of living paradox. It is a place actively sought by the ego self for the purpose of meeting the no self —“the emergent formation of direct experience without the ground of an ego self” (Varela et al, 1991, p. 123). It is a place wherein the ego-self can be viewed in all its risings: memories, habitual patterns, cultural embeddedness, and multiple layers of conditioning that the “I” might carry on the Sādhanā journey. From an artistic perspective, conscious self-steeping within the “Stop” (Appelbaum, 1995) that is the continual “movement of transition” is an act of communion with a deeper sense of Being. And it is here where rich resources of self-knowledge and artistic inspiration reside.

**Openings to Learning and Transformation**

“To entertain performative inquiry as a research vehicle, is to recognize the risk, the unexpected, ‘the stop’ embodied in action and interaction through performance that opens us to possibility” (Fels, 1998, p.3).

It is important to my research process to have a way of embodying inquiry that is emergent, reflexive, and responsive—a way of working that, like Sādhanā: intentionally provokes insight, revelation, and creative inspiration within the one inquiring; recognizes such experiences as valuable and vital to the process of learning; and views these potentially transformative moments as openings to resources, new directions, and further possibilities. Performative inquiry (Fels, 1998, 1999) is an approach to research that assigns significance to the “space-moments of learning”—moments of possibility and opportunity for awakening revealed through the conscious and embodied act of performing the “what if...?”
What if… The arts student was to redefine the artistic endeavour as a pilgrimage into the unknown nature of the self…? What insights and revelations might one encounter on the journey of self-discovery…? How might these encounters be reflected through the creative impulse…?

Each artful Sādhanā within this thesis is a unique journey-landscape replete with “space-moments of learning” (Fels, 2008)—moments of stopping and reflecting upon all that which is brought to the moment of stopping, and on that which caused/activated the moment of stopping; and further, upon the opportunities for learning and possibilities for further inquiry presented therein.

**Preparation**

When preparing to document my explorations, I prepare to create an art piece. My intention is to carry my inquiry throughout the entire exploration process—from dream inception to actualization through embodied improvisation and play, through the recording of the embodied event, and throughout the final production—the inquiry is continual, and the art produced exists as artefact and document of process, in mediums visual, aural, and textual. I record my work in video and photograph as well as in writing. As a transdisciplinary artist, I see the potential for artistry and inquiry in every step of the process of creation, including the stages of preparation and postproduction. I want to share my work in inquiry, and therefore, part of my inquiry is in finding ways to share the invisible and the experiential. The artefacts produced are more than a direct documentation of an event. It is my intention to be evocative through image and through the presentation of the image. Because of this, the artful recordings of my embodied performative inquiries are further transformed to
become video and photography installations that stimulate an extended witnessing space to include the viewer in the reverberations of the inquiry.

**Transdisciplinary—**
as an artist, my art is inquiry-based and not necessarily or particularly discipline-based. I engage a particular way of being in inquiry that focuses on the interrelationship between the knowing, doing, being, and relating (Basarab, xi). In this way, I follow my inquiry through all and any discipline or medium that might call to me. The experiences within each discipline and medium are unique and will be reflected in the art produced, while the inquiry into the nature of the self continues throughout all form.

**Gathering of Image**

Photography extends my performative inquiry in many directions. To my process it represents: the witness in the moment of the initial creative act; the reflective mirror during and after the initial performance event; and in post production and installation, photography acts as a portal through, and to, an extended witnessing body, and thus through to future time. The act of photography effectively apprehends and holds in stasis a moment in time now past—a tracing of a subject no longer in existence in the actual world. Yet it also has the potential to extend life of an event in time, and its resonance, if artfully crafted, can communicate an experience of that moment—an experience not contingent upon or locked into a time or frame. The act of photography, of composing and creating a tone and mood within the frame, is “a spiritual exercise, an exercise in attentiveness, a way to live a life of philosophy, and a way to represent the integration of one’s inner and outer experiences” (Patterson & Gallant, 2001, p. 22).

Thus, my thesis is a living praxis—a performative site of inquiry that acknowledges, contemplates, reflects and responds to lived and still living experience through each visual, textual, embodied and experiential encounter.
What you are looking for is who is looking

St. Francis Of Assisi

(Loori, 2005, p. 238)
At the turn of the century, scholars Denzin and Yvonna (2000) envisioned a way of engaging qualitative inquiry for the new era that would begin with the self and extend into the environment through the recognition and respect of the sacred.

We imagine a form of qualitative inquiry in the 21st Century that is simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical... It seeks to ground the self in a sense of the sacred to connect the ethical, respectful self dialogically to nature... It seeks to embed this self in deeply storied histories of scared spaces and local places, to illuminate the unit of the self in its relationship to the reconstructed, moral, and sacred natural world.... This model of inquiry seeks a sacred epistemology that recognizes the essential ethical unity of mind and nature... A sacred, existential epistemology places us in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical relationship to the earth, to nature, and to the larger world... (p. 1052)

This thesis is my offering and response to such an imagining. Artistic Sādhanā is not a new concept engineered for the new century, rather it is an ancient and sacred foundational spiritual practice of the Yoga tradition. I return to this ancient source of wisdom to listen deeply to its teachings. Sādhanā is a Sanskrit term meaning the conscious intention and discipline in the doing and in the pursuit of a particular goal, which throughout world wisdom traditions, translates to being a goal related to ones spiritual practice. “A Sādhanā is a spiritual practice—a meditative exploration that weaves into a seamless whole: visualization, inner focus, physical movement, breathing, mantra, prayers of devotion, and silent contemplation” (Hearn, 2008, p.8). When applied in the area of arts education, Sādhanā becomes the conscious participation in ones own spiritual evolution through the engagement with, and the refinement of ones own art practice.
Artistic Sādhanā

“There is an art to listening to our lives. Research is not only an outward endeavour, but it travels in the realm of researching our own lives, knowledge, passions, and practice” (Snowber, 2011, p.3).

The practice of Artistic Sādhanā continues to awaken and refine me as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Approaching education as Sādhanā means conscious participation in one’s own academic, artistic and spiritual evolution. It is a way of coming to understand the nature of self-in-relation to the universal through one’s own embodied actions. My thesis is, in a sense, a recovery project, a reclamation of the sacred within the self first, and from there, a recognition through the sacred to the environment of which I am an integral part. Author, educator, and activist Parker Palmer (1998), claims, “there is a deep yearning among teachers and students today—a yearning for embodied meaning—that will be fulfilled only as education embraces the fact that what is inward and invisible is at least as important as what is outward and empirical” (x). Palmer’s (1998) observation is echoed by scholar poet and artist Celeste Snowber (2011), who explains “…students desire ways of accessing Being in a new way. A hunger is evident. Students are yearning for places to nourish inner life, which will sustain them in their engagements in daily practice” (p.31). I know this yearning in myself, and have witnessed it in others, students and teachers alike—a yearning for profound intimacy, immersion, and depth—a desiring of a deeper kind of knowing and being.

Bringing Artistic Sādhanā into arts education is my response to such a yearning. For I believe that the yearning and longing for that which lay beyond the known edges of our consciousness, will be the force we need as artists, to create the reflection and experience of that we seek. And our effort will be echoed back to us with a reciprocated longing from the
source of our desire. According to musician, author and educator Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), the play of longing that draws us into the source of our own being, “this lila, is the instrumentality for hypnotically drawing people into deeper and more sacred areas of the psyche” (p.164). It is a seduction—a meeting and merging of the visceral and spiritual. In the field of art, “we feel this quality of entrainment when we are carried away, or rather carried inward, by the rhythmic, mantic qualities of music, poetry, theatre, and ritual” (p. 164).

“Spirituality in education begins with openness: opening up to ourselves, feeling our experience, and exploring the inner landscape of our lives” (Glazer, 1999, p. 247).

In The Heart of Learning (1999), Steven Glazer writes, “spirituality in education is about intimacy with experience: intimacy with our perceptions—the experience of having a body; our thoughts—the experience of having a mind; and our emotions—the experience of having a heart” (p. 2). Within the Sādhanās of my thesis, my bodymind, breath, and voice are the mediums through which I explore inner spaces and outer places and the in-between where the two meet. They are my fields upon and through which I play and am carried away—carried inward and outward—meeting and merging with spirit. The act of Sādhanā extends to the phenomena of “intensified listening” as “deep play [and] total immersion” in the art form, where by “tuning the instrument we tune the spirit” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 55). It is a listening with the entire being, and a seeing within, between, as well as without, and a viewing through multiple lens back towards the multiple layers of self.

“The arts... offer a method for deepening and shifting the perceptions and understandings of practices one engages” (Snowber, 2011, p.3).

Artistic Sādhanā engages in: the “work of art” as well as the “work of art” as defined by Eisner (2002, p. 81), where the former refers to the product being created, and the latter to
the process of creating; and the “practice as art”, as defined by Nachmanovitch (1990, p.68); as ritual, as defined by Driver (1991), where the process of art making as “work done playfully” becomes charged with “energies and meaning” (p. 99); and as ceremony, as conceived by Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (1994), who teaches us, “The ceremony of art touches the deepest realms of the psyche and the sacred dimension of the artistic process. This is the level that not only transforms something into art, but also transforms the artist at the very core of [her] being (p.155). Artistic Sādhanā is a returning to ceremony and ritual—a returning to the sacred within the self and the world in which we live. It is a way to conscious transformation within space-moments in time—a way of making sacred the moments of self-inquiry and self-cultivation.

“Spirituality in education is about bringing ourselves more fully to each moment...” (Glazer, 1999, p. 247).

Art practice as Sādhanā embraces and reactivates Maxine Greene’s (1995) position on the “importance of wide-awakeness, or awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p.35). For Sādhanā requires a conscious decision to be awake and attentive in the moment’s unfolding, to listen deeply and attend with mindful-awareness to what is brought forth in each awakened moment in the spirit of exploration beyond the edges of the known to the otherness of Self. “This wide-awakeness is a visceral aliveness, a cellular knowing—an embrace of what is seen and unseen” (Snowber, 2014, p.124). It is the “aspiration for clarity that will allow us to deal with the many layers of our conditioning; to bring each one to light, to examine it, to let it go, and to investigate deeper” (Loori, 1999,p.5), and recognize that we are essentially encountering “an idea of a self that is perpetuated through the notion of separateness” (5).
Sadhana is a living exploration of and through the paradox of embodiment. As such, the inquiry into and through embodiment is an ongoing open-ended inquiry that can be pursued through multiple artistic mediums. I shall begin with breath and extend into sound, then from sound into movement as creative dance and ritual and path walking. Throughout all the forms that my Sadhana takes, I intend a conscious cognitive presence within an embodied sensorial awareness.
Notes for Śādhanā

Scholars of Śādhanā ~


Śādhanā ~

Śādhanā tests and strengthens character while simultaneously purifies, opens, and unmakes the identified self—the whom one believes themselves to be. In the Yoga tradition, Śādhanā is the basis for yoga, and is engaged as a preparation for higher states of realization (Rama, 2011). The content of Śādhanā is designed specific to desired outcome results: focus, healthy body and thoughts, the removal of all unwholesome and unhelpful practices. In spiritual traditions, Śādhanā contains instructions to be carried out through the body in the way of sacred gestures and movements, sacred utterances, visualizations and meditations. Sometimes the visualizations are upon a particular form or aspect of a deity, and sometimes the focus is upon emptiness. In Yoga Śādhanā, the intention is to move through form into formlessness—to recognize one inside of the other—and to immerse oneself in the paradox of being both. Śādhanā practices have traditionally been set by the Guru; however, Swami Shivananda (1998) states, “If you are a student on the path of Self-reliance, you can yourself select the Śādhanā for your daily practice” (xi). Thus, with Swami ji’s permission, I select Artistic Śādhanā as my daily practice and teaching.

My idea of Artistic Śādhanā ~

is to engage the artistic process with the intention of opening, revealing, unmaking and remaking the self, not as a psychological, therapeutic or healing exercise necessarily, but as a conscious work of gathering and creating knowledge alongside of refining one’s art expression through form. Śādhanā is a spiritual practice—a way of coming to understand the nature of self-in-relation to the universal through one’s own embodied actions. Śādhanā offers a unique spiritual orientation to education as well as an ecological worldview.

This entire thesis is a result of my questioning and my quest to know: “How might I bring the practice of Artistic Śādhanā into an academic research paper? How might I express it in a way that is performative, affective, and evocative, and in a way that resonates and inspires the reader towards a questing of his or her own through an artful Śādhanā practice?

Wondering, Questioning, and Seeking to Know ~ reflective forms of Experience

I continue to learn that in matters of personal and spiritual development, “the very things we seek to understand are produced in the moment of inquiry” (Springgay, 2008, p. 162). Knowledge and self-understanding are revealed in the process of gathering ones thoughts into a question. It is here where “reflection is a form of experience itself—and that reflective form of experience can be performed with mindfulness/awareness” (Varela et al, 1991, p.27). For this to happen, however, one has to be a wonderer—one who wants to know. For me this translates as active participation in the evolution of one’s own knowledge making process, and an openness “to possibilities other than those contained in one’s current representations of the life space” (27).
This entire thesis process is immersed in the Sādhanā of Embodied Breath.

Here and throughout my thesis explorations, I journey upon, with, and through the embodied breath into the extraordinary richness of each moment of active inquiry.
Sādhana of Breath

“The breath is a medium, a mediator, which is essential for a becoming of the relation to ourselves, to the world, to the other. To cultivate one's breath means keeping alive a possible mediation between oneself and oneself, oneself and the other, oneself and the world” (Irigaray, 2013, p. 217).
“Breathing is a doorway, a threshold of arriving and parting, a gateway of mystery, which is available to any who care to flower in trust and sensitivity and wide-awareness” (Hearn, 1991, 2005, p. 9).

Breathing, as Tibetan Buddha dharma teacher Tarchin Hearn (1991, 2005) so poetically posits, is a gateway to the unknown otherness in our midst. In this light, I propose, breathing is also a gateway to the unknown otherness of self. For in my lifeworld, the conscious breath is a Happening—an eventful intersubjective Happening—an aesthetic event full of the richness of embodied presence.

I breathe, and by my breathing alchemically transform the matter and content of each breath. Inherently skilled in the art of transmutation, I breathe in the exhalations of the trees, and exhale...gifting all that I am in this moment back into the world. With each conscious breath cycle, I awaken into the wholeness and fullness of life itself.

The conscious breath is the foundation of Śādhanā practice—breathing the practitioner and the practice awake to the world within and without. Hearn (1991, 2005) explains that by attending to breathing as a conscious practice, we might come to “recognize how each aspect of [one’s] existence: body, speech and mind, inner and outer, micro and macro is interweaving with everything else in the universe” (Hearn, p.140). It is a sharing with the universal community in which we are all an integral part. "Nothing stands independently on its own. Everything is created, sustained and supported by everything else. All arisings are mutually shaping" (140). Breathing as Śādhanā brings the practitioner into conscious presence—breathing oneself awake into present moment awareness and to the potentials and possibilities therein.
“As we reach deep into the spiritual realms of consciousness, our breath functions as a bridge between the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious mind, the material and the spiritual worlds” (Paul, 2004, p. 169).

My breath moves between and throughout the inner and outer realms of my embodiment. It bridges the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious. Breathing is where I share this world with every other breathing organism on the planet. It is the way of conscious interconnectivity with the otherness of being, with other beings and other consciousness.

I have in the past been unaware of the full potential of the breath as a doorway to consciousness and presence. My breath has supported me throughout many pilgrimages to sacred sites, ashrams, cathedrals, temples, monasteries and sacred mountains. It has kept me alive while seeking the teachings and blessings of holy masters; and has been fully engaged in my expressions of devotion while singing,chanting, and praying. It has allowed me to search for meaning, healing, spiritual truths, insight and revelation. And continues its blessing as I awaken into the full realization that the holiest and most sacred site of all is my own aliveness, and the portal of that aliveness is, and has always been, my own ever-present breath. I now know that I don’t have to search outside of my self for “the way”, for I am immersed in it. I am it. For without the breath, “I” would not be, and neither would “my self” as part of Self, the collective “WE”.

I breathe…and by my breathing, bring all that I am into the environment of which I am an integral part. I breathe…and with each breath notice the edges of “me” soften and open to receive…I breathe the boundaries between myself and other open….
“The first practice that can cultivate an ethical and loving relationship with the other is, of course, breathing” (Holmes, 2013, p. 45).

The breath is the teacher, the guide, and the spirit. It is the essential animating force of life itself. With this understanding, the sense of a separate identified self as “me” seems illusory. This new sense of “Me” now is far more spacious and inclusive than I had ever imagined. Experiencing my lifeworld in this way, there is so much more to explore.

Zen scholar, artist, and scientist John Daido Loori Roshi (2007) asks us to “imagine a universe that is a self-creating, self-maintaining, and self-defining organism—a universe in which all the parts and the totality are a single entity; all of the pieces and the whole thing are, at once, one thing” (xi). From here it is easy to imagine that which connects and makes whole ‘all the parts and all the pieces’ is that which permeates all things—Breath.

Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) explains the Indigenous belief that “breath represents the most tangible expression of the spirit in all living things” (p.42).

In a sharing of spirit with all living things we share a mutual identity—We exist by the substance of breath—are animated by the life forces—the living spirit within each breath—life is breathed into us; and we can (if we so choose), animate and activate our consciousness through breath, by turning our awareness to our own breathing.

“Breathing cannot be assimilated to an abstract and unconscious gesture. Breathing must become an autonomous, active and conscious gesture towards a living spiritual becoming that is both embodied and embodying” (Irigaray, 2013, p.217).

Professor of religion Emily Holmes (2013) affirms that conscious breathing practice doesn’t come easily, even by grace; it requires human cooperation and effort—practiced over time until it becomes a spiritual habit. Cultivated from mere survival breathing to spiritual
breathing, breath is the source of divinization, supporting spiritual growth towards becoming divine (Holmes, 2013, p.46-47).

I breathe…. and with each breath fill myself with spirit…

I breathe…. and with each conscious breath co create my divinization

I breathe… and by my breathing offer all that I am to the present moment.

I breathe…. and with each breath witness my emergence into clarity

“Notice the ever-changing current of dozens of sensations that makeup the experience of each breath. The more clear and sensitive awareness becomes, the more sensations you can observe in a single breath” (Walsh, 1999, p.190).

Conscious embodied breath work can be engaged as an active process of self-inquiry without adding any other intention or structure to it. By “simply being aware and present with each of [the] movements of breath expressed through the body…. we enter a self-analytical process of growth and development. Breath becomes our guide and teacher” (Roffler & Middendorf, 2009, p. 138). In this way “every breath can be a practice…[it] is not something that requires a particular place in which to sit” (Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, 1998, p. 135), walk, meditate, or dance. When we practice conscious breathing we are observing our aliveness in all its manifestation.
I breathe…and witness my thoughts, emotions and sensations as they arise from moment to moment, and observe their qualities (Thompson, 2015, pp 52)

I imagine a Curriculum of Breath—breathing into curriculum—breathing the student, teacher and teachings awake—breathing life into learning. I imagine how conscious breath practice might transform learning, knowing and being in academic life, and I envision the spaces breathed into being. In my experience, conscious breath work supports an investigation into the states of mind, body, and energies within the practitioner, bringing an awareness of the self in context and in relationship to other and environment. Breathing practice could potentially open up “curricular spaces” (Fels, 2003, p. 173) for deepening the learning experience, for reflecting through breath upon the experience, and for responding with breath through the art form of ones choosing. A conscious breath practice would breathe the curriculum and the student awake— filling both with spirit and presence.

With each conscious breath I energize my focus and bring vital energies to each moment of inquiry.

Breath practice can take numerous forms ranging from the highly controlled yogic practices of pranayama, used to control particular states of body, energy and mind, to a complete and intentioned abandonment of control where one uses a light observation of the breath as a basic support while investigating the current states of body, energies and mind (Hearn, 2005). Throughout the various practices within Sādhanā, one uses/ accesses/ and engages the breath in multiple ways depending upon the objective of the Sādhanā in the unfolding
moment. For example, Sounding Sādhanā requires a longer more sustained breath; and therefore, a developed pranic discipline is part of the practice, whereas in walking Sādhanā, especially if the goal is mindfulness and interbeingness (Thich Nhat Hanh), a gentle and continual observance of the underlying breath supports the intention of the practice. In Theravada Vipassana meditation, one “begins with a focused attention on the sensation of breathing...[and] shifts to an open awareness once some degree of attentional stability has been attained” (Thompson, 2015, 52).

One of the primary intentions of Sādhanā is to develop the practice of “open awareness” (Thompson, 2015)—the “awareness of awareness, or what psychologists call meta-awareness”(52). It is the cultivation of the witnessing self whereby one’s focus remains open and attentive to the thoughts and feelings as they arise from moment to moment, and within such witnessing one gets to see how the self is created. According to philosopher Evan Thompson (2015):

This style of practice leads to an acute sensitivity to implicit aspects of experience, such as the degree of vividness in awareness from moment to moment or the way that transitory thought and feelings typically capture attention and provoke more thoughts and habitual reactions. One learns to see how habits of identifying with sensations, thoughts, emotions, and memories—in other words, with specific contents of awareness—create the sense of self (52).

I breathe…and watch my thoughts as they reach beyond this moment into memory spaces and emotional places…I breathe…and witness the sensation of longing unfulfilled… I breathe…and gently lead my mind back to the beauty of the present moment and all that it contains…
In my morning Sound Śādhanā practice of toning and singing, the breath is observed throughout for all that it reveals about the one supporting the sound. Yoga teacher Donna Farhi (1996) explains that, "The process of breathing is the most accurate metaphor we have for the way that we personally approach life, how we live our lives, and how we react to the inevitable changes that life brings us" (p. 5). It is from within the invisible presence of the breath that our visible presence comes into being. Breathing consciously, one can discern and examine the potential holding spaces that trap energy and thus trap breath. For "just as the breath specifically locks in the negative experiences of birth and early childhood, so the breath can free us in this present moment " (Sky, 2009, p. 92). In learning how to harness breath, it is important to realize that the breath is part of the whole body system. And the body is a "collection of powerful forces working together as one, with the breath as both a source and a guide...Whereas anxiety restricts our breathing, joy permits it to flow freely.... Every activity changes our breath rhythm..."(Roffler & Middendorf, 2009, p. 139).

In the conscious allowance of release and flow of breath throughout the active processes of self-inquiry, I actively participate in the movement of energies held in stasis within the body mind.
Notes for Sādhanā of Breath section

Pranayama~
Raja Yogi and Yogic Guru Swami Rama (1998), explains, “Through knowledge of the respiratory system a student can gain control of the motions of the body and mind. Through the practice of Pranayama [s]he can shape [her] character and even change the course of [her] life, for the knowledge of breath is a subtle and complete way of understanding and regulating the functioning of the mind and body” (p. 58). Prana, a Sanskrit term for “the vital life force or life energy in any living being which exists in a subtle, nonphysical form” (p.150), is strengthened through the discipline of singing and in turn strengthens the body and the mind. The development and management of Prana is sought through the practice of Pranayama, a yogic science and discipline practiced to gain control over the physical breath in order to further govern the subtle energies of the body-mind organism. The controlled breath and pranic energies are channelled into a one pointed focus towards the experience of Nada Brahma—immersion in the oneness of being.

Interbeingness~
Buddha Dharma Scholar and Monk Thich Nhat Hanh asserts as an extension of the concept of independent co-arising, that there is no independent self; we “inter-are”—the perception of self as “me” or as “I” or “mine” is an illusion. It is the awareness that “I” am made of “non-I” elements…and am part of the web of life
https://bodhileaf.wordpress.com/2009/05/25/understanding-interbeing/

With this realization, the idea of self as singular subjective no longer stands.
I inter-am within a vast community of spirit filled othernesses that exist alongside, within, around, and outside me, as part of, and because of, my own living processes. The “I” is so much more than my small and messy ego-self would have me believe. And yet, it is that same small ego-self that has led me to realize a world beyond the limitation of its self into the fullness of living-beingness. I respond with caring, kindness, and deep gratitude.

Vipassana Meditation~
Vipassana meditation is the practice of cultivating moment-to-moment awareness and clear comprehension of whatever arises in the field of experience. Such “mindfulness” is non-reactive in the sense that ideally one simply observes or witnesses the coming and going of sensory and mental events without getting caught up in cognitive and emotional reactions to them. Vipassana cultivates an awareness that is non-grasping or non-clinging because one discerns whatever arises without holding onto it (Thompson, 2015, p 52-53). Within Sādhanā the cultivation of the witness self is key, and within Artistic Sādhanā, the moments of grasping and clinging can be noted and commented upon or worked through one’s art medium. Whatever is seen and experienced can be resourced for creative purpose. Whatever clings or grasps can be acknowledged, examined, ritually played with, embraced and or sacrificed in the fire of awareness, depending upon the goals of the artist’s unique Sādhanā.
The Sacred

Before I venture further, I think it is important for me to offer a definition of ‘sacred’ that can be used across all contexts. For this purpose I draw from the work of American ritual theorist, Ronald Grimes (1995), who defines ‘sacred’ as “the name we give to the deepest forms of receptivity in our experience” (p. 69). For whether the space or event can be recognized, by a cultural authority or other, as ‘officially sacred’ or ‘unofficially sacred’, is not important to the practice of Sādhanā. It is for the practitioner to recognize a space, place, object, event, feeling, moment, group, or happening, as worthy of assigning sanctity, and within that sanctity, open in trust to receive the experience that awaits. In my understanding, the making of something as ‘sacred’ is simply a way of grounding an experience with meaning and importance as a foundation and platform from which to tether the self, until ready to release into an expanded understanding of the term. Eventually, one might experience the ‘sacred’ as a space that is carried within, and in this way, wherever one may go, the ‘sacred’ will be present throughout the journey. Zen Buddhist Monk, author, and artist John Daido Loori Roshi (1999), speaks of a way of being in ‘intimate understanding’ that is unlike ordinary understanding, in that it is beyond the dualistic separation of self and other. Loori explains that intimate understanding is to happen within the self first—“It is a state of consciousness” (p. 65)—a way of being in intimacy with all things— the ‘sacred’ space of deep intimacy with no separation is to happen in the mind first. “When you enter the mind of zazen, you enter a sacred space” (p.28). It doesn’t matter where you are or what you are doing, “the mind of zazen always opens a sacred space” (p.28). Sometimes the sacred space evolves through your meditation. “You do zazen and the space grows around you” (p.62). How I understand Loori Roshi’s teachings, is reflected throughout my thesis inquiry as Sādhanā. Sādhanā begins with a defined space and practice, journey and intention; however, underlying the various Sādhanā practices dwells the knowledge that it is the practitioner who is sanctifying the practice, the space, and the knowledge. The practitioner is a weaver of sacred knowledge and practice. The practitioner, as Sādhaka, carries within them the potential to realize the sacred in each waking moment.

Spirit

Spiritus (Latin)—Breath— I offer a definition of spirit that winds its way through this thesis exploration as embodied breath. Connecting the subtle qualities of spirit with breath is the practice of conscious breathing. It is through such a practice where one might realize the breathing space as a place of mediation and ethical relation with non-human otherness; and as a medium for recovering attentiveness and essential awareness to our own bodymind being, to the body of the other, and the body of the earth. Thus through the spirit-filled breath we might cultivate the capacities for a deep listening presence to the self and other across all differences. Cajete (1994) explains, “the breath represents the most tangible expression of the spirit in all living things” (p.42). What is consciously riding upon the breath becomes filled with the spirit, saturated with the soul force (Yogananda, 1938,1974)—Prana—Qi of the one who breathes. When one breathes consciously, one moves from mere unconscious survival automatic breathing to spiritual breathing—divinizing the self by consciously connecting to the universal life force that animates all living things. Such cultivation bridges body and spirit, and makes possible a spirit that remains flesh (Irigaray, 2013). Although breath maybe the most tangible expression of spirit, the spirit is, as I understand it, a far subtler non-quantifiable essential quality that our form might hold only for a moment while grasping to express its true nature in the limitation of words. Thus, I sense around what it is that I am exploring, and invite the reader into the inquiry.
What rides upon the breath?

*And what of the dimension of sound...?* Sound is the trickiest of all the arts in that each sound can carry the weight of all the other sounds gone before into the hermeneutical space of each witness.

*How might I escape from under the weight of sound’s history to have my own unique experience of the creation of it?*
Sādhanā of Sound

“The musical experience itself is a form of knowledge and a means of seeking the truth. Music presents being to us in audible form, and our apperception of that being (insofar as it corresponds to the presentation) is a means of obtaining valid knowledge—of the world, of experience, of ourselves” (Rowell, 1983, p. 7).
Pursuing Emerging Possibility

“In the process of working with the material, the work itself secures its own voice and helps set the direction. The maker is guided and, in fact, at times surrenders to the demands of the emerging forms. Opportunities in the process of working are encountered that were not envisioned when the work began, but that speak so eloquently about the promise of emerging possibilities that new options are pursued. Put succinctly, surprise, a fundamental reward of all creative work, is bestowed by the work on its maker” (Eisner, 2002, p. 7).

I begin with my morning Sādhanā of integrated voice and meditation that I have been practicing for ten years or so. I would like to say that I am established in this Sādhanā practice, but in truth, all I can really say, is that each morning I begin again, and each morning, new knowledge is revealed and offered up through my committed effort. And I do mean effort. This sacred ritual play is not effortless; however, it is through the committed effort of “workful play” that I get to a space of effortlessness, of “playful work” (Driver, 1998). The space of effortlessness is a place that I try to drop into with the first awareness of breath. Sometimes, though, I am knocked off balance by the sound of my own voice, and I am drawn into what lies within, under and behind my voiced sound.

Each morning, I begin again, and each morning, my voice reveals my bodymind’s secrets. There is much in the way of distraction, for the sounded voice carries within its composition identity, memory, imagination, and bodymind states that are opened by the vibration of the voiced sound. Nevertheless, my intention is to consciously and simultaneously ride the breath and create the sound that bridges the worlds of the corporeal and transcendent. It is from this platform of embodied active awareness that I hope to catch insights, revelations, and creative inspirations as they arise. I have purposefully designed my Artistic Sādhanā as an invocatory space of insight and inspiration. However, although such rich results may be my desire, they cannot be my only goal or expectation, for the knowledge that I seek might also appear after the fact, in reflection, and as resonance to be found attached to and within
the many reverberations of my performative inquiry. In this way I surely know that my morning Sādhanā moves beyond the boundaries of time and space to affect the other worlds of my creation in which I participate.

Who rides upon the breath?

I watch my breath underneath and through each sound,

And observe my voice with all senses open and listening

What of me is being revealed in this voiced breath?

In this breathed tone within which resonates all that I am?

Each vocal gesture, no matter how simple, is different from the one before…each tone sounded never to be repeated…evolving and shifting along with the bodymind of the one who creates each sounded moment.

Impossible to grasp the entirety of content and meaning,

I may only glimpse a fragment…

Yet perhaps this fragment contains all that I need at this moment of seeking.
Morning Sādhanā

“The knower... becomes known to him [her] self...the consciousness bears witness to its own voice” (Khan, 1923 p. 4).

I wake before dawn in Brahma Muhurta—the Ambrosial hours in the last phase of night just before the morning—a space of time within which spirit is profoundly felt—a space of time that is most auspicious for all practices of yoga and meditation, and most advantageous for the evolution of one’s Sādhanā. I wake into the soft darkness of Brahma Muhurta, lured from the depths of unconsciousness by my desire to commune with spirit, to listen in silence at the pulse of my mortality, and sit in the stillness between each solid beat of my heart.

I Pranam to my breath ever present, and I am drawn into the fullness of my senses to sit in the source of creation of both dreaming and waking—my self before the sounding.

I listen…

I listen to my breath still long and deep from sleep

I listen…

And breathe….

I can hear the sound of my heart drumming within me

I can hear the blood coursing through my body and pulsing in my ears

I listen…

And breathe........
And wait… for an impulse to begin…

…………………………………………Breathe

Embracing the slender neck of the Tanpura

I begin to gently pluck each string

setting divine reverberations in motion

immersing myself in its overflowing resonance….

I listen….

I breathe…

I seek the origin of sound within me and watch it rise to meet the Tanpura’s tone

Each pluck of a string offers up the tonal root of my Sonic Sādhanā

anchoring my awareness in the absolute present

poised between the realms of Heaven, Earth, and Underworld

I listen…

breathe………

And listen………

Now… in one long breath I match the Tanpura’s drone with a sounded tone
Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Each breath carries the voiced vibration

Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

I listen with my whole body……………….

Who is it that rides upon the breath…? 

What is it that my body is telling me…?

Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Who am I in this moment…?

Where is my strength…my courage…?

Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Ommmmmm Shreeeeeee  Aaaaaaa naaaaaaaaanntaaaaaa Haaaaaaaaaa riiiii Naaaaaaaaraaaaaaaa yaaaaaaaaa na

What is the thought attached to the moment of hesitation…?

What is its quality…?

How does it resonate in sound…?

What if…I breathe space into its complexity…?
I offer the fruits of my practice to the limitless ultimate reality

Ahh……..a shift in tone…my breath is strengthening.

It is no longer shaking, I am no longer breathless.

I am gaining confidence and courage in each long toned breath.

What is the quality underlying the unwavering breath…?

Courage…? Aaaaaaaaaa Naaaaaaaaninnta

Persistence…? Haaaaaaaaaa Reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Surrender…? Naaaaaaaanaaaaaa RaaaaaAAAAAA

A deep knowingness…? Yaaaaaaana

I focus all the parts and thoughts of me towards steadying breath and opening to sound

Again and again I tone until breath and body are steady

Until I am settled in place
Immersed in the doing and being of sound.

My breath… supported by my body, by my mind’s intentioned focus,

Lengthens, strengthens, and widens

Embracing and transforming all hidden places within me into tonal resonance,

light, and clarity

The mantra opens into syllabic play… Taaa Raa Naaa Tommmmmmmmm

Re Na Na Na

I explore the micro spaces between each note… listening deeply into each liminal opening while gently coming into awareness of the fullness of my self through simultaneous reflection upon the sounded connection of breath, tongue, tissue, muscle, and thought.

I am awake…

I am alive…

I consciously direct all elements toward being in sound,

towards being sound,

towards Being,

My body is full of activated stillness.

Ommmm Shaaanti Shaaaaanti Shaaaaantihhii.
Now within this peaceful observatory of self in the doing, being and making

I am ready to begin again.

This time with Raga Alap

Free from mantra…free from syllable…free from meaning…and free from all thought, yet filled with creative presence and potential—a deeply reflexive journey of creation through and between the complex structures of raga while immersed in a formless and intuitive flow rhythmically induced by my own breath and heartbeat.

*Om Shri Ananta Hari Narayana*— opening invocation— offering the fruits of my practice to an expanded experience and concept of Self as limitless Being.
Notes for Sādhanā of Sound

*Brahma Muhurta ~ God’s time*
A disciplined early waking into the quietest time at the end of the night before the sun rises, encourages a serene state of mind and a full presence at the doors of perception (Bhawalkar, oral teachings)

*Pranam ~*
I place my hands, palms together, over my heart and bow to the life giving spirit of breath.

*Sound and Music ~*
I use sound and music almost interchangeably throughout the writing of these sections. Occasionally, I use music to indicate an increased level of vocal intention and articulation into a specific form that comes from voice training and performing precise formulations of sound elements; but for the most part, and in the context of Sound Sādhanā, sound is the preferable term, as the qualities of conscious presence I am referring to require a vocal responsivity that is available when the practitioner is free to move across, through, and beyond specific forms and styles of music.

*Sonic Sādhanā ~*
Means music as a spiritual practice, though not necessarily songs with words and meanings—This could be entirely instrumental. With voice, Sonic Sādhanā means seeking communion with the divine through tonal exploration—long tone, microtone, overtone and undertone, texture, pitch, placement, resonance, clarity…and removal of stylistic forms of masking. Sonic Sādhanā is making sound while studying the creator of the sound….self and Self…microcosm and macrocosm.

*Raga ~*
A series of notes placed and performed in such a way as to charm the heart, move the soul, and expand consciousness. Raga is a melodic structure though unlike the Western scale. Its rules of play are unique and dependent upon the performer and the Gharana (Family or house) of origin.

*Alap ~*
A slow, rhythmless unfolding and free elaboration of the notes of the chosen raga, customarily the opening section to Indian classical music styles, varying in length depending upon the intention. For the purposes of my Morning Sound Sadhana, alap is used as a vehicle of conscious awakening, and as such, the time of play is unlimited and open ended sometimes carrying over into other activities in order to maintain the bodymind state achieved. (Courtney & Courtney, 1995)

*Tanpura ~*
Is a long necked drone instrument with a gourd base that when plucked in a continuous non-rhythmic looping sequence creates a harmonic drone. Each string is especially tied with a thread so as to create a vibration and to bring jīva (living spirit/ soul) to each note. The sum of all four strings together vibrate in a full rich harmonic wave, and act as a sonic canvas upon which the voice can perform a journey through raga.
Sound Sādhanā

“Each tone we play is at once an exploration of technique and a full expression of spirit” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, 68).

सारे ग म प ध नि सा
सारि ध प म ग रे सा

Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa

As a Westerner working with Indian classical music’s Sanskrit swara (notes) of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa, in place of Western classical music’s solfege notes Do Re Me Fa So La Ti Do, I have had to retrain myself in a completely different system of music. There are some very interesting similarities between the two, but to keep within the scope of this thesis I am not going to compare the systems; however, the fact that I choose to work in a completely different culture, language, and music system from the one I was born into does provoke reflection. I follow the path of resonance. I follow the sound of the voice and its movement through raga because it affects me profoundly. I chose to work in Sanskrit and in Swara so that I could begin again and enter into a new way of being in the world with beginner mind, breath, and body. I want to approach music as a sacred art. Not steal or mimic another culture’s philosophy and art, but immerse myself in resonance and cultivate the sacred within my own practice so as to transform the very foundation of me.
Sound Sādhanā practice begins with a gentle steady awakening of all the senses. Yet, this gentle awakening is undertaken as an ascetic and structured event. It takes place within the form of early waking, silent sitting, breath consciousness, full body presence, the structure of Raga Alankar, and the repetition of Mantra. All the structure imposed is purposeful. It is a way of gathering energies into focus. However, once focus has been attained and skills developed within the focused practice, the practitioner is free to play with and beyond the dynamics and limitations of the original forms. Ultimately, the idea is not just to master formula, it is to straddle the paradox of form and formlessness... flesh and spirit...architecture and passion. The structure contains as it trains. It is a place of developing the skills for journeying beyond the limitation of boundary and constraint.

One of the goals of morning Sound Sādhanā is to be attentive to the process of unfolding the self each day, and to maintain a steadfast focus on breath and sound throughout. The intention is to move the breath and the energy steadily and consistently through the waves of mind and chaos—to bring the voice and its rider from inertia into clarity and into the present moment. It is an active practice of transforming sound and energy qualities—a process of moving the entire bodymind organism through the focus of sound—from unrefined, inflexible, sluggish, and asleep, to a refined state of responsivity and awareness. The results show clearly in the changing tone and timbre of the voice. What starts as unsteady, unclear, and thin is transformed into a full-bodied, focused, and well-supported silvery tone full of resonance and courage, ready to explore song and cultivate knowledge.
I weave in and out of merging with the Tanpura’s mesmerizing drone that transforms ordinary space and time into a sacred space-time portal connecting the worlds of earthly and divine. Its tonal constancy holds me present in my body and in the room, while its harmonics awaken me to the paradox of living a spirit full life…of being flesh and spirit in a body…. The Tanpura invites me to attune to its full-bodied vibration and to actively participate with my emerging consciousness…into beingness…into presence.

—Morning Sound Sādhanā 2014
Contemplative Notes on Sound Śādhanā

“The world is sound. It sounds in pulsars and planetary orbits, in the spin of electrons, in the quanta of atoms and the structure of molecules, in the microcosm and in the macrocosm. It also sounds in the sphere between these extremes, in the world in which we live” (Joachim-Ernst Berendt, 1987, p. 76).

In music we search for “values, being and nothingness, meaning, physical phenomena, cosmos, transcendence, truth, logic, reasoning, profound spirituality, subjects, objects, soul, comprehension, moral, ethos, empiricism, matter, ideas, and knowledge…” (Tarasti, 2012, p. 3). We can project onto musical notes all that we desire and "endow them with all kinds of analogical capacities; they will not protest! (Jankélévitch in Tarasti, 2012, p.17) Does this mean then that music represents all that we already know or want to know…? Perhaps there are other ways of experiencing music and sound beyond what it carries or what it may signify…? What of hidden knowledge or mysteries we have yet to uncover that might be shaken loose by the vibration or invocation of sound?

If man/woman/human is indeed “fascinated by allegory, [and] has always searched for the signification of music elsewhere than in the sound phenomenon” (Jankélévitch in Tarasti, 2012, p.17), what if one were to focus on the sound phenomenon itself as a vehicle, not for any message already known or written for us by another, nor as a sign directing us away from the sound towards some memory, idea, or product, but as a vehicle that can carry our attention deeper into our own self processes, bridging the phenomenological aspect of the ‘sacred’ within music to the deepest place of receptivity within our own being. What might we find as the one who simultaneously creates, listens, and attends?
“The voice reflects the mental, emotional, and physical condition of a person: it is truly a parable of the soul. In the same way that the soul links to the personality of the individual to the spiritual unity of the whole, the voice links the smallest wave or particle of energy to the energy of the universe” (Dewhust-Maddock, 1993, p. 37).

In my experience of Sound Sādhanā, listening deeply while improvising with sound elements of tone, texture, resonance, pitch, and breath, the body and mind are simultaneously engaged as both the creator and the experiencer, the awareness of which results in a fullness of participation in the unfolding ever-present moment. Each note is new, as if it were a living thing, and because it is attached to the self, can never be replicated even by the self; for each day the voice and the source of the voice changes. This kind of inquiry is complex and generative, it is ever changing, emerging, forever coming into being, and is for me a purposeful inclusion in each moment’s emergence, a way of being in the world as part of creation itself. It is “being in audible form” (Rowell, 1983, p. 7).

Music is a divine art, not to be used solely for pleasure but as a path for God-realization. Music that is saturated with soul force is the real universal music, understandable by all hearts. Music is not only an art, but also a science. It has the potential for harmonizing mind and body and for developing the deep spiritual aspects of our being (Paramahansa Yogananda)

“Spiritual and religious traditions around the world have explored sound as part of their quest for the transmutation of consciousness” (Feuerstein, 1998, 2001, p. 312). The exploration of and through sound and music for spiritual purpose has existed for thousands of years. Whether sounds gathered through entrancement by, or contemplation of, the natural elements within our earthly environment, or whether tuning and aligning through meditational focus to the heavenly spheres and their resident celestial bodies; our ears, our hearts and our minds have oft sought after music for all it conjures, invokes, and provokes within our mortal realities. Mostly, I propose, that music is sought after as an inter/ruption of ordinary reality—as an escape from, or an enhancement of, the everyday and the
unremarkable; and/or as an “inscape” (Franck, 1973, xii)—a bringing of the self home (Rinpoche, 1992), and a way to self-knowledge through contemplation and reflection. Both “meditation and music point us toward the transformative experience of inner realization, which is a distinct feature of sacred wisdom* in many cultures” (Sussman & Kossak, 2011, p. 55-56). *Wisdom is defined here as knowledge acquired through direct perceptual experience (Sussman & Kossak).

Following Resonance

“Music is far more than attractive sound or pleasant entertainment. It is the means of communicating an idea that is beyond being aural, visual or literary and is the manifestation of a spiritual belief that relates all things through the common denominator of the human spirit” (Messiaen in Stumpf, 2005, p. 14).

In my personal experience, I remember the exact moment and indeed, the specific music, which “opened the door for [me] into the magical world of tones” (Tarasti, 2002, p.16). It was during an Indian classical music concert that I heard a particular quality in the singer's voice that effectively suspended time. I experienced darsan—a “glimpse of inner reality” (Storl, 2004, p. 54), an “experience of the divine (96), and “the grace of a wider vision” (p.2) into my self. In that timeless moment, I experienced an awakening of my musical self and musical potential, and a qualitative change in the way I perceived sound and sound creation itself. Music suddenly became the key that could unlock the door to an unknown world. “It had become existential. [I was] convinced that this message was true, authentic, and crucial to my being”(p. 16).

In that moment, the message was Nada Brahman—the “Sonic Absolute” pervading all existence, and I was experiencing this abstract principle through music. Nada Brahman emerged out of the sonic cultural matrix of Hindu India—an environment in which primary
attention is given, not to letter, but to orality—to the transmission of teachings through the voice. Throughout the ages of India, exceptional focus has been placed upon the spoken and sounding word for "its range of expressivity, meaning and value—in performance, in poetic production and aesthetic reception, in philosophical and theological reflection, and in the formation of symbols and world interpretation" (Wilke, 2014). It is through music the abstract principle of Brahman can be experienced sensorially. Music is "the audible Nada Brahman. Listening to it provides access to the unity of reality, the world-immanent and world-transcending nature of the divine via feelings and senses" (Wilke, 2014). Nada Brahman as the all-pervasive "Sonic Absolute" transforms the spoken and sounding word into a sonic event that speaks to the senses, the body and the emotions. Sacredness is found in the auditory dimension beyond the limitation of semantics and meaning, an idea well demonstrated in the exposition of the Dhrupad genre that I was listening to.

The music was alive and it was speaking directly to me, affecting me so strongly that I decided then and there to pursue this aspect of Nada Brahma within music through the study of Nada Yoga (Yoga of Sound); as it was there I believed I would also find knowledge of myself. Yoga, a Sanskrit word meaning “Union”, also refers to “a whole system of practices through which philosophical claims can be tested in actual experience” (Rama, 1998, p. 138). The idea of embodying my inquiry so as to realize the answer through my own experience, and self-generate the kind of knowledge that was to become wisdom as defined by Sussman and Kossak (2011), empowered me then as much as it does now. Yoga has evolved over five thousand years of experimentation by its practitioners (Rama, 1998). Nada Yoga then becomes union with sound—the “cosmic principle” (Berendt, 1987, p.18)—Nada Brahman the “Sonic Absolute” (Wilke). Such was my desire to really know what it was in the music that had profoundly moved me, and furthermore, to have the experience again
and again through my own doing, that this moment marked the beginning of my journey into Sound Meditation as Sādhanā, and my study of Indian Classical music forms of Dhrupad, Khayal, and Nada Yoga.

Initiation into the study of Nada Yoga and Indian Classical music began with in that first moment of timeless sounding where I recognized and was awakened by a quality of vocal resonance deeply familiar to me on a primal level. I felt as if I was listening to the sound of the pure soul that had transcended the masks and markings of worldliness, yet was now fully embodying and filling out all the dimensions of its earthy corporeality. At that time of my life I was searching. I had many years of Western voice education and a successful singing career, yet, rather than continue to build on what I already knew, I decided to start again from the very beginning, with an entirely new system and approach to music, to voice, and to Being. With that decision, I entered an ashram to receive spiritual initiation and teachings from accomplished Nada Yoga Master Shri Yogi Hari, whose grandfather was a renowned Gandharva—the Sanskrit term for a male nature spirit in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, and or a highly refined singer of the courts with abilities to bridge the human and spirit world through the profundity of the voice. When I told the Guru that I was seeking the way of the Gandharva, he replied that he could indeed teach me the many tools of sounding, but that the true secret of the Gandharva is that the quality of the person that is creating the sound and through whom the sound travels and resounds, must be cultivated and finely tuned to be the vessel of divine resonance. In other words, I needed to begin work on all levels of my self first. This secret knowledge placed me resolutely on the path of Sādhanā through Sampoorna Yoga—the yoga of fullness—an intelligent integration of Hatha, Raja, Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, and Nada—to purify, harmonize, and balance all aspects of my person, and transform and transcend my lifeworld as I knew it.
“When immersed in the note and the raga, the self disappears and music takes on its own existence; the principle of ‘Darshan’” (Bhawalkar, 2015)

Further initiation into morning Sound Sādhanā came through master Dhrupad artist, Pandit Uday Bhawalkar, who sings and teaches with a voice that is saturated with a “soul force” (Paramahansa) rigorously cultivated through his own music Sādhanā practice. Through the power and presence of Pandit ji’s voice I experienced full darsan as a guide for my own Sādhanā practice. In addition, I was given an equally rigorous morning voice Sādhanā to be practiced daily before the sun rises. Through this daily practice, I have found that I can listen to myself through my voice, and hear what is true and what is masked. I can discern what is coming forth to be supported so that I can strengthen the foundation of my practice and grow in unlimited potential as an artist and as a spirit full being. Above all, I have found through my own disciplined play, the same connection and alignment with Nada Brahman that I discerned within the teachers of mastery, allowing me to consider the value of teaching self-disciplined Sādhanā.

In teaching Sound yoga and Sonic Sādhanā within Western culture, I have sought ways of bridging Eastern knowledge practices with Western. One of the most successful ways of explanation and integration so far has been teaching sound practice as a performatve inquiry into self. The work becomes a direct engagement with perception and as such requires each participant to be awake to and to attend to what ever comes to light within the practice. In this way, a sound Sādhanā practice is unique to each individual depending upon the intention brought to the work, whether it be refinement of voice quality, acquisition of skill, establishing a meditation practice, and or deepening the knowledge of self in presence.
“The human being is likened to a very complex, unique, and finely tuned instrument. Every atom, molecule, cell, tissue, and organ of the body continually broadcasts the frequencies of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life. The human voice is an indicator of its body’s health on all these levels of existence. It establishes a relationship between the individual and the wondrous network of vibrations that is the cosmos” (Dewhurst-Maddock, 1993, p. 13).

Certain kinds of music and sound offer portals into altered reality and altered time, and it is within this altered reality where we have the opportunity to become acquainted with our hidden natures. We have an opportunity to see and experience what actually lies under the surface presentation of us. “Great music should not make you see the world through rose-coloured glasses: it should force you to take them off. The question is: having taken them off, what is it that great music can then make you see?” (Stumpf, 2005, p. 9). The ultimate purpose of sound meditation is not to experience oneself as separated from ordinary reality, but to become fully conscious of the perception of separation, and, as a consequence of such a realization, to then experience a merging with the music and a sense of unification with creation itself. It is to embody sound and self completely in the moment rather than using meditation or sound as music to transcend self or the moment.

**Metaphysical Implications**

“It is possible to conceive of each human individual as consisting of pure information expressed in rhythmic waves that start as the infinitesimal vibrations of subatomic particles and build outward as ever-widening resonant hierarchies” (Leonard, 1978, p. 86).

Working with breath and consciously created sound, I am the creator of a "living organism" which "imitates natural processes"; and by such identification I "participate in the experience of unity" (Tarasti, 2002, p. 17). In this way, sound meditation as a ritual practice serves a utopian function as a means of attaining primal unity with the surrounding cosmos (Tarasti, 2002). Personal experience in the practice of sound meditation supports the
proposition that “the essence of music is vibration and that the vibration of sustained musical tones and events is analogous to the pulsing energy of a living cell” (Rowell, 1983, p. 172).

Whilst artfully unfurling each delicate note of the raga, I realize… I am part of an organic creation process. I give life to sound created through and by me. All the parts of “me” are gathered into focus to produce one temporal line of sound—sound that is inherently of “me”—filled with my Scottish Celtic, Hindu-imbued Femaleness, my yogic animist mid-life bodymindedness, coloured by the textures of my thoughts and intentions, brought to life by my desire to create beauty, to move into presence and beyond what is already present; and to provoke consciousness through dissonance and harmony. All tonal life and quality of sound created is sustained by the strength of my Prana—the subtle energy system within and around the me-self that shapes and guides each temporal tone into, through, and out of existence. And yet, while it lives upon the breadth of my exhalation, each sound serves for a moment to “direct the minds ear to the border line at which eternity breaks into temporality” (Goldman, 2009, p. 32). Such a moment of no duration exists in the middle of time between the past and the future, as an ephemeral place of revelation suspended in the sublime—the ever-present reality permeating worlds mortal and eternal, visible and invisible. Within this space of timeless time, the one who sounds immerses in the fullness of that which is inclusive of, yet beyond the divisions of, sacred and secular, flesh and spirit, earthly and divine. —Morning Sādhanā, 2015
As a vocal genre of music, Dhrupad is especially significant. The object of performing Dhrupad for the practitioner and listener is Sādhanā. In the exposition of raga, Dhrupad uses repetition of semantically void syllables in an act of sonic blurring that becomes both an incantation, and a vehicle to knowledge of the inaudible. The practice is not a performance as such but more of a sharing of deep contemplation resulting in spiritual benefits for all present. In this respect singing is considered to be the most direct and effective method of prayer and contemplation (Cuni, 2013), a belief shared by many world spiritual and wisdom traditions. Paul Madaule (1994), Director of The Listening Centre in Toronto, Canada, theorizes that the reasons for this similarity across religions and cultures include the rich harmonic content within contemplative chanting and toning that is directed towards the common purpose of spiritual enrichment. Further he adds that “music has played a key role in the development of consciousness and creativity”, thus supporting mankind through its struggle for evolution (p.64). To support his theory, Madaule (1994) asks us to consider “the “enlightening” role of Gregorian chant during the obscure Middle Ages”, and suggests, that the role of music was to provide “the necessary nutrient for man to move on, transcend himself* and take charge of his own evolution” (p.64).

*In this context, I surmise the definition of transcendence to be the inspiration of a life beyond what is apparent within its present context; be that through science, technology, or the concept of God.
Sound Sādhanā practice, whether Dhrupadic or Gregorian, involves incantation and repetition of tonal notes over extended periods of time. The practice cultivates strength, endurance, breath, and a wide range of vocal harmonics. There is life in the voice. Madaule (1994) considers the kind of energy generated from vocal frequencies as a form of electrical stimulation that can effectively charge, energize, and nourish the nervous system, the brain and the body. Vedic and Buddhist Sanskrit mantra authority Thomas Ashley-Farrand (1999), explains that, “human consciousness exists on many levels at once. It is...an intricate collection of states of consciousness distributed throughout the physical and subtle bodies” (p. 51). Adding mantra and prayer to the voiced tone “creates a particular physical vibration...that in turn produces various energetic effects in the physical and subtle bodies” (p.50). Sound meditation stimulates all dimensions of the bodymind, and the idea of using sounds as a conscious way of transcending* oneself and directing one’s own evolution (Madaule, 1994), is indeed part of what the practice of Sound Sādhanā offers.

*Transcendence of oneself— to transcend the idea of the self as an independent static thing or entity, towards the realization of the self as an emergent ever-changing process — Thompson, 2013

The extent to which Indian music engenders contemplative states is proportional to the extent of the foregrounding alap—the slow reveal of the notes of the raga sequence with long held tones—and in this, Dhrupad has no equal (U. Bhawalkar, personal communication, 2010). The practitioner slowly uncovers each note of the raga spending a lengthy amount of time in the lower octave before ascending the upper octaves, weaving each note together seamlessly with a breath control and focus that requires “rigorous pranic discipline” within the vocalist” (Clarke & Kini, 2011, p. 141). Throughout the Dhrupadic alap sequence, there are no words and no meaning in the utterance of each
sounded tone. The practice is to focus voice, tone, pitch, breath, energy and mind so as to sustain long held notes, and to eventually bend, swoop and spiral the voiced tones throughout multiple octaves while simultaneously maintaining one’s place in both the body and the space of transcendence that the experience awakens.

It is easy to be consumed by the bliss created through sound, to fall into the singer’s voice, or into the dream it inspires. It is tempting to leave the corporeal self and one’s place within the relative field and the world of matter. However, the intention here is to remain fully cognizant in the play, and to balance between sound, breath, body, and tone. It is to participate in one’s evolution and growth in artistic skill and connection to spirit while embedded in the flesh of embodiment. For how else would one experience Bliss if it were not through one’s embodiment. It comes down to a deep and loving gratitude for all that life has granted and continues to gift

—Morning Sādhanā Jan 2014.

The practice and concentration in this form of Sound meditation can lead to blissful absorption. It is here where the experienced practitioner maintains a fullness of presence while participating in the creation of sound. And it is here where one creates the opportunity to “enter into direct contact... with life itself” (Franck, 1973, p.7). It is a journey into full awakening. “Suddenly there is the miracle of being really alive with all senses functioning (p. 28). The vibratory qualities of sound act to bring the sounder into direct and sensuous realization of embodied Beingness.
When sound is accessed as meditation, this “meditative practice is designed to overcome mind-body distinction” (Clarke & Kini, 2011, p. 148) in both the practitioner and the listener. The pure tonal sound—sound without language or meaning— alludes only to itself, directing the listener to follow the sound current into a deeper listening experience and towards the state of meditation. Through deep listening, the participants of sound meditation are initiated directly into the mysteries of ‘Self’, thereby accessing “a level of primal feeling and being” that bypasses words, meaning, and language (Sussman & Kossak, 2011, p. 56). It is within this kind of immersive practice, that the dualistic subject/object distinction holds no sway; as music’s intimate concern is with “transcending that dichotomy”, thus “healing Descartes’s ontological separation of self and world”, and “Kant’s epistemological separation of self and certain knowledge”, both perspectives formative of today’s dominant Western paradigms (and difficulties) (Harvey, 1999, p.1).

In Sādhanā, transcendence of separation is sought after and found in each embodied moment and movement through each conscious breath. “Breath by breath we dissolve dualistic thinking and perception, and transform consciousness” (Bai and Cohen, p. 49). The lived experience in and through the body is central to the experience of transcendence, as opposed to the idea of transcendence as a movement out of and/or away from the body to some “higher, distant, transcendent sphere of being” (Denton, 2004, p. 137). We must work in our individual body, without seeking any escape, since this body is the very place where consciousness connects with matter (Satprem, 1984,p.185). Embodiment is a listening in and through the body—ungoverned by dualistic thinking that separates mind and body, spirit and flesh. It is a deeper kind of listening with the aim of dissolving all contradictions into a unity of presence (Denton, 2004). Once inhabiting that place of fullness “with the
finest degree of awareness, “we may find our edges dissolving into the everything that includes no-body” (Friedman and Moon, 2008, 1997, p. xi). And we might actually “experience the body as permeable, borderless, empty space.... nothing is solid, nothing is bound or limited” (Tollifson, 1997, p. 21). There is, in every moment, the possibility of “waking up to bare presence, to just what is” (21).

The work of Sound Sādhanā is based in a deep listening with and through all the cells and all the layers of bodily beingness available to the consciousness of the practitioner. Although very much an inner pursuit, Sound Sādhanā also engages outward listening and presencing through seeking, aligning, and co-creating musically with tone, pitch, rhythm and instrumentation. The practice of balancing between inner and outer worlds simultaneously, is a practice of heightened consciousness that, when sustained, (which is the goal), seamlessly bridges binary space. From this vantage point one easily moves perception beyond the bounds of the individual sentient and sensible body into communion with the sentient and non-sentient otherness with whom we are intertwined within a larger body of beingness. The realizations gathered through Sound Sādhanā, reverberate and provoke further exploration through creative movement and ritual play.
Notes for Sound Sādhanā

Raga ~
A melodic formula of notes arranged in such a way as to charm the ear, the heart, the mind and soul.

Raga Alankar ~
Are exercises involving multiple repetitions of notes (Swaras) of the ragas. It is a way of practicing and working the notes into memory thus gaining knowledge of the ragas and their specific rules of play. It is also a way of creating Taans or particular combinations of notes within a specific raga and practicing over and over with the dual intention of refining the voice (thus developing harmonics, or what I call the silver edges of the voice) and moving the self into a place of absorption.

Nada Brahman ~
Nada Brahma; is Sanskrit for Sound as manifestation of the creator, Sound as God. Nada Brahma meaning not only; “God, the Creator is sound; but also (and above all): Creation, the cosmos, the world, is sound. And: Sound is the world. Additionally, it means; sound is joy; sound praises. And even: Emptiness is sound. And finally: Spirit and soul are sound” (Berendt, 1987, p. 18). Nada means sound and Brahma is the “cosmic principle”. Nada Brahma is “one singularity: the primal sound of being. Being itself” (p. 18).

Dhrupad ~
Is an ancient ritualized form of North Indian classical singing based on the principles of Nada Yoga (Yoga of Sound). It is an oral tradition that relies on memory and inspiration with each new exposition, and is regarded as the foundation of Hindustani music.

Mantra ~
A Mantra is a specific formula of Sanskrit words or syllables corresponding to a particular energy vibration. It is used as an object for meditation, and if practiced over a lengthy period of time will gradually move the practitioner’s meditation deeper and deeper. A mantra is a condensed teaching. “Through constant practice of repeating the mantra both within meditation and in active life, the power of the mantra and its essential teaching will gradually unfold as its latent mental and spiritual energies are released” (Swami Rama, 1979, p. 127). The language of Mantra harnesses and magnifies the soul force towards the transformation of the one who sings.

Initiation ~
Initiation is a sacred ritual transmission of sacred teachings. Initiation is a quickening agent—experienced as an invisible power or force that speeds up the spiritual process. Initiation is a rite of passage—a blessing, a teaching, a new beginning, and a commitment of the student to tend the spark of spirit—to cultivate a sacred fire within one’s life. In my experience, initiation is passed between teacher and student in a moment of deep receptivity and trust.
Sādhaka~
A Sādhaka is the Sanskrit term for a practitioner of Sādhanā—one who is on a journey of self-realization through a particular Sādhanā. The term Sādhaka, better suits the journey of Sādhanā over the term practitioner, for the Sādhaka is not just practicing an art form or other, but is clearly on a spiritual path. Whereas the practitioner’s goals may be limited to product and outcome, the Sādhaka’s goals are limitless and include the spiritual dimension of self and other. Sādhaka can also mean God seeker—one who seeks union with God.

Zazen ~
Formal seated Zen meditation practice.

Meditation ~
According to Shri Yogi Hari, Meditation is not a way, nor a methodology; it is the space attained after a period of focus. All ways and methods are simply focusing techniques to get one to the space of meditation. As a space, it can be accessed any time and anywhere, and can be carried as sacred space within the practitioner.

Jnana Yoga~
“Jnana means wisdom; Jnana Yoga is the intellectual approach to spiritual evolution or realization. Through inquiry and analysis, the mind is used to examine its own nature” (Devananda, 1978, p. 103). However, it is important to note that Jnana Yoga requires a thorough grounding in, and assimilation of, all the other Yogic disciplines; otherwise it will simply be an exercise of the mind and not yoga at all. According to Swami Vishnu-Devananda, One must have a strong and healthy body, access to, and control of, its vital energies, and knowledge of the workings of the mind before there is even the possibility of using the “mind as a vehicle” to transcend one’s ignorance (p.105). Additionally, according to Sri Yogi Hari (2002), “ Jnana Yoga is the path that begins with the intellect and leads to knowledge of the Self. When the Self is known, everything else is known, just as when gold is known, everything made out of gold is known. Only the names and forms change. Then the question of “Who am I?” is answered” (p.56). Jnana Yoga is part of Sādhanā and Sādhanā is part of Jnana Yoga. I propose that Artistic Sādhanā is the Yoga of Inquiry—a yoga of self and Self-inquiry—a striving to know and to ask questions—a questing for truth beyond the appearance of things. And, much like the role of the Gelong — the Tibetan Buddhist monk “who is free to ask questions...and investigate unconstrained by defensive hopes and fears” (Hearn, 1991, 2005, p. 27), the Sādhaka’s quest is for self-knowledge through inquiry, and, in the case of Artistic Sādhanā, is reflected and experienced through the artistic process.

Nada Yoga~
Nada Yoga is the “science of divine vibration as revealed to the Mystics, the Saints, and the Yogis...the vehicle for its transmission is Indian classical music in the form of Ragas, Talas, Shlokas, Mantras, chanting, Kirtan, and Bhajan. From the tiniest atom to the mightiest galaxies, everything is a state of vibration and complies with the laws of rhythm and harmony” (Hari, 2002, p. 62). Nada Yogis use music to move from the gross level of differentiated vibration to the subtlest of the Para state that is the source of all creation.
**Raja Yoga**

Known as the Royal path of mind control, is the most comprehensive and scientific approach to realization of one’s true nature (Devananda, 1978, p. 139). It is “a branch of yoga that analyzes the mind and aims to gain control over it… He who has control over his mind and senses is a real King, a “Raja” Yogi (Hari, 2002, p. 51). It is a method of self-inquiry systematized by Maharishi Patanjali by way of the Patanjali Sutras that describe yoga theory, the functions of the mind, levels of consciousness, and samadhi states—the superconscious state which transcends the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states. Raja Yoga is known as the highest yoga, and according to Sri Yogi Hari (2002) “all paths of yoga could be called Raja Yoga, because in their own unique way, they all lead to the highest state of realization” (p. 51). Embedded in the principles of Raja Yoga are practices that assist in clearing and purifying all levels of bodymind, including vows and practices common to all spiritual paths and religions. These include: non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, non-covetousness, moderation, cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, study of scriptures, surrendering to God. Also contained within Raja Yoga are Asana (body posture), Pranayama (control of vital energies of Prana through breath practices), Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses—turning the senses inwards—a *“bringing of the self home”* (Rinpoche, 1992), Dharana (focus and concentration), Dhyana (meditation state achieved through Dharana), and Samadhi—the transcendental state where one transcends the limitations of body, senses, mind and intellect. Through a Sādhanā of Raja Yoga, “the mind evolves toward the state of purity. Free from distractions and agitation, it regains its creative power” (Hari, 2002, p.53).

**Bringing the self home**

In 1996 I attended a Dharma talk by Sogyal Rinpoche, a Tibetan Dzogchen lama and author of the book The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying (1992). Rinpoche guided all those present to draw their full attention back into their own selves. He said “Bring your self home…wherever you are at this moment…wherever your thoughts are traveling or dwelling…bring them all home to you…here…now”. For those present who believed meditation to be a journey of transcending the body, this was a revelation. We were being asked to be fully present in our embodiment and in all of our senses. When Rinpoche asked this of each of us, I was in many places outside of my body and outside of the present moment. With his simple instructions, I caught each mind thread; surprised that I had wandered so far from my self, and I gently pulled them all back into me.

**Hatha Yoga**

Born of the Tantric tradition, Hatha Yoga—the path of Kundalini awakening— is a science and a system for working with Shakti—Cosmic energy. Hatha Yoga focuses on the Divine Feminine in the form of Prana—the Divine Energy— and is a complete step-by-step science of awakening the Kundalini Shakti (the energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine) towards the goal of unification with supreme consciousness, (which, in this case is Shiva). In this sense, every Hatha Yoga practice is also Kundalini Practice. Sampoorna Yoga—Yoga of Fullness/Completeness/Wholeness—affects the three bodies and the five sheaths of the subtle anatomy system—a system described in the Vedas as a process of embodiment from the subllest level of becoming, to the culmination of the physical level of earthly Being. It describes the individual soul as successively enclosed within three bodies and five sheaths: the Causal body (Blissful sheath), Subtle Body (intellectual sheath, mental sheath, and energy sheath), and the Physical body (food sheath) (Hari, 2002). Regarding Sādhanā, the spirit of inquiry can move through the subllest level of embodiment to the grossest level and back again. In Artistic Sādhanā, conscious inquiry through the bodies of the subtle anatomy system might be reflected in
varying degrees of awareness, deep listening, discernment, and/or refinement of method, technique, word, thought, colour, or brush stroke. Exploration and expressions of the various stages and understandings of wholeness are all part of the emergent process within Artistic Sādhana that are in turn reflected through diverse artistic mediums and forms of presentation.

**Karma Yoga**

Karma Yoga is the path of selfless service, and, fully realized, is known as inaction in action. Karma Yoga is the most grounded of all yogic approaches, and its ideal of inaction in action—naishkarmya-karma—applies to all other spiritual disciplines (Feuerstein, 1998, 2001, p. 51). In practice it is the detachment from the fruit of one’s actions. An example here is my morning Sound Sādhanā wherein I begin with the mantra: Om Shree Ananta Hari Narayana. The mantra effectively surrenders the fruit of my practice at the feet of the ultimate Guru—highest knowledge, thus I am freed to explore without any need, arrogance, or pride attached to whatever I produce. In this way, I can very quickly open in deep receptivity to emerging knowledge as it is presented through my embodied practice. As a teacher, Karma Yoga is engaged in each preparation made towards the student’s betterment that, whether acknowledged by the student or not, is given as an offering of service to the ultimate Guru, which is knowledge of one’s true nature as embodied spirit.

**Bhakti Yoga**

Bhakti Yoga is the path of love and devotion. Very similar to the Christian tradition where one surrenders to a deity or God aspect, and where through spoken and sung prayer and self-surrender one attains direct perception of his/her ideal. The goal is to merge in communion with the focus of the love. In Bhakti Yoga the emotions are (with proper direction) transformed into an unconditional love for God. All longing, yearning, grasping, and clinging—all that is usually bound up with attachment—is purified through acts of devotion and surrender, and thereby transformed from conditional need to unconditional love. Bhakti Yoga is also said to be the fastest route to God. Here it is important to note, “God is experienced by each individual in his or her own way” (Devananda, 1978, p.134). There are hundreds if not thousands of forms of God—as many as there are devotees. This understanding has much to do with Artistic Sādhana in the way that I intend it within this thesis, wherein the practitioner (Sādhaka) can explore their own relationship to spirit full otherness and self-in-relation to the greater Self through art process without the imposition of established views, ideologies, or external theologies. Bhakti Yoga is accessible to all and one need not enter an ashram or seek solitude for the practice, for it is the devotional attitude that is necessary for success on this path. “Even the intellectual approach of Jnana Yoga needs the element of bhakti for success in attaining God’s grace” (p. 135). A Sādhaka might choose the path of Bhakti Yoga, or choose to incorporate elements of bhakti into their Sādhana if they are on a spiritual quest seeking healing and refuge from grief, distress, or trauma. Curiosity to move beyond the trappings of ritual, symbol, and the worship of form, is also a powerful motivation to enter the bhakti path, as is desire to receive or gain knowledge from the acts of bhakti. The highest form of bhakti is selfless, and its motivation is simply the desire to love and serve spirit. The Sādhaka Bhakta works through the self to liberate and ultimately transcend self. Here I use transcendence to mean: the moving beyond a limited definition of self. “There is nothing external to attain—the spiritual journey is a ceaseless process of investigating ourselves, of digging through the layers of conditioning to reach the ground of our being” (Loori, 1999, p.x)
Breathing Movement into Existence

“Movement is intrinsic to whom we are as human beings, and dance is movement made conscious” (Halprin, 2014, p.93).

In the study of transformation, what is studied is not a static thing, place, or moment of arrival; it is movement itself. The bodily self is not an object that moves, rather, movement is what we are, and “this bodily movement that humans are is inherently creative” (Lamothe, 2014, p. 3). We are continually creating our worlds and ourselves anew in the ecstatic dance that is life itself. The goal of Artistic Sādhanā is to awaken into the movement of the transformative moment, to be present at the conjoining of body and consciousness, and to explore the possibilities presented within this dynamic and activated fullness.

Choreographer Deborah Hay (2000) speaks of the body as a site of exploration to which the dancer must remain vigilantly attentive, and asserts the possibility of “a consciously aware and critically reflective corporeality” (xviii). To Hay (2000), the body as a generative source of ideas is the reward that comes, not from mastering dance technique or skill, but from what is revealed in each moment of the body's unfolding as a site of infinite possibility. By abandoning her hold on form, Hay (2000) realizes herself as “movement without looking for it” (p. 55), and exclaims, “Where I am is what I need, cellurally” (xviii). In this light, I am a dancer... everyone is a dancer. Our body's are our teachers...our oracles of deep knowing and viewing. All we have to do is listen.

Listening with and through the body, cultivates the “entire body as receptive space” (Snowber, 2009,p. 31)—a place where we can listen into "the landscape of our inner life"
(31). I experience my dancing as an intimate conversation between breath and body, self and place. Place-based artist and scholar Celeste Snowber (2014), notes, “a key ingredient to integrating dance in transformative work, is the act and art of deep listening" (p. 126). A “deep listening to the body opens up a place for magic—the magic of being keenly alive, and the magic of the possibility of being deeply woven into all of creation” (p. 124). Further, Snowber (2014) speaks of her experience of dancing outside in nature as a privilege and a partnering with creation, where she and “the wind, waves, trees, ocean, and weather become and ensemble”(p. 128). Inspired by Snowber’s (2009, 2014) embodied inquiries, the improvised nature of my creative movement begins by deeply listening into my body and into the landscape in which I am dancing. I open myself to be moved by the spirit of all that animates me—Prana, Qi, Breaths full of Conscious Sentience—the same spirit that animates the place where I choose to dance in dialogue with all there is in the moment of performative inquiry.

By dance, I mean my very own self-created ritual movement inspired by my practices of Qi Gong, Yoga, and the Zen-like movement of Bhuto. My approach to movement inquiry draws from the practice of Authentic Movement, originated by Mary Starks Whitehouse (1958), where “the core of the movement experience is the sensation of moving and being moved [and where] ideally both are present at the same instant... a moment of total awareness of coming together of what I am doing and what is happening to me...”(Whitehouse, 1988, p. 43). From within the movement experience, I recognize the body as a “site of knowledge” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003), and movement as “a corporeal way of knowing that is loaded with significance...” (Sklar, 1994, p. 11). Each new bodily gesture generates a multitude of feeling experiences, both somatic and affective (Sklar, 1994). And each feeling experience
offers the choice to either explore a phenomenon deeper, or remain an undistracted witness at its passing.

According to Stromstead, (2009), “Authentic Movement facilitates a decent into the inner world of the psyche through natural movement”. It is a way of “reconnecting with deeper instinctual resources and spiritual intelligence that dwell in the molecular structure of the body” (p. 201). The participant enters into a relationship with herself and “moves in response to body-felt sensations, emotions, memories, and/or images” (p. 202). This meditative movement form “opens to the non-verbal, affective right brain allow[ing] for further access to and expression of the emotional, imaginal and relational capacities (p. 209). Through dance, Artistic Sādhanā intentionally provokes and invokes the inner realms of self for the purpose of bringing fresh perspective and creative resourcefulness to old patterns of being. In this light, each new impulse arising from the depths of me, calls me to attention. For within the mystical experiences of intuitive movement also dwells unresolved personal history, memories of trauma and disillusionment, that, once awakened into consciousness, will require a heightened state of discernment in navigating its evolution into new form. Such a practice of intimacy, courage, and vulnerability requires a predetermined space and place within which the event could unfold. A respectful and hospitable place that one could enter into and exit out of at will—a ritual space—a place for the living theatre of conscious self-unfolding—a place open for self-revelation, re-creation, and reconciliation.
“Ritual carries phenomenal power. It is a catalyst for processes of innovation and creativity; and is thus generative of new knowledge” (Pryer, 2011, 73)
Ritual Space

“Through the practice of ritual we rekindle the embodied knowledge that we are grounded in the material reality of the earth and of the everyday. This profoundly transformative pedagogy acts directly upon our embodied minds. It is an alchemical process, one where visions and dreams arise in our consciousness, giving birth to new ways of being and living” (Pryer, 2011, p. 80).

I am drawn to the creation and performance of ritual for the purpose of actively bringing forth and establishing awareness and presence in moments of personal transformation and restoration (Lange, 2004)—consciously changing my way of being in the world—shifting from alienation to connection—restoring an ecological sense of self (Naess, 1986) and returning to awareness “the process of mutual alive relatedness” (Fromm, 1976, p. 87). Thus opening the boundaries between the self and the more-than-human other to participate wholeheartedly in the “dance of life” (p. 88). In and through ritual, especially when performed in nature, I am reminded that we do not exist in isolation. Even when pursuing self-education in seeming solitude independent of a collective, I am not working alone—I am constantly witnessed and in continual relationship with nature through our spirit full interdependent interbeing—our intertwinement in the “flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Paradoxically, in the realization of such a transformative presencing, I also realize that I am in a constant moving process of ritualizing each moment of my life, and deeply engaged in the fructile chaos and fertile nothingness of liminality (Turner, 1990, p.12). To become conscious in waking reality to the experience and potentialities within the liminal, is what my practice of ritual intends. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1990) explains liminality as “a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a
random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a
fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal experience” (p. 12). In
Artistic Sādhanā, ritual becomes participatory assimilation and reformation—a continual
and intentional metamorphoses—a journey of adaptation and refinement of self and art,
and self in relation to other.

In Indigenous cultures, the role of intentional entering into non-ordinary reality to dialogue
with spirit, belong to the shaman, Author, shamanic practitioner and psychologist Sandra
Ingerman (1991) notes, “from the classical shamanic viewpoint, the spirit world is a
complex, multidimensional land full of potential dangers for the uninitiated” (p. 27). From
the viewpoint of Sādhanā artist and researcher, a journey into the complexity and
multidimensionality of the spirit realm can be undertaken as a pilgrimage into Self—as a
way to embrace the dynamic possibilities for bringing together and making whole the
separation of body and spirit. In the journey through the liminal phase of ritual, “the
characteristics of the ritual subject, (the “passenger”) are ambiguous” (Turner, 1969, 2008),
and as such, are open for viewing. In Artistic Sādhanā, the process of re-aggregation or re-
incorporation of the individuated self is a consciously performed process of discernment
and personal refinement that is reflected through one’s artful expression in the world.

Ritual is fundamental to Sādhanā. In sound Sādhanā the preparation of person and
environment, and the attitude with which one enters into the transformative event, are very
much ritualized. Ritual is a way of grounding oneself in the work and in the intention of the
engagement. Ritual is “world-making” (Driver, 1998, p. 149)—a way of creating our world
reality by our own choosing, and through our own action. It is a way of conscious re-
ordering, re-balancing, re-making, and re-claiming one’s self in the ever-unfolding processes
of life.
The ritual of Sound Sādhanā brought forth a vision...

I envisioned myself emerging out of primordial matter to become a living dancing being. Dressed in clay I hunted for the lost pieces of me between the shadows of the forest and the light of the sun. I saw my eyes looking out from behind a mask of earth, and my self at the entrance to the underworld.

Space moment—Sounding Sādhanā, 2014

And, as an artist, I chose to follow its resonance... What if.... I create a ritual for body, clay, water, and stone...? Where is my dream consciousness leading me...?
Sādhanā of Clay

“When we discover what we are made of and how we are put together, we discover a ceaseless process of building up and tearing down, and we realize that life is at the mercy of that never ending process. Like the sand castles on the beaches of our childhood, it can be washed away” (Damasio, 1999, p. 144).
Clay Rituals Project

“Ritual serves to awaken awareness, and to focus intention through sharpened attention to one’s own body and the body of the earth” (Pryer, 2004, p. 1),

I dreamed myself the potter and the clay…the creator and the substance…

What would happen if…I were to recreate myself…? What shape would I take…? Could I create for myself a fresh start…a new beginning…? And in this new shape…what might I hold…carry…contain…? Could this new form of me be empty?
Emergence

*Equal parts water and light*

*Dark earth and stone*

*I birth myself back into living*

*back into the world of flesh and heart*

The creek flows deep and fast through the steel tunnel and I am drawn into the cylindrical structure as much by the welcome shade as by the potential of the resonating walls to echo my song. Leaving the hot sun behind me I enter into the dark coolness. My feet work below me to find balance upon the algae-covered stones of the creek bed and the cold water swirls upwards welcoming my submerging form.
“Dance has the capacity to be the muscle of the imagination, a magical invitation through the creative process to reimagine new worlds. This is the same imagination that is needed for every new beginning in life, whether it is a different way to lead, a personal decision, a cure for cancer, or a way to build the bones of innovation” (Snowber, 2012, p. 56)

Looking up I see hundreds of tiny flying insects filling the space between the water and the roof, whizzing around my arms and face like clusters of curious winged sprites. I begin to sing while moving in slow undulations, entranced by the way my voice fills this watery concert hall. The current pushes me towards the entrance of the tunnel and I see a distinctly marked borderline where the dark inside of the tunnel space meets and opens into the sunlit creek bed. I step onto and into that meeting place between the light and dark and begin a new dance…a dance out of the darkness past, and into the light of presence…a dance of emergence of and into new awareness…moving out from the invisible realms of being into visible presence….
a new sense of being one in the perpetual coming into consciousness… of being both inside and outside and all sides. I situate myself and my body directly upon this border space to play…explore…and inquire….
What is this moment revealing about me...about my journey...?

Am I ready to begin again...to start anew...to love this body of mine? Am I ready to step once again into full visibility? Or shall I remain here in the world in-between looking both outward and inwards...hearing my own song sung back to me...?

I am water and light, dark earth and stone, so why do I have to choose...?

Can I be all of these things and not hide...?

The flying creatures accompany me in the dance as I dip in and out of the light between the water and the air, and are as mesmerized as I to view my beautiful body of flesh and heart released into the world once again as, on my own terms, I dance slowly out of the tunnel and up onto the banks of the creek looking upwards to the sky and the trees...
Reflection

“By dancing our questions, we can uncover the questions underneath the questions and open up a deep listening to the body’s knowledge. Dance awakens us to emotional and spiritual intelligence” (Snowber, 2012, p.57).

This ephemeral ritual performance took place on the outer edge of a water-filled tunnel under a bridge and out of sight of the world above. Life is danced back into Being. A body emerges out of water and darkness into light...into reclamation and rebirth...of self unto self...a time of renewal and recognition of the beauty, strength, and fragility of mortal flesh...

I enter into performative inquiry much the same as I enter into ritual liminal space. The environment is set, and yet once I cross the threshold, there is nothing predictable about the journey.
I could say that *Emergence* was a ritual of gestation and rebirth, and indeed it was, yet, I can also claim that each exploration is an entering into liminal and thus transformative space knowing that I will inevitably be transformed and the result will be a new me... an enhanced/modified me with an extended consciousness... some new understanding or awareness of me, my world, my stories, and how I interpret and or react to and within the performative inquiry. If I am present and conscious within performative inquiry, I can say that each moment of breathing, thinking, writing, sounding and moving could potentially be a rebirthing...and, being present, I participate in the continual rebirthing of me. The womb-like tunnel in *Emergence* served as a gestational space for my coming into consciousness of my embodied self. Moving out of the womb space through a portal doorway into the light became a performance of conscious rebirth and awakening.

*Emergence* remains a physical, emotional, spiritual, whole body re-birthing of my self unto my self. I am re-born anew, this time with enhanced awareness of my value and beauty, knowledge of border spaces and retreat spaces, and knowledge of the play and the balance between light and dark...knowing that I can step into and out of all spaces, and that I can dance throughout it all. The most important revelations are that I can choose to remain in, between, or I could choose a more encompassing vantage point.
I wanted to begin again...

to shake off all that came before this moment...

but the clay upon my body grounds me in the knowledge

that I am all that came before this moment.
Opening Spaces

“If we are to open spaces for the self, we must risk the wilderness of feeling” (Denton, 2004, p.141).

Diana Denton (2014) writes, “In the place of wounding there is vulnerability, an openness that may lead us to a more self-reflexive posture” (p. 220). And suggests “the wounds of the body's experience [be accessed] as points of entry” (Denton, 1989, p. 50). For the work of Sādhanā, the reawakening of the wound is an opportunity for entering into and bringing light into darkness—uncomfortable and disorienting as it might be.

Christopher Poulos (2006) writes of “thin places” — places where the invisible otherness and the visible known are separated by the thinnest of veils. And where potential diminishment, disillusion, illumination, and presence abide side by side. He suggests, “perhaps the thin places are really places within us” (p. 168), places where we meet the hidden parts of the self yet to be examined and brought into clarity.

Feminist scholar bell hooks (1999) writes of the longing to be rid of the “wounded me, that secret shadow self” (p.8) and explains that in the formation of one’s artistry, in order to be fully alive and fully whole, we must not leave the shadow behind. We must rescue and enable its recovery; search and reclaim it as our own. As an artist on the path of revelation and reclamation of the self, I will need to “confront that shadow-self, to learn ways to accept and care for that aspect of me as part of a process of healing and recovery” (p. 11). Yet, it will take courage to embrace the hidden darkness, for “an anguished heart is never a brave heart. It’s like some wounded body part that keeps bleeding, that can’t stop itself” (p. 9).
And yet it is also true that, “such wounds hold the potential to catalyze an increase in consciousness” (Denton, 2014, p. 220).
Snowber (2004) draws our attention to the Buddhist expression of unconditional friendliness and kindness towards oneself—Maitri—as that “which ultimately means to have compassion for everything that comes into our lives...to welcome everything, even the uninvited guests” (p. 125). Snowber asks: “How can we lean into the uninvited guests of our lives whether that is people, experiences, illnesses, broken plans, or both the delight and limitations of our own bodies. It takes strength to lean. Endurance” (p. 125). When art practice is approached as Sādhanā, the leaning into darkness and shadow is taken up as an opportunity. For as Denton (2014) explains, “Sometimes the wounding, the burning must occur—to awaken greater consciousness” (p. 220).

According to hooks (1999), the place of woundedness kept so long in the shadow, can become “a place of recovery, the dark deeps into which I could enter to find both the source of that pain and the means to heal” (p. 12). Memories lost and buried through time and trauma remain where they happened, and, like seeds planted in the core of me, are easily provoked into reliving what once was. “Every moment and memory has been written on our bodies, and lives on as knowledge stored in our every cell (Pryer, 2011, p. 12). The experiences of once upon a time are part of what formed me. And, as my body has been here since the beginning of this life as “a “seismograph recording every emotional tremblor” (Rainer, 1997, p. 202), I have become my own living archive of lived and still living experience, of all thought and deed both done unto me and by me. Yet hooks (1999) proposes that hidden deep within the dark space of the shadow-self is the opportunity and opening “to learn the self anew in ways that [will] allow transformation in consciousness and being” (p.12). There is an opportunity here within the dark space of the shadow-self, a calling to awaken to the possibility of wholeness.
Goddess scholar Carol Christ (1980) asks, “What would it mean for you to become Queen of your own particular underworld?” If I were Queen of my own underworld, I would be my own director, producer, player and witness, my own auto biographer and editor while engaging in the work of reclamation and reconciliation of shadow to self. Through ritual and play, I would recall and reclaim the rawness of lived experience as resource and inspiration. And I will make sacred this work of coming to understandings and new ways of knowing and listening in the body by calling it Sâdhanâ.
Embrace

“Dance is the invitation to reclaim an embodied inspiration—the entrance to our knowing that is filled with a lifetime of mystery and magic” (Snowber, 2012, p. 58).

I am hot…so hot…and so tired…I am covered in clay and it is thick and heavy and tight… I feel like a clay pot sitting out in the sun to dry. The longer I sit the drier I become. Soon I will plunge into the lovely coolness of the creek water and wash the earth from my pores.

Soon I will be returned to my soft and living and still young flesh. But for now I sit altered both inside and out. I no longer feel like me. I feel lost and afraid behind this hardening shell.

What would happen if…. I couldn’t wash it off…?
What if this is what it will actually be like when I am eighty or ninety or one hundred years old…? Will I be as lost and afraid then as I am now…waiting and watching fearfully from inside a drying outside…?

Will I still be looking out of the crumbling form of me wishing I could wash it off…waiting to return myself to myself in the clear waters of a creek…?

I look closer at the now parched earth upon my arms. Each line…each wrinkle defining the inevitability of my fears being realized in time…this will be me. I am disoriented and fascinated at the same time. I am cracking and crumbling moving closer to death in every moment…yet every fearful second watching my body’s slow transformational dance towards extinction …towards dying…is a second not lived fully—a moment not loving my flesh as I stand outside of it watching…observing…judging…un appreciating… wishing for something other, something less
animal, less worldly…less of this earth.

I look beyond my own body and I am shamed. I see the forested space and the running creek. There are birds in the trees and insects in the earth, water, and sky, and they live a shorter life than I…and yet they are so full of life presence.

Why would I stop loving my body because it is aging…? Have I been so touched by the culture I am immersed in that I hold little value in the aging human body…the aged person, in being old, an ancient life form…? I have always been kind to aging animals, why then would I treat myself with less kindness as if holding my self to another set of values…whose values?

What if I reclaim and reset those values and hold my self and this life in its every moment as sacred and valuable and full of potential?
I see now that my mortality is what makes life precious. I embrace this form, and in so doing I embrace life in all its fragility and temporality. I am animal and I am of this earth.
**Reflections**

“We hold difficult areas chronically in our bodies, emotions, and minds. Our bodies particularly are sacrificial areas. I think of these areas as sacred sites. Parts of our bodies hold our difficulties, until we have the strength to experience them with mindfulness” (McDonald-Smith, 1997, p.176).

This short performative inquiry happened unexpectedly. I was waiting for the cameras to be ready and in place to capture my next planned exploration. As I sat there by the water waiting, I could feel the clay drying and I slipped into contemplation. My partner/witness realized the moment and returned from his preparation to capture my image and movements on camera.
I remember saying:

“Look at my skin…. quick come close and see the cracks…it looks like a desert landscape…I am becoming a stone…one of these river stones… I am an ancient nature being…and am of the same colour as the stone mixed with the earth and the sun… I feel as if I am part of the creek bed…slowly merging into the nature of this place.”

It would seem that the conditions were ripe for me to move into an altered state of being and a liminal space of inquiry. With the heat and the clay, and the sound of silence and water rushing through it all, it would have been impossible for me to remain in an ordinary state of being.
Within my quiet solitude

Even that which is defined in stone

Breaks its bounds in the world of reflection

I was a vessel carrying something ominous, and this something rose to the top of consciousness to be examined, performed and transformed. What I experienced was a surfacing of fear that must have been sitting heavily within my subconscious weighing down my body and my movements, casting a deep shadow over any hope of lightness of being.

If I consider and act upon the implications of the information offered up through reflection and embodied inquiry, I could potentially change who and how I am in the present and future, and gain insight into how the "I" of the present came into being.

Fear of aging came up to be reckoned with like some haunting element begging to be embraced and loved into acceptance.

Ahh…this is what has been burrowing deep within me…this is what has been holding me back….fear….age…image…How sad that I would use up my body and then turn away from it in its old age.

“Movement…acts as a mirror reflecting the breaks that need mending, discordances seeking harmony and the potentialities that await us patiently” (Halprin,2014, p. 93)
Again I feel shame. I want to “touch my aging self with tender fingers and speak” (Friedman, 1997, p. 73) tender words of gratitude for all that it has allowed me to do, and to ask forgiveness for my lack of self-compassion. I want to reclaim my body from the weight of self-rejection…re inhabit it with the fullness of awareness…remind it of its aliveness.

I want to transform my own sight so as to see through fresh eyes the value and the worthiness and yes, the beauty of my own flesh and bones.

“This is a presence of knowing and experiencing our full vitality. And in this place we encounter the deep wisdom of our bodies, what we came into the world with, and what we need more than ever in this day and age. Dance opens us up so we can show up for our own lives and once again fall into wonder”(Snowber, 2012, p. 59).
Once I accepted my body as animal, I felt an expansion, an opening into a field of being that is inclusive and welcoming...a feeling of familiarity...of family...of a bond and connection that is unconditional...whatever happens to one happens to all.

Appreciating my body now as a "creative shape shifting entity" I recognize that "far from restricting my access to things and to the world, [my] body is my very means of entering into relation with all things" (Abram, 1996, p. 47).

Embodying and performing self-inquiry within the natural environment of the creek and its surrounding forested space activated a profound contemplation on the mortality of the human body and its place within the cycles of nature. In this embodied exploration I journeyed through grief, loss, gratitude, and surrender. I contemplated my corporeal existence— “the body [as] an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults—to scars and scorns of others, [and self], to disease, decay, and death” (Abram, 2010 p. 6). And I came to a deep appreciation of my body as my life’s precious vessel, vowing to live in gratitude and trust while embracing spirit and the natural turning of life.
I see now that my mortality is what makes life precious.

I embrace this form,

and in so doing I embrace life in all its fragility

and temporality.

I am animal and I am of this earth.
Prayer

“Let me remember that my Buddha-nature is drenched in flesh” (Moon, 1997, p. 228)

The glacier water dances and swirls around my legs, shocking me into full presence and challenging me to stillness as I sit in prayer upon the fallen tree. I breathe… and I listen. My heart is pounding with the effort to heat my blood as the water currents pull the warmth from my body and carry it into the deeper pools further downstream. My breath is steady and strong…my mind hyper-focused. With all my senses heightened… I am still. With my heart and blood and breath reverberating within me…I am still. I am of the stillness of stone and sky. Yet I am not frozen in bodymind or awareness. I am aware of my body inside and out, and of my self in relation to the sentient bodies of river and tree. My eyes are closed and yet as I sit between and within and from outside looking in I see so much from here.
I am watching and witnessing my self sitting and focusing, and I am aware of being watched and witnessed by the elements around me. I have not gone unnoticed. There is a silence coming from the surrounding forest. I imagine a million tiny eyes of conscious othernesses watching and waiting to see and to know what it is that I am attempting here in my performative inquiry.

*What would happen if… I become still while the world around me rushes by…?*

I seek communion and kinship with the environment (as if there is some such static place of final arrival) …and I sense the water, the river boulders, and the trees laughing at me…at my determination…my pushing…my lack of stillness in my desire. I am opened by humility. And I see in their reflection that I am already part of their world. I am already connected… interconnected…and I don't have to try so hard.
Thus I empty my prayer of all longing and expectation, and sit in peaceful awareness.

I am stopped (Appelbaum, 1995). I realize that...there is no stillness here...no silence...no inside or outside....it is not as simple as that...not as delineated...as divided....There is only fullness. I contemplate this marvellous "balance point —often called the edge of chaos" which is, as I am presently glimpsing, a generative space, out of which the "complex system [that I am] can be spontaneous, adaptive, and alive" (Waldrop, 1992, p.12), and in continual emergent existence of me as consciousness itself. It is not still. I am not still. There is no resting here in this system that walks and talks and thinks of itself as a person (Stager, 2014).
There is aliveness...a natural rising up to meet and to join with and in...and I....

I sit here listening into the fullness of being
“In the work of ritual, one is reminded that the self does not, and can never, exist in isolation, but is always in community. The self is merely a single weak fibre spun into the hardy strands that comprise life. The silken webs of sacred meaning, spun through the constant processes of ritual, connect us intimately to the self and, at the same time, to the Other” (Pryer, 2011, p.74).

*Prayer* is a ritualized performance of stillness—an expression of deep reverence for life, and a performance of recognition of the body as being "the primary instrument of all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos" (Abram, 2010, p. 8). It is an honouring of simultaneous otherness and oneness with the natural world, and an acknowledgement of the spirit dancing through all form.

"What would happen if…I did nothing at all?"
“A stop is a moment of listening. A stop is calling attention to what is hidden—a vulnerability, an intimacy. It is a new awareness of possibility, a recognition of oneself in relation to others and one's location, as if for the first time” (Fels, 2008, p.36).

I listened deeply with every cell of my body and waited to see what might come forth into consciousness. I followed my intuition to sit as still as I possibly could, taking a performative risk to see what might happen if I did nothing at all. Perhaps I could have asked, "What would happen if...I did nothing at all?" But of course I know that the act of doing nothing is an act of doing something. However, what did happen, was that by "practicing the art of stopping" that Thich Nhat Hanh (2006) teaches as the practice of stopping the self from being carried away by the thoughts of the mind, I was able to "enter the present moment to be nourished by the beauty and wonder of life in and around [me]" (p.6). I had prepared myself for a "stop moment", according to Appelbaum (1995), in which I opened to an actual unfolding life event (p.24) happening all around me, that might have remained hidden had I
not first practiced "the art of stopping" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2006, p. 5). I had stopped acting
upon the landscape about me and had started to listen in. In doing so, I realized that I was in
deep conversation with sentience, and I was awake.

"A stop is not always apparent in the moment it occurs" (Fels, 2008, p. 36).

As I reflect upon the photographic images and the reverberations of my experience in this particular
performative inquiry, the theme that comes to mind is stillness amidst the storm. The desire to
remain still, calm, and balanced in the centre of turmoil seems to be a recurring theme and one that
I play out again and again within each Sadhana practice. Powerful images from ancient mythology
that are embedded deeply in my emerging consciousness inspire this recurring theme. The image of
Lord Shiva sitting unmoved deep in meditation for thousands of years on Mount Kailās, while wars
rage and civilizations come into and out of existence around him; and the visual metaphor of the
goddess Quan Yin balancing in perfect stillness upon a dragon riding in the eye of a hurricane,
empower and inspire my play.
“Play enables us to rearrange our capacities and our very identity so that they can be used in unforeseen ways” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, 43).
Perhaps this theme is continually acted out because it is a major sticking point for me in my personal evolution. Reflecting into my past to a time before Sādhanā practice would find the theme of a leaf that had detached from the security of its branch to become subject to strong currents of wind and water.

A leaf,

A delicate momentary form,

its vital breath spent,

is freed from its branch

by the force of the wind.
and laid atop a fast moving current

To be held...

Carried...

half floating, half submerged,

taken

to be churned

and broken by the journey
Before being swallowed and forced to the bottom of the pool
as cover for the stones.

"A stop calls us to question our habits of engagement and invites us to reimagine, to
engage anew" (Fels, 2008, p. 36).

A leaf,

In honour of the great cycle of life,

Offers its final breath to the wind

That gently cradles its flight

From the branch

To the loving embrace of the water below
A leaf,

Finally released from its tether

Joyously flings itself into the wind

And gifts itself back to Creation

A leaf

Beauteous Changeling

Eternally Spinning…

In circles fluttering

Unquestioningly

Being
At Rituals End

I want to begin again…to shake off all that came before this moment…but the clay upon my body grounds me in the knowledge that I am all that came before this moment. This series of ritual play and inquiry was to be a cleansing…a ritualistic expulsion of the dysfunctional layers of me so that the living parts of me can once again breathe. It was to be a ceremony of artful exfoliation of what is no longer me…. a rebirth…a renewal…and a way of testifying to my self and all witnessing bodies…. “I reclaim only the best of me!” But that is not what is Happening here. This is no ritual of shedding…of leaving pieces behind. It is a dance of retrieval…. A bringing of my self home to self…A reclaiming of all the parts….a re establishing of my self as a complex living being…not yet old…but no longer young…so much experience and knowledge to assimilate….make sense of…to weave into wisdom and art.
Sādhanā Meditation on the Body

This body of mine is composed of atoms born in stars,
  molecules, cells, tissues and organs.
It is a union of unaccountable viruses, bacteria, fungi, plants and animals.
It is conditioned by families and societies, by thoughts and dreams.
It is molded by sun and gravity and the whole of the ecosphere.
It is an interbeing of all these processes from micro to macro.

Wondrous! Transient! May it teach me wisdom!

Bones, flesh and skin—skin, flesh and bones

—Hearn, 1993, p. 10
Reflections on Ritual

Clay Sādhanā was a full immersion in liminal time space, from the moment of my dreaming to the after moments through the writing, and even in the memory of it.

I want to continue the experience and performative exploration of my bodymind through ritual movement yet within a contained space. One that I can step into and out of, one that I can observe from numerous angles and proximities. And one that I could, at a future time, bring others into. I follow resonance to the ancient circle upon the earth, to see what it might offer Artistic Sādhanā.
“The creative process is a spiritual path. This adventure is about us, about originality, about the deep self, the composer in all of us, about originality, meaning that which is not new, but that which is fully and originally ourselves” (Nachmanowich, 1990, p.13)
Threshold

I am on the threshold waiting...

Knowing... once I enter the Circle of Lines and Spaces

I will be awoken to the pieces held tightly within my person.

Fragments will be shaken loose and brought forward to replay events past.

Always surprising.

In all ways revelatory
These images of moments I will dance into and through,

Relive and glimpse anew

each memory with fresh eyes, wiser mind and kinder heart.

For I know there will be opportunities for re working...

Re knowing...

Un knowing...

Un winding... Unraveling...
Revealing... Un concealing...

Re claiming... Re naming...

Re entering with gentler being and compassionate observing,

Dancing...

Re igniting the passion for Being

Bringing forth a space for Reconciliation,

Re introduction ... Re aggregation... Re assimilation...
Re association...

Remaking... Re-storying... Re-storing self to Self

One spirit full step into the liminal where transformation is inevitable...

I know the choice is mine to participate...

Activate...

Instigate
Through Sacred Play

A ritual pathway

To Resurrection

Profoundly knowing

There will be no returning

to where and who I am now.

— Anderson 2014.
The labyrinth, when engaged with as an actual or metaphorical journey/pilgrimage into virtual or actual place, space, dimension, real or imagined state of receptivity where one can access knowledge of the multifaceted self within, makes available, reveals, uncovers, shakes loose ossified knowledge resources held in stasis until made conscious through dancing the bodily form within, upon, across, and beyond its circle of lines and spaces.

—Field Notes, 2014

For as long as I can remember, the Labyrinth, as both a metaphor and as a physical space, has intrigued me. I have come across its mysterious form many times, usually at interesting junctures in my life’s journey. Whether inlaid into a cathedral floor, carved into the earth, built from stone, cut into grass, or drawn in sand, the labyrinth evokes and invites entry and exploration. Such a place is a liminal space (Turner, 1997), a place of ritual set apart from the mundane world (Pryer, 2011), a place of entry into contemplative, ritualistic, communion with the otherness of self. For me, entering a labyrinth is akin to walking among ancient ruins where all that remains of a once vibrant civilization is a stone floor upon which our ancestors stood deep in contemplation. I am curious about this stone floor, this trace of histories past. I want to explore its potential as a theatrical stage for transformative inquiry, and inquire into its possibilities as an inter dimensional portal where, as a seeker, I might quest knowledge of the self through individual, cultural, and ancestral memory unimpeded by the boundaries of time.
A Generative Space

As an interdisciplinary artist and researcher, my engagement with the labyrinth began as part of a multi disciplinary visual art project incorporating performance, film, and fashion design. The labyrinth was to be the stage and backdrop for the actual artistic work. Its presence was intended to be purely symbolic in nature; it was to add a dimension of mystery and spirituality to the visual field. Dressed in the colour of the stones, I was to dance across the face of the labyrinth while the photographer captured the full aesthetic effect for my portfolio. However, almost immediately upon entering the labyrinth, I experienced a “Stop” moment (Appelbaum, 1995) wherein I glimpsed the potential of labyrinth dance ritual as “a catalyst for processes of innovation and creativity, and thus as generative of new knowledge” (Pryer, 2004, p. 73). From that moment onwards, the focus and intention of my inquiry shifted from the purely aesthetic, with visual artefact as its reward, to become a contemplative and embodied inquiry into activating insight and revelation through ritual performance, labyrinth, and dance.

When I began Labyrinth dancing I had no real idea of what I might find. It started with a single visual image remembered from a dream that I wanted to capture with my body and camera. I did not know at the inception that I would be exploring memory and psyche, and revisiting moments of past realities that formed me. I did not anticipate engaging in embodied presence while simultaneously visioning inter dimensionally across time and space. And I certainly did not foresee the Labyrinth as being both a metaphorical structure, and a ritualized experiential way of entry into self-inquiry.
Labyrinth Sadhanā explores the labyrinth through ritual dance, combining these two powerful forms with the intention of activating imagination and artistic vision. More than a tool for self-reflection, the Labyrinth is a powerful visual and literal metaphor for cosmos and chaos (Purce, 1974), a “place within and through which to explore artistic and visceral, tactile, verbal, aesthetic spiritual practices of identification of, and inquiry into, the ‘self’ as spirit, soul, and sacred” (Bickle & Jordan, 2009, p.2). The Labyrinth’s unicursal path demarcates sacred space that has traditionally been used for contemplative walking for the purpose of self-reflection, and, as “a unifying symbol to learn/teach and [inquire] within and from” (p. 1).

Traditionally, pilgrimage into the Labyrinth is undertaken as a journey to the centre of the soul and welcomes pilgrims from all faiths, or no faith (Korchuk, 1998). The spiral and the Labyrinth forms are “archetypal symbols of the self, representing wholeness and unity”, and the common response attributed to labyrinth walking is “transformation and renewal” (Sandor, 2005, p. 480). Participants may have the “sense of connection with the self, between inner and outer, and between past and future”. Walking the labyrinth is a “non-linear, whole-brain process” (p. 480) within which participants can explore their own psyche on a non-verbal and non-linear level. Dancing the labyrinth adds a level of provocation that intends an active embodied awareness with each reflective and reflexive gesture. Activated immersion into self-inquiry within the labyrinth serves to evoke physiological, affective, and spiritual outcomes similar to Authentic Movement and Creative Movement discussed earlier in this thesis journey.
“The knowledge generated by engagement with ritual permits change in the participant’s consciousness, thereby enabling the participant to co-create new ways of being in the world” (Pryer, 2004, p. 73).

As Sādhana, one prepares to enter the labyrinth by setting an intention for the exploration while simultaneously putting aside all expectations for specific outcome. Preparation for entry includes the calming and clearing of the mind, and a focusing and directing of the breath into the body so as to induce a state of embodied receptive presence. Once this receptive state of conscious self-presence has been attained, the explorer steps into the labyrinth and begins their journey, all the while maintaining an unfocused worldly gaze to allow for inner sight to come into consciousness.

In my experience, dancing the labyrinth with the pre-set intention of gaining insight extends the traditional labyrinth walk into a consciously engaged practice of self-transformation. In my research, the Labyrinth is used as both a performative structure within which we dance, and as a visual metaphor for reflection upon the infinite possibilities and multiplicities of being.
Dreaming the Vision

I dreamed myself

the colour of stone

Moving in trance

A dance of stillness

Upon a marble stage

Every move revealing,

Unconcealing
Every step
a glimpse of something
A moment
just out of reach
A trace
A fragment of memory lost
A face from the past
A family held in time

In place

Just as I had left them so long ago

— Anderson (2013)

I reached backwards to touch the space around the apparition as my feet danced me further forward along my own journey. I was repeating the very same leaving but this time clarity and compassion danced the metaphor. Dancing across and through time with each step. They watched me as I watched them, and there was love and healing in that moment—Maltese Labyrinth, UBC, 2014
Thin Places

“Heaven and Earth, the Celtic saying goes, are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter” (Eric Weiner, 2012, The Cultured Traveller, New York Times).

In Celtic lore, Tír na nÓg is one of the many names of the Otherworld—a supernatural realm of the spirit that can be reached through a natural portal known as a Thin Place. Thin places are often conventional sacred places like Mosques and Cathedrals, places that are designated for communing with the divine. But there are other places too, unconventional and unauthorized places on earth made sacred by those who seek them—standing stones, places where the earth meets the ocean, caves, cliffs, forest groves, streams, and ancient tree
gardens—"locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses...(Weiner, 2012), and where the invisible world and the visible world are at their closest proximity separated by only the thinnest of veils. They are not always pleasant places, or beautiful, or peaceful. They are transformative places wherein one might "lose their bearings, and find new ones [and be] jolted out of old ways of seeing the world...". They are places “[that] transform us—or, more accurately, unmask us. In thin places we become our more essential selves” (Weiner, 2012). This transformational experience is not always comfortable, but thin places are sought to provoke such a transformation.

“What learning is possible on the edge of the sea in the shelter of mountains?” (Fels 2004, p. 185).

In the late part of summer I sought the Tír na nÓg Labyrinth on Bowen Island British Columbia. It is an out-of-the-way place set into the land on the side of a mountain and at the edge of a forest. There were no other human visitors there besides my husband and myself. The sounds of traffic and industry could not reach us here in this magical place were ravens, dragonflies, bees, beetles and ants filled the air with the symphony of their aliveness. I was entranced—instantly drawn into an alternate and extraordinary reality space between the realms of imagination, memory, and the present moment. Philosopher Edward Casey (1993) theorizes that ‘‘Place ushers us into what already is: namely, the environing subsoil of our embodiment, the bedrock of our being-in-the-world. If imagination projects us out beyond ourselves while memory takes us back behind ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually under and around us’’ (pp. xvi-xvii). I experienced a deep sense of homecoming, and
a resonance with the spirit of the place. I recognized this dwelling space as a Thin Place of Celtic mythology. And, as a Scottish Celt, I knew it in my bones as surely as I slipped easily between the worlds of here and there—from the past into the present and back again.

It was here where I could explore and recover some of the narratives that I had kept at a distance during my other Sādhanā practices, and here where I could dance the many worlds of my creation into and out of being.

I am drawn to the Labyrinth, in particular freestanding labyrinths that are open to individual exploration, translation, and play. I am lured by the idea of Labyrinth as a stage for contemplative ritual and sacred performance, and as a catalyst and generative space of fruitful chaos for inspiring an imaginative response to play. I am enchanted by the very thought of the labyrinth as an interdimensional portal for time travel where living memory can be consciously accessed and
interacted with. I am intrigued by the labyrinth as a place of pilgrimage wherein the traveler moves from outer awareness to inner attunement; as a metaphorical life journey for the purpose of reclamation and reconciliation; as a place of paradoxical play where binaries merge; as an interface between self and the otherness of self; and as a catalyst within/ upon and through which I enact a performative inquiry through dance, ritual, and sacred play with the intention of disrupting the stuck places (artistically and holistically speaking) for the purpose of liberating inspiration and artistic insight.

“In performance the body that does is of no less importance than the mind that knows, for performance is the unity of doing and observing” (Driver, 1991, p. 81).

Each movement brings forth a memory held within flesh, long forgotten by mind until brought forward by the dance and the labyrinth. Acknowledging the processes at play, I allow my body to guide the inquiry. I recognize the work I am undertaking is dependent upon an embodied and performative approach. I also realize that I am engaged in activating openings into further inquiry, beyond practices of personal memory interaction, into the primordial creative energy held within memory fragments and time, so that I might dance, write, paint, and sing its liberation.
“Performance is holy, a place of worship consecrated for the devoted who gather in its name to listen to the sacred scripts, to join in the hallowed ceremony, to make the spirits rise as the world whirls away” (Pelias, 1999, p. 111).

To activate the processes under observation, I intentionally stray from the path. I step across a line and a space. I straddle two spaces simultaneously. I enter and exit at will. I jump into the centre without first completing the journey. I provoke, evoke and invoke memory and vision, real and imagined. I experience my exploration as intentional participation in revelation, and realize that I have opened myself up to a kind of living theatre of which I am the creator, the writer, the editor, and the player. I also realize that it is the nature of performative and embodied inquiry to have profound consequences personally and artistically. For I have found a way into my life stories. I have found a way to revisit the moments that made me. And I have created an opportunity for myself to re view, re do, re claim, restore and re story. In short, I have discovered a way to connect my self to who I was. I now use the labyrinth as my personal stage—my “Holy Theatre” (Brook, 1968, 1981, p.42).

“This theatre is holy because its purpose is holy; it has a clearly defined place in the community and it responds to a need the churches can no longer fill” (Brook, 1968, p. 60).
“Performance not as process nor as product, but as breath, intermingling, unexpected journey landscapes reeling against the sky in a sudden moment of recognition” (Fels, 2003, p. 173).

It is here within the labyrinth that I embody my inquiry and dance to awaken my stories within.

**Portal 1**

—*Activated by the dark spaces between the stones in combination with a fleeting shot of pain through my left hip.*

Strange that I should fall at this moment into hell…

As I lie in the hole I know the lights are about to return, just as I also know I am broken and cannot move. The old adage “the show must go on” flickers through my mind for a moment, as if I am a Broadway musical theatre actress that has to keep going regardless of the situation otherwise an understudy will step right into and onto what has taken me a lifetime to achieve. But all I can do is lie here upside down, with half my body in the hole, my pink-stockinged legs connected to a pair of pink boots poking upwards like cautionary flags around an open pothole forewarning others to steer clear of the danger below.
I am drawn to the creation of ritual for the purpose of bringing forth and establishing awareness and presence in moments of personal transformation. As I have experienced it, the theatrical immanence of the labyrinth enhances ritual, and is an ideal space for contemplative work and sacred play. By “work” I refer to the intentional work of self-investigation and self-reflection. And by “sacred play” I mean the way by which one intentionally un-conceals and reveals the knowledge of the self. In this thesis, the “way” is a way of Being where I am a willing and active participant in open-ended reflection (Varela et al, 1991).

Portal 2

— Activated by the size and colour of the carved stones laying all around me.

I have found a hole in the palace wall and climbed through. In front of me lies a large stone head that must have fallen from its body many years before this moment. I look closer and notice one side of the Buddha’s face has crumbled onto the ground to become the gravel I am walking on. I follow the path of gravel to another bodiless head, and another and another. I look up. All around me are headless bodies seated, so still and silent, their heads crumbling into the earth at their feet. I wander further into the ruins and imagine the sacred and fragrant world that once existed.
Who is my Witness?

I take off my shoes and step in and onto the labyrinth

My body inviting the vision

with open arms and open hands,

open heart, and open face.

Dancing through each open gesture

Witnessing...

Embodied Presence

Listening...

Reflexive flesh
Responding...

Memory and impulse

Awakening...

Within each,

a question for

This body,

This vital sheath,

This sacred container within which I reside

Questioning...

Who is dancing me?
Who is my witness?

What is the nature of the one who animates this flesh

— Anderson 2014

“Movement evokes, reveals and channels feeling, emotion, memories, images and story. In consciously expressive movement, we can meet all our life material, giving us a way to break the impasse between past and present. We can play with our material, grapple with it, confront it, shape and reshape it” (Halprin, 2014, p. 97).
Activated Narratives

Endless resources…raw data evoked out of hiding to play…to be reimagined and shaped a new, transformed through embodied active processes of engagement…

Portal 3

—Memory narrative activated by the growing shadows of the surrounding trees

I enter into the dark solemn environment of a downtown Vancouver church. I have taken dance classes within these halls before, and am surprised by the transformation of both the space and everyone in it. Those who I have known to be joyful, robust, spirit-filled fully inhabited physical presences, appear to have let go of all that made them individually unique living expressions, and have become something quite the opposite. The room is filled with circumambulating dead-eyed, emptied out flesh…openly wounded…dread filled…grieving…exposed vulnerable souls…openly beseeching …asking …needing…wanting and yearning to merge with a numinous other. The tomb-like room is filled up to its high ceiling with profound and palpable expressions of dearth. I feel myself resisting…contracting…and armouring against the idea of God as separate from me. I seek a way of communing with my ‘self’, not with God the Father, or Goddess the divine Feminine, but the very authentic ‘self’, whatever that might look like. I watch the community of mindlessness walking zombie-like towards the centre of the labyrinth. I realize that I do not need to step into the actual labyrinth to receive a teaching. I turn away and walk out of the tomb, leaving the darkness behind me.
Labyrinth as Stage

“A holy theatre not only presents the invisible but also offers conditions that make its perception possible” (Brook, 1968, p. 56).

The labyrinth is an ideal stage for enacting *sacred play*. It is where one can examine the theatre of the self—playing out various themes as actor, director, and audience simultaneously. Sacred play, according to Driver (1991) is “work done playfully...charged with energies and meanings” (p.99), and the labyrinth stage offers a focusing place for these energies, and for making meaning from what might be revealed through the *play*. It is a “Theatre of the Invisible—Made—Visible”, where the invisible can appear and take a deep hold on our thoughts (Brook, 1968, 1981, p. 41). It becomes a place where one can examine very closely, to the micro level if need be, the inner scripts and multiple masks, of the various characters and narratives, and the many opportunities for creation and transformation they present.

*How is this place performing me? Does it have to be a labyrinth? Could I not have the same experience walking a forest trail?*

The labyrinth place performs as a lens through which to focus intention and inquiry. It becomes the sacred play(ing) field—a material manifestation of Kurukshetra—the sacred battlefield of the Bhagavad Gita, where one contemplates one’s path through engaging in deep self-inquiry. A place is space delineated through my relationship to it, and by the marking of its boundaries—its beginning and its ending—and from my exclaiming, “within this place I shall...and when I am finished I shall step out and step away from it.” Within the place chosen or designated for inquiry, I, every part of “I” comes into presence to perform the “what if...?”
Body memory Activation

I turn my head and close my eyes against the overwhelming brilliance of the sun, and in the darkness within, I contemplate each gesture, posture, and breath. Responding to an impulse, I dance across the surface of the labyrinth to dwell for a moment in the outermost ring.

Portal 4

— Memory narrative activated by the turning of my head and a momentary blinding by a sunbeam reflecting off a white line drawn on the grey stone labyrinth.

A glance downwards at my feet positioned in the carefully delineated space of the labyrinth form activates the portal.

A sliver of light reflects off the long white lines that seem to be holding the spaces between them and, like a shard of mirrored glass, pierces my present reality creating a tiny opening through which it enters into memory embedded and long forgotten.

My awareness meets a small fragment held up to the light now streaming in through the newly created pathway…

A ship—with long white railings—pitching and rolling in the ocean’s storm

And I, a small body before the weight of life’s experience, carry no sense of foreboding, only a sense of wonder at the spaces between the white railings through which my child’s body could slip with the next roll of the ship
I use the labyrinth form to focus my mind and breath away from the distractions of a gathering crowd. The preparations for the evening’s grand Labyrinth opening are underway…frantic…noisy…multiple opportunities for mindfulness…for stillness in motion…for the practice of deep listening presence…for a teaching, for a guided moment of wisdom…a communal breath of preparation and settling into the sacred. I sense anticipation from the group mind as they tune into one another…a waiting for something to happen…for a spell to be cast…a blessing given…for permission granted…for acknowledgements to be made…and for authority bestowed.

I walk the perimeter of the Labyrinth while maintaining a connection to inner focus, unmoved by the fact that I am engaging a personal journey in a public space.
The tension continues to build as the seats are brought in for the dignitaries who are to bring with them political good will, affirmation of right doing, and permission to go forth.

I turn my attention to my feet and to the fresh cut grass.

The grass, so green and fresh…strong and healthy…thick …

well cultivated…manicured…contrived…not a forest floor. I step up to a Labyrinth line…thick white paint upon the green of the grass…a borderline…

a marker…like the lines of a tennis court delineating inside/outside…this space is in…cross this line and you’re out…stay within the lines otherwise …Foul!!!

Every step in the right direction a point in your favour; every trespassed toe on a line…a loss…a point against… Stay within the designated spaces! The thick white lines are extra thick and extra white so that they will be seen once the sun dips down, yet here they are yelling at me STOP!!!!!

I acknowledge the lines, the work it must have taken to make them so thick and white, and the definite intention with which they were laid, then I pick up my foot… point…flex…arch…stretch and reach… and step across to another space within similar lines. I do not step on the lines. I do not smudge the border or walk through the white to lay a trail of my own in a loop across or a zigzag…Half of my transgression is in the imaginal reality especially when I did not build the labyrinth. One day soon though, I will create my own labyrinth in the vast blank sandy beaches of White Rock, and I will draw then erase lines, dig holes in the lines and bury treasures and jump where I will but…see …another metaphor…it always comes down to metaphor…buried treasure within the lines. The lines of the labyrinth represent walls, invisible walls. What kind of treasure is buried in walls? Historically speaking it is not the kind of treasure one really wants to uncover; for it is bound to be or bound to some old relative or relative other…but that is what the labyrinth is all about…a treasure hunt…only the treasure is knowledge…knowledge in the form of insight and revelation.
I see lines upon the grass, and the grass upon a lawn, and the lawn upon a campus, and a campus upon unceded territory, and we dance our self-inquiry within layers upon layers of constructed reality. Can we use the Labyrinth here as a portal into the reality of the place and our part in its destruction, construction and re-designation? Can we awaken enough to view the attitude behind its appropriation, and be the change required to facilitate its reclamation? Or is Labyrinth here used as a sweet distraction?

I bump up against my own resistance over and over again. What shall I do with that?

**Beyond all rules of engagement**

I realize that if I want to shift consciousness I could simply step into it. I need no mediation. I can take a journey or I can realize that I am already there. It is my choice. Stepping across lines of containment...stepping on the lines of division...dancing between the spaces marked for habitation...dancing in the forbidden zone, that place that was not meant for and not designated by another to be used for...balancing between spaces and places...playing inter-dimensionally...skirting the vortexial...observing from the balance point way above the fray.

What I like about the labyrinth so far is its potential as a catalytic form...for spinning us into chaos...into realization of paradox...of our complexity and simplicity, our naïveté and hypocrisy. I love its delineation of space that creates a multidimensional stage upon and within which we can disassemble and reassemble the many parts of us. It is a sacred playground; a circle cast within which we can witness and attend to (if we so choose) the many aspects...constructs of self in reality through which dances the animating creative force of the universe.
A Pedagogical Space

The labyrinth is a teaching and learning space—a classroom with invisible walls. It can perform as a pedagogical space, whether one is inside the form, on the edge of the form, or apart from the form, yet in relation to the form, (as in seated outside and away yet still in proximity to the form). I view the labyrinth as a place filled with potential for personal Sādhanā. Similar to the Clay Ritual Sādhanā, where one can design and enact their own ritual play, here within the labyrinth, there is an opportunity to create one’s own curriculum, and, to be one’s own teacher, student, and researcher. The curriculum content will be emergent, dependent upon each individual who enters into engagement with it. As such, it will be a living curriculum, an active currere† made vibrant through self-activation, self-experience, and self-reflection. The curriculum will be directed towards viewing the self as the primary resource, and the labyrinth as the pedagogical forum perfect for provoking and gathering of knowledge about the self, challenging self constructs, examining knowledge systems, investigating difficult thought, memory, and visual narratives, and embodying inquiry—taking an inquiry out of only thinking it and to put it into the doing of it—dancing, acting, playing it through—investigating through the entire bodymind process.

†Currere—
The lived experience of curriculum—“currere, the running of the course—wherein curriculum is experienced, enacted, and reconstructed” (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). Currere privileges the concept of the individual in curriculum studies, wherein we can cultivate our distinctiveness as individuals. And where “we can become individualists committed to actualizing whatever independence we experience and can muster in order to pursue courses of action (including thinking) that we choose as significant” (p.1). It is an “autobiographical method that asks us to slow down, to remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future. Then, slowly, and in one’s own terms, one analyzes one’s experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one’s submergence in the present” (Pinar, 2004, p. 4).
I view the labyrinth as a place filled with potential for personal Sādhanā work. Here there is an opportunity within a self-created curriculum to be one's own teacher, student, and researcher.
I Am All

I step into the labyrinth and begin to dance...

I have brought nothing with me that can be seen from the outside,

nothing to show you other than the movement of my body.

For this journey is a preeminently inner journey,

and what I bring is carried within me

as a vastness of life-experience and memory.

I move by my own impulse.

There is no script and no map,

No outside voice directing this inquiry

It is a deep listening with all senses wide open to revelation.

Intuitive promptings lead my body,
Which in turn awakens new vision into moments forgotten.

I dance to See...

Not to grasp, capture, or retrieve,

but to glimpse anew all that made me.

From this place of dance and delight

I view all that came before and all that I am now.

With the earth and sky, and all the consciousness between as witness

In this moment outside of time,

I am no longer one that is becoming, or one that has been...I am all in the one that is.

—Anderson 2013
I am all

Here, once again, I recognize the paradox of being nothing and everything at the same time. In this case, the act of writing is a performative and embodied inquiry in which I dialogue through the medium of my own subjectivity with myself as I am coming into being. My inquiry is reflected back to me through the words inscribed on the page, and the dialogue continues with self as the written word provokes new openings of inquiry. Sometimes the process of revelation is instantaneous while other times, insight comes after a shift in context.

Regarding my initial statement, if I were to deconstruct the meaning quite literally, then the very thought of carrying an immensity of narrative conjures images of multiple created worlds filling up the space of nothingness within the carrier. I would have to ask: *What, or who, is the carrier apart from being a vehicle for personal narrative? Are the personal narratives and the carrier one and the same? What are the qualities of the vessel that it could contain such immensity? And why would I call the immensity nothing?* Such is the nature of my inquiry as I enter again and again into the ritual space of the labyrinth, a circle of lines and spaces demarcated specifically for inquiry into the paradox of embodiment.

“...each of us is at once both self and other...” (Meyer, 2010, p.87).

*And what of the indiscernible otherness—the concealed yet-to-be-known residing in the unconscious? What is that which is carried yet cannot be seen even if we were to open up the body and look beyond the flesh and bone? What is the imperceptible that resides within and around the body attached through the invisible processes of breath and mind?*

*How might I gain sight into that which inhabits the invisible layers of me?*
“An encounter between self and other becomes an interstice, an invitation, and an improvisation” (Meyer, 2010, p. 95).
Regarding the Self

At this point I am stopped in the realization of the difficulty in articulating and defining the idea of “self”.

Before I can consider the “other”, should I not know what the self is?

I suppose the “self” is the “me” in the ‘me and you’, and the “I” in the ‘I am that’,

but what is the “self” really? What are its’ parts?

My “self” is different from some one else’s “self”, of that I am sure,

because I am me and you are you, and you are the “other” aren’t you?

But if I don’t know what my “self” is or what it is made up of,

is it then also the “other”?

Can I be the grasper and the grasped?

Who is the “Me” except a multiplicity of “I’s” and “mine”? 

Perhaps the “self” is not a real thing at all

but an unfixed ever-changing aggregate of constructs,

a grouping of habitual ways of thinking, feeling, acting, reacting, remembering,

planning, and intending (Loy). It maybe that all these elements working together

create a “sense of self” that is separate from other selves.

Yet a “sense of self” is not the actual “self” is it?

Or is it?

The idea of an indefinable “self” intrigues me.

Who is it that comes into being in response

to whatever calls me into presence—into wide-awakeness—

into “astonishment as if meeting
my self for the very first time

and being amazed” (Fels, 2014)

by the invitation into knowledge,

into the “otherness of self” as the yet to be known spaces and places

through which I filter the experiences of my embodiment.

Self as Other

My Living Breathing Inquiry

My Sādhanā

— Anderson 2014

I experience my praxis as living breathing emergent process of meaning making and being, and as “a performative site of reflection” where “the subject and the materialization of the research are open to perpetual reconfiguration” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 902).
Thin Places

Thin places are border spaces, frontier places, where one can walk between the visible and invisible. They are threshold spaces, liminal places, points of arrival and departure where one can move between the spiritual and temporal realms, between ordinary and non-ordinary realities. They are places of contemplation, confrontation, awakening, and reconciliation. Thin places are spaces where the ego is confronted and the identity examined, places of falling away, of surrendering to clarity and truth, and spaces for the examining of one's soul, one's position and one's perspectives. They are places where the seeker is drawn inwards into the multiple realms of self and beyond into spirit. Thin places are where diminishment, disillusion, illumination, and presence abide side by side; they are places where a paradoxical merging of opposites and a simultaneous acknowledging of the multiple aspects of beingness transform through experience into knowingness.

Musings…

Yet….If the divine permeates and animates the entire world, and thus transcends time and place, why would one seek it in a specific place? Is not the entire world a thin place for one who traverses the worlds of the visible and the invisible? And for that matter, is not the invisible present in the visible—in action, sitting in the perceptions, in the interface between, in the actual and in the virtual, in the known and the unknown, in the conscious and the unconscious? What of the Zen experience of recognizing the Buddha in a blade of grass…? Why would I choose a labyrinth if I only need a blade of grass?
Embodying a non-dualistic intersubjective consciousness opens one to the reality of an animate universe in which we are an interdependent part—experiencing the world as oneness and relatedness simultaneously. Viewing the universe from within, opens up ways of perceiving, living, and being that are freed from binary ways of thinking, and awake to moments of possibility that arrive within an unfolding presence. Here there is a choice of how to be, and with that, a choice of who to become.

—Stop Moment 2014
Walking Sādhanā

“In a way, walking is a model of how we journey through our lives. We could travel along, manifesting repetitive negative thought patterns or major addictions to plotting and planning or we could simply clump along, mindless of the fact that we are affecting countless numbers of beings in myriad dimensions. Alternatively, we could walk through life with vivid curiosity and a spirit of spontaneous generosity, which freely attends to everything and everyone we meet” (Hearn, 2003. P. 61).
On the path of Breath

“Leaning into creation, letting creation lean into me. The ongoing dialogue of bodies leaning: body of tree, body of flesh... all leaning in communion” (Snowber, 2011, p. 125).

Without any specific prayer, and without any intention other than to “see” what is here in this contemplative practice for me, I walk and breathe the forested path. I begin this inquiry in quiet solitude and reverence for the peaceful beauty that permeates this experience. I breathe deep of the exhalations of the green leaves witnessing my presence, the same breath within which we commune and I am received, enveloped, and held gently as I carefully, mindfully place foot after foot upon the living earth. There is a somewhat organic form that I am following—a path already created by those who have walked before me on this very same trail though on a different journey. It is a path moving towards and away from destination and origination; a path with clear boundaries cut through the forest delineating where one should walk, run, or ride. I am aware of a manufactured environment within which I am walking—a beaten path, a path created for a journey, contemplative or unconscious, a path for leisure and health, a path within and through nature for the pleasure of it; yet, a path just the same.

Does this path support my presence, my journey, and my inquiry? Yes...yes. I am here because there is a path, a path with humanity woven into the intention of its design—a path offering peaceful passage through nature and beauty on this quiet summer afternoon.
“There is a whole other path we follow apart from the external realities of our lives. It is a path of soul, but a path of body too. In essence, paying attention to body is paying attention to soul” (Snowber, 2011, p. 125).

I walk in measured steps, bound to the present experience by my breath and by the deep awareness of my heart pumping the oxygen-rich exhalations of the trees into all the parts of my body. In this moment I have become so aware of my self as a living organism that there is no interest in mind meanderings, and no triggering of emotionally charged embodied memory. There is only breath, heartbeat, sunlight, and the sound of the breeze through the greenness of leaves.

“Moment by moment, vibrantly awake, responsive, and spaciously present...” (Hearn, 2003, p.15).

I fully inhabit this moment—participate in the action of Being...of being present—of being an active presence.
“Awareness is much more than the functioning of a single organ of perception, and is even beyond all the organs of perception added together…In true perception, all the senses converge: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. They are one reality and that reality fills the universe” (Loori, 1999, p.28-29).

I am walking between worlds of spirit and flesh…and in this middle space…this liminal place…I have a clear viewing of the many layers and multiple worlds of my own creation. Here, in the present, is a profoundly creative and generative space within which insight, revelation, and inspiration exist. By my attending directly to presence I have moved beyond the layers of my conditioning to reach a ground of being shared with all the other life forms in this environment.
“Imagination takes us forward into the realm of the purely possible” (Casey, 1993, pp. xvi-xvii).

“My practice of walking is both spiritual and physical... a place for me to be shaped, formed, and recreated in the beauty that meets me on the path” (Snowber, 2011, p. 175).
I am not a silent visitor here. My feet, although carefully placed, break twigs, crunch leaves, clatter stones, and squelch mud. Each step upon the wooden boardwalk resounds down the support posts into the damp earth beneath. Each step upon the earth vibrates outwardly to the surrounding foliage from where I can hear the sounds of insects buzzing, whirring, chirping, and sawing, and birds calling out telling of their presence. I hear them. I am certain that they hear me—my weighted breath and thumping heart …the movement of my flowing garments and shawl…my animal presence calling out “I am here!” It is very apparent that I am not “walking through an inert environment. The environment is made up of living beings who are acutely and responsively aware of [me] and demonstrating a myriad of reactions to [my] presence” (Heam, 2003, p. 35). The longer I walk, the deeper my meditation.
I have entered in. I am now part of the environment, integral to the present moment and experience, which is not mine alone. “Everything I touch is touching me. Everything I taste is tasting me” (p.35). Fully sensorial, I transcend the experience of separateness and recognize myself as part of a greater community. I am immersed in Interbeing.
I am aware that I am, as Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh (2006) says, “practicing the art of stopping” (5). Through this walking meditation I have effectively stopped my mind from being carried away by either memories of the past, or worries about the future. I have entered into the present moment and I am nourished and inspired by the fullness of the experience.

“Being conscious goes beyond being awake and attentive: it requires an inner sense of self in the act of knowing” (Damasio, 2000, p. 250).

I move in and out of direct perception and reflection—back and forth—yet as it is happening it feels concurrent…both states existing at the same time. I am in a space of continual inquiry—watching…waiting…wondering: what is happening now…? ….and now…? I recall the experiences of Authentic Movement where “the ground of discipline is the relationship between the moving self and the witnessing self [and] the heart of the practice is about the longing, as well as the fear, to see ourselves clearly” (Adler, 1999, p. 194). I breathe…..steady and strong……focused and calm…I am not afraid to see myself clearly. Once again, I am curious as to the nature of the witness???
“As we reacquaint ourselves with our breathing bodies, then the perceived world itself begins to shift and transform. When we begin to consciously frequent the wordless dimension of our sensory participations, certain phenomena that have habitually commanded our focus begin to lose their distinctive fascination and to slip toward the background, while hitherto unnoticed or overlooked presences begin to stand forth from the periphery and to engage our awareness” (Abrams, 1996, p. 63).

The elements of nature have a way of lulling while simultaneously sharpening my senses. All extraneous mind stuff falls away the longer I am in the forested space. In contemplation of the space, my breath, and my place within the space, I am merging with nature, yet I am still watching—observing the merging, as if the line between human consciousness and conscious otherness is its own thin place that I move between and through by softening the perimeters of my identified self. Yes I am human, but I am also animal, spirit, wind and water. I am breath. I am of the same primordial matter as all the objects of the universe. I am trillions of cells walking and talking and thinking itself a person (Stager, 2014). This may be the closest I come to dissolving into a primal oneness of spirit and flesh. However, I am still aware of my physical form and of my busy mind waiting to be resurrected once the expansive meditative state retracts upon returning to ordinary reality.

Walking energizes my breath, which in turn fills my body with nature's richness. The walking pulls me into a trance-like state wherein I contemplate my self as presence, as embodied, as consciousness, as human, as organism, as animal, as nature, as breath, water, and leaf. There is no thought to spare on memory or dream, although I know I am that too. Perhaps, if I were more skilled, more practiced in this art of contemplative walking and being-in-presence I might have a palette of mind that I can call upon and pull from to create vignettes, dramas, creative visualizations that relive or realign, or resolve and dissolve, psychically, energetically, spiritually with all my heart, breath, blood and soul attached.
A Final Offering

“Spirituality in education is about transformation. Not just hoping for transformation, or wishing for transformation, or believing in transformation, or even talking about it, but actual transformation” (Glazer, 2004, p. 248).

In my experience, the Artistic Sādhanā journey is one of direct engagement with perception. It requires an awakeness and an attention to whatever comes to light within the practice. In this way, the Artistic Sādhanā journey is unique to each individual. In my experience as a Sādhanā artist, engaging the reflective and reflexive self-in-relation through the creation process, effectively serves to re-inspire artistic vision and re-invigorate the practice of art making.

Artistic Sādhanā, as I imagine and have experienced, offers new possibilities for spirituality in education, and in particular, arts education and creation. Within its application is a hospitable space that invites students to investigate their own beliefs and perspectives through a first person performative, embodied, and experiential inquiry. Artistic Sādhanā consciously pursues self-understanding, self-creation, awakening, and empowerment through the art creation process. Through this thesis I have come to realize that bringing the spirit back into the art-making process is an honouring of self, materials, and the environment from where the self and materials were sourced. It is through the act of honouring materials, place, and process where my artist-self, my vision, and my work have become imbued with the sacred and with spirit. And it is through spirit, essentially breath and aliveness, where I have come to realize and deeply appreciate my interconnection with
the otherness of being—with other beings, and with being other.

Throughout my thesis inquiry, my intention has been to follow spirit as it resonates through multiple disciplines—to uncover and realize the knowledge within each space of resonance, and, once realized, build a bridge from an inner contemplative self-ruminating reality, outwards and into the community and back again through artful process. Sādhanā, especially a morning sound Sādhanā, can be a solitary pursuit of deep listening and witnessing the self coming into realization of aliveness; however, it need not necessarily remain as purely subjective and solitary.

Once established, an individual Sādhanā could be pursued whilst in relation within a community of other Sādhakas. Each individual could have their ongoing Artistic Sādhanā supported within a group environment or community of individuals who are also exploring the self through an individual Artistic Sādhanā. In my vision of Artistic Sādhanā within arts education, the collective could become a community space for dialogue and sharing of individual Sādhanā experiences. From out of the meetings and mingling of Sādhakas could come new understandings, inspirations, directions, and creative collaborations. Although my present thesis has focused primarily upon my own Artistic Sādhanā, my intention for the future is to pursue the vision of a community of Sādhakas, and conduct further research into the collective Sādhanā experience.

I envision Artistic Sādhanā as a path of participatory self-evolution—a way of being in inquiry that will inspire transformation within student and teacher, pedagogies and curriculums; and, by extension, the worlds from where they were sourced and to where they will return.
Bibliography


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Fromm, E. (1976). *To have or to be?* New York: Continuum.


Appendix A.

Photo Credits

Photographs by Mandy Williams~ Pages: 19, 30, 62, 66

Photographs by Mikel Johnson~ Page: 44

Photographs by Patrick Pennefather ~ Pages: 71,72, 73, 74,75, 76, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 99,104,121, 123, 134, 138, 142, 145,150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 157.

Self Portraits ~ Pages: 108, 148
Appendix B.

Video Documentation

Videographer/ Photographer/ Witness/ Artist~ Patrick Pennefather
Transdisciplinary Ritual Artist~ Sheena (Sheinagh) Anderson
Vocal improvisations~ Sheena (Sheinagh) Anderson
Post Production and Soundscape ~Patrick Pennefather and Sheena (Sheinagh Anderson

Files included:
Anderson_Emergence_May4th2015.mp4
Anderson_Embrace_May4th2015.mp4
Anderson_Prayer_May4th2015.mp4
Anderson_WalkingMeditation_May4th2015.mp4

Clay Creek Rituals as Artistic Sādhanā

Inspired by a dream vision, the clay ritual series is an extended performative inquiry through embodied art processes. Themes of re embodiment, reclamation, recognition, and reconciliation are ritually explored. The body is integral to the ritual, and in this case becomes the threshold through which the artist enters into the yet to be known. The performance becomes ritual through its intention to quest, and ritual becomes performance through its witnessing.

One of the most important realizations though the process of creation and gathering of data from the Clay Creek Rituals has been the recognition of the artist in process, and that this process of emergence into awareness and understanding is continual and therefore inclusive, not only of the original conception and subsequent creation of an idea, but also of the waiting, unfolding, dreaming and reflecting throughout and thereafter.

The resulting photo/video pieces have been brought into being through the medium of improvised dance and voice performance, video and photography, sound and digital post-production technology, and poetic and autobiographical narrative inquiry. These works represent a partial viewing of all that is involved with/in a multi-disciplinary exploration of embodiment.

The nature of the inquiry: dream inception, embodiment through improvised dance ritual witnessed and recorded by video and still camera, and re witnessed by the artist in post-production studio creation and editing, including the reflective and contemplative practices used to access liminal consciousness for the purpose of writing and sourcing
the inner self, is purposefully multidisciplinary in order to access the various and multiple thematic threads running through the work from beginning to end, both subtle and profound. It is this multi-dimensionality and complex thematic layering that continues the inquiry process by extending the concept of witness. Multi media exploration of production, form, and presentation potentially opens up the viewing field to a larger witnessing body.

**Emergence**

This ephemeral ritual performance took place on the outer edge of a water-filled tunnel under a bridge and out of sight of the world above. A new life is danced into being. A body emerges out of water and darkness into light...into reclamation and rebirth...of self unto self...a time of renewal and recognition of the beauty, strength, and fragility of mortal flesh...

**Embrace**

This is a ritual dance performance caught on camera and made into a photo/video creation. It is a momentary happening in-between two actual performances of a different nature and intent. The mud had been applied by the artist in a ritualistic performance inquiry of the metaphor "The Potter and the Clay", however, while waiting for the cameras to be reset for the next performance piece, the heat of the sun dried the clay into deep cracks and accentuated wrinkles visually transforming the dancer into an aged being. Fascinated by the weight and profundity of the accelerated physical aging, the artist contemplates the mortality of the body against the backdrop of the natural world while moving through grief, loss, gratitude, and surrender. This work is a contemplation of corporeal existence—of “the body [as] an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults—to scars and scorns of others, to disease, decay, and death” (Abram, 2010 p. 6). Yet the contemplative focus of the work turns towards gratitude and trust, releasing fear to embrace spirit and the natural turning of life.

**Prayer**

*Prayer* is a ritualized performance of stillness. It is an expression of deep reverence for life, and a performance of recognition of the body as being “the primary instrument of all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos” (Abram, 2010, p. 8). It is an honouring of simultaneous otherness and oneness with the natural world, and an acknowledgement of the spirit dancing through all form.

**Walking Meditation Sādhanā**

A walking meditation using the rhythm of heartbeat and steady stride to enter into full bodymind presencing—merging with the spirit of the place—crossing back and forth between the visible and invisible realms through the portal of conscious breath. This video offers a visual metaphor in an attempt to describe the experience of communing with spirit whilst fully embodied.