



**The Cat Who Loved Flowers (And So, He Ate Them): *Music as Extension of
Meditation***

Creative Research by NFChase

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The Cat Who Loved Flowers is an ongoing Creative Research project that explores the integration of Eastern meditative practices into Western Music. This paper is the first in a series of reflexive studies that mine Eastern thought in search of new practices in Western Music Composition and Western Music Performance.

ABSTRACT

Extension No.1

Infinite Interiors: Western Music, Eastern Silence

This paper examines the notion of silence as "rest" in Western Music and juxtaposes it with Vedic concepts of silence as active space. Western Music objectifies silence as a featureless, negative space. In music, 20th Century experimental composer John Cage set the standing paradigm that "silence" is a durational plane upon which "sound" takes precedence. His view, however, fails to address the *nature* of silence. This writing suggests conditioned responses to silence common in Western Culture, and reevaluates those responses through the Vedic precept of silence as transformative energy. It concludes offering functional perspectives of silence as dynamic and inter-positively charged with sound, and suggests conscientiously engaging silence for a richer continuum of musical possibilities in Music Composition and Performance.

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Infinite Interiors: Western Music, Eastern Silence

"...can it be known by concentrating on the ascending psychic centres or the unstruck sound which emanates without any vibration?"
(Anonymous, unknown, 3).

"...in such universal pause one's small self vanishes..."
(Reps, 1957, 162).

—*Vijñanabhairava Tantra*

0 *Introduction: A Perspective on Creative Research*

Before I begin, I should let you, the reader, know who I am, and what it is exactly that I do. I am a Creative Researcher in the medium of Music Composition and Performance. I learned the concept of Creative Research in my doctoral residency, and as I understand it, it is a term coined by research venues offering practice-based PhDs in the arts. Whatever the source, the term puts my work as an "Experimental Composer"—that is a composer, who writes music using untried, or (more commonly) *non-standard* ideas and techniques—into an exciting light. The term suggests that, through creative experimentation, new standards, new thoughts, and new forms will emerge on the (in my opinion, glacially) evolving cultural plane. Unlike theoretical research or laboratory experimentation however, Creative Research is produced on the public forum, leaving you, the audience, the viewer, the listener—the *participant*—to be the judge of its success, or failure.

You should also know that, Experimentalists such as myself are necessarily accountable for all of the classical training that our Traditionalist counterparts undergo. It's the repetitive nature of that classical training, re-enacting what has gone before, often over and over again for hundreds of years, that spawns Experimentalists—Experimental Creative Practitioners—such as myself. You see, every era demands new

vocabulary as civilization evolves, particularly in these times of technological advance, and it is truly the responsibility of the Artist to reveal the limitations of past "vocabulary," and to expand that in a way that is meaningful to and reflective of contemporary civilization. This was the work that Beethoven and Wagner accomplished in their time, Schoenberg after and John Cage after him. In the visual arts, Brunelleschi, da Vinci, Rembrandt, and let's leap ahead to Pollock, Rothko and then Warhol—you get the picture. It is how every era leaves its mark on history, but it makes the view of the Artist, specifically the perspective of Experimentalists, acutely aware of where we came from and bizarrely and uncomfortably self-conscious of "where we are" in the history of civilization. The trick of an Experimental Creative Practitioner's relationship to history is not to second-guess evolution—but to till the cultural soil, so-to-speak, in such a way that evolution can take place—can seed and root. This is the tone of my Creative Research.

1 *Why Silence? A Personal Excavation*

So, let me tell you a true story.

About 15 years ago, in the Roy O. Disney Recital Hall at the California Institute of the Arts, the faculty ensemble in the School of Music premiered the very first piece of classical concert music I ever wrote. It was three movements of thoughtfully crafted material that culminated in one final musical sigh. That sigh was introduced by an ever so carefully placed eighth rest—one half of a beat of silence. I imagined that half beat of sonic space as the precipice where my musical thought would coalesce in the listener's ear, poised for summary in the final fading tones that followed it. I held my breath counting beats leading up to it—*one — two — three—*

COUGH!

My roommate, two seats down, choked uncomfortably in the dawning quiet—and that was that.

Looking back, I realize how much thought I put into that short Silence, and since then, I've thought even more about Silence. As a composer whose job is to organize sounds into meaningful, musical coherence, I want to know about the openness of spaces, about the emptiness of time perceived as Silence. It seems to me that, especially in music, we don't talk enough about Silence. What does Silence mean? What is the value of Silence? Where does Silence go? How do I write Silence on a page of music? How will I play Silence? Does one Silence have a quality different from another Silence? Is Silence stillness— or does it have energy?

Why Silence?

1.2 *What is Silence?*

In order to answer the question "why," I think we first have to ask: *What is Silence?* We think of silence as a sonic space, a temporal interval devoid of sound. But is it really?

For Western Music, Silence is generally understood as a by-product of making audible sounds. It is the necessary gap between notes that secures the importance of the notes it precedes and follows.

In rhythmic terms, that is, in visual representation, these Silences appear as a notational glyph on the page of the musical score. A rest means "don't make a sound," and implies Silence. "Rest" on the temporal grid holds a place in beat groupings important to the architecture of Western Music, but the content of it remains secondary to beats that carry sonic information—the so-called "sounded materials." Swiss composer Jürg Frey says that Silence is made, constructed, an architectural extension of the sound that precedes it and bears the telling traces of that sound (Frey 1998).¹ By this definition, Silence might be thought of as sonic space that is significantly "less dense" than sound. But is a piece of physical architecture "less dense" than the structure it upholds?

And while musical rest evokes physical stillness—the stillness of strings, of breath, of fingers—a stillness of action, is not necessarily an absence of sound—or of meaning.

Marshall McLuhan, 20th Century critic of print and media, tells us that our printed phonetic alphabet has severed the relationship between our eyes and our ears. He says phonetically and pictographically oriented cultures think differently about empty space (McLuhan, 1962, 27). Phonetic print emphasizes and abstracts words, isolating them from their conceptual root or meaning. Western culture, by and large, has subsequently become less sensitive in the auditory realm, and less prone to expressing oral subtleties. Most contemporary Germanic and Romance languages—which are expressed in writing phonetically—rely on word meaning combined with syntax, whereas, Eastern languages that are pictographically represented, for instance Chinese, depend on oral subtleties for precise meaning as did ancient Greek and Classical Arabic.

Oddly, the idea of writing down music, securing it in a printed format, is a notion specific to Western European culture. By default, this visual language, with its countable number of neumes and notations, limits our ideas of what music can be, and gives no clues about producing sound (i.e. mechanically), or where sound goes or should go once expressed. This is ironic given that our Latin alphabet tells us how to actually speak a word, how to mechanically pronounce it, as long as we understand the meaning of phonetic symbols, but gives no indication of what the expressed sound might mean. So when we evaluate a written "rest" in music we are left to ponder, which of these "rests" are Silence, and which are extensions of the notes that precede them? Which are purely mechanical (offering enough time for the internal mechanism of the instrument to function properly) and which service the constructive architecture of the musical sounds?

By contrast, we rarely, even perhaps never ask, "How long does Silence take to reach the listener's ear? What qualities does a given Silence have, or *can* it have? What qualities can we, as composers *give* individual Silences to make them meaningful? To make them *musical*?"

1.2.1 Fields of Silence—or Fields of Sound?

Traditionally, Western music has used silence to prop up sonic material—the pitches (notes), phrases, and in more recent history, as we'll see, the "sounds" that precede or follow silence.

Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg definitively broke from tonality in the early part of the last century by asserting serialist methods—intellectually contrived "algorithmic" systems that generate musical material—for composing music that has become the foundation of Conservatory and University discourse on music composition

since. Yet, in spite of his intellectual preclusion, Schoenberg approaches Silence in a utilitarian way, referencing 18th and 19th Century Classical and Romantic notions:

"*Fluency* depends greatly on the right connective in both literature and music, notwithstanding the fact that simple juxtaposition often functions satisfactorily. It is not necessary to think of the 'general rests' which Bruckner so often uses as an opening for a new idea. But the highly dramatic general pause of Beethoven is of a different kind. While in the first case the part before the pause serves principally to diminish the obligations in which it has engaged, Beethoven's general pause furnishes time and space to take a deep breath before, like an explosion, a profound truth bursts forth. It is a moment of tension, enforcing what arrives as its consequence.

"Tonality and rhythm provide for *coherence* in music..."
(Schoenberg, 1948, 287).

Schoenberg's all-too-brief consideration of pause—which he implies is real Silence, and not its notational facsimile—is confusing in the way he attributes it with an energetic quality—"a moment of tension"—yet likewise sees it as a purely functional place holder, in his terms a "connective," not dissimilar to a grammatical conjunction.

Schoenberg clearly sees there are different silent intervals that bear unique qualities and function depending on context: if, and, or, but. Yet in spite of his own revelation, enforces the age-old idea that "coherence," real meaning, comes from the particular ordered arrangement of sounded notes and their harmonic relationship to each other.

Less than half a decade later, Schoenberg's student, John Cage had a radically different idea about Silence and in fact named his well-known collection of lectures *Silence*. After enclosing himself in an anechoic chamber, a soundproof cell of sorts, where he experienced, not Silence but the unintended amplification of autonomic nervous functions—his own body at work, his breathing, his pulse in his ears—Cage wrote, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound" (1954, 191).

Cage, however, was not at all interested in the idea of Silence as the material of a musical composition itself, but in the ambient, or accidental sounds that would occur within the prescribed musical "rests." Cage responded to Schoenberg's serialist technique by creating a looser system for composition by which musical structure "could be expressed with any sounds, including noises..." (Cage, 1990) and eventually derived his well-known piece of music, 4'33", or "The Silent Piece" as he called it (Cage 1990), from that paradigm. Cage's 4'33" was made by Chance Procedure—his method of tossing coins to determine structures and durations for the music—comprised of three movements of musical rest. Paradoxically, Cage did not imagine the piece as "silent" but as the platform for ambient noise in the recital hall—the minutiae that hammer at the borders of Silence²—a reflection of his experience in the anechoic chamber.

Cage's idea of Silence was that it offered a space for sounds [*sic*] to live unbridled. Cage describes his musical Silence as "...an empty glass into which at any moment anything may be poured." (1959, 110). Cage freely invoked the word "silence" to set the stage for his compositions, and he stated that his works come from, and return to Silence, referencing Zen Buddhist ideas. While sound held the value, interest, and focus of Cage's music, his Silence was ultimately featureless: "...a sound has four characteristics: frequency, amplitude, timbre, and duration. Silence (ambient noise) has only duration" (Cage, 1958, 80).

In spite of his Buddhist-borrowed frame, Cage's "sounds," like other experimental music composers after him, dot silent terrains, negating silence like this black typeface negates the white of the blank page. But the world around us, particularly the sound-world, is not an environment of extremes and totalities, of purely "this" and of purely "that," nor of such distinct borders that print and ink suggest. The

world is comprised of relativities and gradations, and on that scale we have to evaluate an idea of Silence from a position more complex than simply "sound or not-sound."

What we have come to in the present day is a paradoxical understanding of Silence in Western Music: architecturally we can't do without it—even in John Cage's "formless" or happenstance structures—yet we seem reluctant to give Silence a sonic qualification on par with sound. It is the Dark Mass, if you will, of music.

2 *Finite Interiors: Five Cultural Frames for Silence*

"One should fix his sight (on the empty space) inside the pot, leaving aside the enclosing structure. Thus...the mind becomes completely absorbed (in the void)"
(Anonymous, unknown, 27).

—*Vijñanabhairava Tantra*

What makes us compulsive about filling empty spaces? We load space with goods, with words, with sounds, with "objects or activities" (McLuhan, 1962, 107). McLuhan tells us that European, Medieval civilization valued a room for its space, not the things in it. Even a bare room was considered a completed space (McLuhan, 1962, 107).

But this is no longer true. Since the 16th Century spaces became filled not only with useful furniture—tables, chairs, and beds—but also with cabinets and closets, constructed spaces designed as repositories for more things. "Collections" became popular and were understood as indicators of opulence and even intelligence. Objects in repetition, multiples of the same "thing" in variation were viewed as specimens to be sorted and looked at—and used to line empty spaces as a means of telling onlookers that the owner has "room to spare." Since then, space has become brimming over with its own absence. Ownership of space is only meaningful if there is some "thing" to put in it.³

In the United States, when our forefathers pushed Westward in pursuit of open spaces, it wasn't a quest for space itself, but a compulsion to fill it, exhaustively, with their own presence by taming and domesticating it. Interiors are finite and can be filled with countable goods, evidence of prosperity and status. While yards and gardens are connected to, but separate from interiors, these exteriors are controlled, fenced, designed and planned to indicate the abundance of their adjacent interiors—or shield interiors from inward and outward gaze. This is the role of the Western suburban yard and garden.

Our spaces of living, being, and of interacting are rarely spaces in confluence, interiors that extend beyond our habitual structures, or exteriors that are inherent in our interior dwellings, such as one might find in the East—for instance, interior courtyard gardens that offer a private and intimate connection to nature within the protection of the structural abode, and is architecturally situated so that a person within the dwelling must cross through it to access other areas of function and living.

In the West it's not difficult to see where Colonialism seems to have had a profound and lasting influence on our view of spaces. The Colonial paradigm situates "this" and "that" in permanent opposition to one another: "I," the Colonist, am oriented in opposition to that which is to be colonized—the "other"—and obligated to tame and domesticate it to conform to my terms of engagement with the world: commodity, ownership, rulership.

I conjecture that it's a contemporary, post-Colonial view of the world—the specific attitude of "myself" and "other"—that has stabilized in Western culture today in a way that suggests polarized, positive and negative values toward the perceptible presence or absence of substance. Qualifying the emphasis of value on quantified substance makes Nothing undesirable: We want more, but who wants more of

Nothing? These values extend to activity—light versus dark, motion versus stillness, sound versus Silence—and positions a Western thinker in a world of compartments, interiors *segregated* from exteriors.

The paradigm of segregated spaces is problematic when applied to creative practices, notably in temporal disciplines, dance, theater, and music, where movement and stillness, sound or silence, evaluated as "positive" or "negative" generates an artificially static notion of events that happen on a temporal scale.

To get our bearings on Western music's stance on Silence, I'd like to ponder some common, Western responses to Silence and weave a possible context for our cultural system of evaluation.

2.1 *Silence Has No Value*

Socially, economically, we regard the absence of sound as a durational abyss without feature, characteristic, or quality. We rarely seek out silence for itself, but usually in relief of its opposite—noise. While we seek silence as an antidote to noise, we imbue Silence with the same value as noise. Silence is abundant, yet disposable, in the same way that noise can be excessive and undesirable.

More significantly, when we generate "meaning" on the sonic shelf, it is always in the form of sound—something we can quantify and more or less easily describe with words. For instance, you are reading this paper. I am addressing you with my words and filling the "void" of sonic stillness with my thoughts (albeit internally) on this page. Would it be more effective to communicate my idea by offering a blank page—an intellectual rest, a visual tundra—immersing you in Silence so that each reader could

assign individual, subjective meaning to my presentation?

2.2 *Silence is Paradoxical*

Silence generates personal space within which one engages one's self. When we are silent, we entertain our thoughts and ideas. In this way, silences are private, and sometimes intimate.

Silence in a musical context, particularly in a concert hall, opens this space to become shared space—community space. While Silence is shared in the physical location where "no-thing" occurs, individual perception of "Silence" is subjective. Silence creates and maintains a space that is simultaneously internal and external. It is an interior that extends spontaneously exterior, beyond the comfort of habitual and public sound.

2.3 *Silence is the Absence of Information*

Silence in the form of a pause, a hesitation, often means there is a block in the flow of information. Our social connection devices, phones, bank machines, and so on all give us some kind of feedback, typically sonic, to tell us, "*We are making a connection.*"

In conversation, if we are not receiving a signal, we are sending one:

"Mm hm,"

"Yes?"

"I see"

"Uh huh"

send a signal that says "*We are making a connection.*"

A break in feedback indicates a break in the system.

Are you shocked?

Overwhelmed with joy?

Heartbroken?

What does your silence mean?

What is the signal?

What will happen next?

I don't read you!

A break in the social feedback signal is a void. It invokes [sic] uncertainty and it says that we have reached the boundaries of our understanding, or the boundaries of our vocabulary, and no-thing, idea, or thought can be expressed. There is a block in the flow of information. We have reached the boundary of our habitual abode—the fence or gate at the edge of the garden that separates living from the outer wild.

2.4 *Silence is a Social Cue*

Silence in conversation demands response. Sound Artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle suggests that responding to Silence is a social obligation (LaBelle, 2001, 63). But what is the correct response? What does Silence cue?

In the West, we hear Silence in social contexts as awkward, unwelcome—uncertain—and we reach to fill the void.

We will even cough to cover an unexpected silent space.

2.5 *Silence Leaves No Evidence*

You have the *right*

to remain silent.

In a culture that imbues ownership with status, objectifying memorable sonic experiences makes it possible for us to retain some evidence of sound's ephemeral offerings. Sonic experiences can earmark memories and give mutual, and communal value to a single point in time. Pop music coins terms such as "ear worm" and "hook" to describe musical variations that stay in our memory. Recorded music exploits—and as a commodity, *banks* on—variations of “...*frequency, amplitude, timbre, and duration*” (Cage, 1958, 80). Silence leaves us without a souvenir for mutual experience. We cannot—or perhaps, have *not yet*—assigned a monetary value to durations of Silence.

But Silences can't be commodified to sell units in bits and bytes, or even durations, as is the current practice in the sale of replicated music (sound).

What's more, we cannot consistently qualify Silence. With no scale for valuation, we cannot "grade" Silence, since it is neither good nor bad, correct nor incorrect.

Silences remain always subjective.

Music considers Silence "effective" or "ineffective" in relationship to sounded material, and objectively, we have determined that Silence is either long or it is short, longer or shorter. "Silence...has

only duration"

(Cage, 1958, 80).

Is it true that Silence has no value of itself, and is only a means of measuring the value of what surrounds it?

3 *Vedic Science, Divine Silence*

"...our emphatic awareness of the exact modes of many cultures is itself a liberation from them as prisons" (McLuhan, 1962, 76).

It seems apparent that the Western devaluation of Silence since John Cage stems from a de facto objectification of sound that presumes both sound and Silence are static. The difficulty of Western Music's objectification of Silence, and likewise sound, is that, while sound achieves its work in the physical, spatial medium, its presence is ephemeral. But Silence, like sound, is temporally engaged, and so, as we have seen, substance-oriented analysis of either (and both) quickly grow confused and fail.

There is a solution. As a committed practitioner of Yoga—being a Yogin, as it's called—I've been exposed to the cosmology of the Vedas,⁴ the earliest philosophical, spiritual and scientific texts from the Indus region that are the basis for both Hinduism and Buddhism after it.

The Vedas were passed down in Sanskrit through an outrageously precise oral tradition for an unknown number of generations before being codified in the text that we study today. Sanskrit is a remarkable language, one of the oldest, if not the oldest, still-used language in the world. Uniquely among all languages, Sanskrit has not shifted in meaning—the precise meanings of words used more than 5000 years ago are identical to their meaning today, making Sanskrit as the vehicle for consistently preserving knowledge and ideas ideal.

The Vedic texts outline an intricately balanced model of the universe as a place of energy in ongoing flux. What's more, the idea of Silence itself is directly addressed in Vedic cosmology, and is conceptually integrated with its cognate sound in a way that is truer to the actual, physical nature of both.

3.1 *Energy and Matter: Silence is S-Om-thing*

Sri Paramahansah Yogananda, well-known in the first half of the 20th Century for bringing awareness of Yoga to the United States said, "Under Breath falls: presence. Under Silence falls: OM" (Yogananda, 1932, 238).

But how does he get from there

to here?

Vedic understanding of the cosmos is of a Universe in vibration—a vibrational wave that is identified as a sound wave, the cosmic utterance that we call *Om*. This paradigm provides us with the basic model for all creation via the omnipresent *pranavaḥ* (sacred utterance) *Om*. Vedic scholar Harish Johari illuminates the paradigm of *Om* as an energetic source:

"[In the Vedic tradition,] matter is treated as the vehicle of energy, and energy is considered to be consciousness (not like the energy of modern scientists, which is devoid of consciousness). Before manifestation there is only supreme consciousness without attributes...and the power of consciousness...When [energy and consciousness] come together, there is the thrill of union (*nada*), and from this the *maha bindu* is born. *Nada* is pure cosmic sound and *maha bindu* is the supreme truth that is the seed of all manifest phenomena. According to the tantric scripture *Sharada Tilak*, manifestation begins with the **bursting of the bindu**. First there was unmanifest sound...Through the action of volition (*kriya*), the unmanifest sound becomes the source of the manifest..." (Johari, 2000, 23).⁵

This "bursting of the *bindu*" as Johari puts it, is nothing less than the cosmic *Om* from which the Vedic Universe emerged. It is the sonic energy that binds and sustains all energy for all time, and is analogous to contemporary Quantum Physics' Big Bang, though it precedes that Western model by at least five millennia.

Om is a *quantifiable* energy—or energy *wave*—with knowable attributes, a sonic expression from which the Universe emanates, and from which all other forms of energy *and matter* arise (Frawley, 2000, 107). Everything in the Universe is an energetic variation, or expression if you will, of the *Om* vibration. The notion paints the Universe that we perceive as an intricate, however *singular* entity, of which we are each a vibrational variant (Frawley, 2010, 45). *Om* is the root of Vedic cosmology—the Gods themselves invoke *Om* and indeed were summoned into existence by it (Satchidananda, 1990, 42). As the generating seed of all cosmic energy—and when I say cosmic here, I mean it in the Western, scientific sense—*Om* bears a striking resemblance to ideas appearing in contemporary Quantum Physics and String Theory.

Because the Vedic universe is sonic in nature, not merely alive with, but alive *by* sonic vibration, utterance, that is speech, is a focus of Vedic sacred pursuit.

The word *yoga* is Sanskrit for "practice" and is related to the English word "yoke" as in "harness" or "tie." *Mantra Yoga* is the branch of *yoga*, or Vedic practice, devoted to sound. A *mantra* is a verbally expressed Sanskrit aphorism meant to be repeated ritually in order to generate vibratory sympathy between the human nervous system and the corresponding cosmic vibration. In the way *mantra* means to link human (self-) consciousness with cosmic consciousness, *mantra yoga* is a core practice of *Vedism*.

Mantras are comprised primal sounds, similar to Western linguistic phonemes, and easily recognized in any language: a, ā, ō, ra, ma, da, sa, kh, ch, g, gh, ś (sh), ḥ (ha) and so on. Many of these single-syllable sounds operate individually or in tandem with a second phoneme to create a seed, or *bija mantra*, a mono-syllabic *mantra* from which more complex *mantras* are composed. The most significant *bija mantra* is, of course, *Om*.

20th Century Yogi, spiritual teacher, Sri Swami Satchidananda tells us, "...*Om* is the origin, or seed, from which all other sounds and words come. In other words, *Om* is dormant in all other words." (1990, 44). And so, *Om* is understood to be the total combined manifestation of all possible spoken syllables.

My explanation of *mantra* here is necessarily brief and doesn't give the science its due credit. The philosophy of *mantra* is deeply tied to the cosmic expression of matter and shouldn't be misunderstood as a variation of "sacred chanting" for personal affirmation, or notions of prayer. *Mantra* is the vibratory means by which energy is transformed to matter and vice versa, as we will see.

3.2 *Silence Is Divine*

The most often cited, and certainly most concise written source on *Om* is the *Maṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*,⁶ an early, however short writing entirely devoted to the explanation of *Om*, its meaning and significance as a vibratory energy.

The *Maṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* describes *Om* as comprised of four syllables—A, U, M, accounting for a variance in Latin transliteration as *A-U-M*. These first three syllables embody states of spiritual awareness, and alternately, past, present and future. The fourth syllable, however, is described in the *Maṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* as

"...perceiving neither what is inside nor what is outside, nor even both together; not as a mass of perception, neither as perceiving nor as not perceiving; as unseen; as beyond the reach of ordinary transaction; as ungraspable; as one whose essence is the perception of itself alone; as the cessation of the visible world; as tranquil; as auspicious; as without a sound..."

The verse continues to describe this mysterious fourth syllable as "...without constituent phonemes...auspicious and unique" (Olivelle 1996, 289).

This fourth, silent syllable is called *anahata* or in an expanded sense the *anahata nad*—or "Unstruck Sound" (Frawley, 2010, 157-158). *Anahata* is also the name for the fourth primary Chakra⁷ or energy center located in the center of the breast near the heart. In both instances, the word *anahata*, particularly in its context as *anahata nad*, has a temporal connotation relating specifically to the future tense,⁸ and meaning more or less "imminent," or "yet to come."⁹

Sri Swami Satchidananda tells us a little more about *anahata*:

"After the verbal sound ends there is still a vibration. That is the unspoken, or anagata [anahata], sound which is always in you, even before saying the A and after finishing the M [of AUM]. This is always a sound vibration..."

"[As] We can't see any motion in a stone, but that does not mean it is motionless. We need not go to the scriptures [for proof]; the scientists themselves have proven that" (Satchidananda, 1990, 44-45).

Meanwhile Frawley, describes *anahata* as *the Unstruck Sound* (2010, 157-158), and expands the understanding of *anahata* as "...[containing] the highest stage of speech, the supreme silence..." (2000, 107).

And so, in the Vedic Universe, Silence is Divine. Frawley tells us that from the Divine Silence there is a pure activity that he calls life, and from which life emanates. In other words, the Divine Silence of *anahata* is a living—rather, an *alive*—space that vibrates with the Cosmic Consciousness.

3.3 *A Universe of Confluence*

It's important to understand that *anahata* is part and parcel of sound, particularly of the *pranavaḥ Om*. Within Hindu cosmology, a non-divided state of being and not-being is at the core understanding the universe. How is this possible?

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, Book 2, Sutra 23, Satchidananda explains that,

"...[cosmic union] means perfect union or junction. And here it doesn't mean the union of the individual self with the higher self, but the union of the...Self and nature. *When they are completely apart, they don't express themselves. Their connection, however, lets us know them both*" [emphasis mine]

and emphasizes the necessity of this interdependent union saying, "[Union of Self and Nature] isn't just [physical] bondage as many people think. It is necessary" (1990, 114).

The duality that is inherent in all nature is a unified form: "Neti, Neti—not this, not that," which is to say, the functional Whole is comprised of its opposites.

But the union of opposites in the Vedic universe is not a static scenario, a mere "Yin/Yang" of balanced elements. It is a dynamic system of exchange whereby one energy is constantly transforming into another and vice versa. In Chapter VIII of the Bhagavad Gita, the ever-cycling relationship of life is revealed: "Yet there is another

unmanifest nature, which is eternal and transcendental to this manifested and unmanifested matter. It is supreme and never annihilated" (Prabhupāda, 1972, 342).¹⁰

In itself, this may seem similar to cosmologies world-over, but expanded upon, as does Christopher Isherwood in the appendix to his translation of the *Gita*, the Vedic understanding is significantly different: "...the universe is part of a beginningless and endless process, which alternates between the two phases of potentiality and expression" (Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 1951, 132).

In other words, *cycle* is the action of the Vedic universe—and the dynamically intertwined states of being and not being—of matter and not-matter, void and substance, and paves the way for late Vedic ideas of re-incarnation and *karma*¹¹—the transformation of life-energy from one form (energy) into another form (physical substance). The ongoing *dynamic* state of being / not-being is at the heart of the Vedic Universe.

Frawley tells us, "Each object in the universe is an expression of the Divine Word and holds a specific message about the meaning and purpose of the universe as a whole. Nature itself is the first Book of Mantra or sacred sound, the outer reflection of the Divine Word" (2010, 45). In other words, each element of energy and of substance reflects the macro-structure of the Universe itself. The persistent process, or cycle of energy-to-matter-to-energy and so on is the real and perceivable shape of the physical universe.

In Vedic terms the world does not exist as a collection of "this's" and "that's" but as a series of contiguous states each with common, unifying qualities, and understandable through variations and layers of expression. Physical Spaces in Vedism are not segregate areas, but substance in flux.

4 *Infinite Interiors: Reframing Silence*

"One who is adept in listening to the unstruck sound in anahata, (that is) uninterrupted like a rushing river, attains the supreme state of Brahma by mastery of shabdabrahman, the form of Brahman as sound" (Anonymous, unknown, 18).

—*Vijñanabhairava Tantra*

The Vedic paradigm seems to defy general notions of objectification, even of compartmentalization. The idea of "ownership" itself can only be understood with a transitory sensibility.

From this position we can start to unpack a notion of Silence on the energetic spectrum of Sound. Vedic cosmology tells us that even when there is no matter and no perceived activity, there is always energy. Even when that energy is expressed as the *pranavaḥ Om*, the impulse extends beyond the enclosure of perceivable meaning. For our discussion, we can say the Vedic cosmology suggests an inherent connection to sound as an extended state of Silence and a persistent energy. From this position, how will our Five Cultural Frames for Silence change?

4.1 *Silence Has No Value*

Silence is Energy, and as an energetic expression, Silence has equal value with Sounded Materials.

In Vedism the concepts of space and substance, stillness and motion are interpositively charged. That is to say, their meaning is derived from their consistent relationship to one another and the ongoing cycle of transformation of one to the other. The concepts are not *opposite* as we understand the term to mean, having mutually negating value. How can we describe this idea effectively in English? I'll suggest a grammatical usage to describe the relationship with more Vedic valuation: 'appositive'

from the grammatical construction 'apposition' in which two elements modify or extend each other. A notion of *appositive* charge better suggests integrally and equally valued materials.

If sounded material and Silence are considered *appositively* charged concepts, both retain activity and dynamic force.

Silence with value is an Energetic Silence, Silence of Gestation—an expression of the creational *Om*.

4.2 *Silence is Paradoxical*

Yet, Silence integrates, because Silence is confluent. A breath going in, or breath going out—these are *appositive* in their relationship to each other. In the Vedic practice of movement, *Yoga Asana*, we learn that our breath connects us to the space around us, to the world around us. Everything breathes, everything is submerged in air. And, according to the Vedas, when we breathe, we are silently uttering *Om* in consonance with the Universe.

In music, an ensemble finds after a while that they are breathing together. While breath is intimate, to breathe is common. Strangely in the West, we don't think of breathing as uncomfortable behavior, awkward in social scenarios. We are all breathing and breathing together in this shared space. The paradox of a shared Silence is transformed as a Silence of Integration.

4.3 *Silence is the Absence of Information*

If Silence indicates there is a block in the flow of information, it tells us, "There is nothing to say," which never needs to be stated in terms other than Silence—Silence makes its own statement. By its presence, Silence makes clear, "There is enough. No

words are necessary." In social scenarios, Silence might be the most appropriate response. You have the *right*

to remain
silent.

In the musical dialectic, Schoenberg reveals an entire history of musical Silence that both tells us that something *has* happened, and that something *will* happen—something is *imminent*—there has been a sound, but there is a sound that is yet, unstruck: the *anahata nad*.

Even so, these scenarios think of Silence as object, thing, or a node that is featureless and static. Silence in music is, importantly—*an action*. Silence is temporal, an expanding or contracting density of sonic material. As an active, or *acting* temporal gesture, it is dynamically energetic and carries both acknowledgment of sound that has just past, as well as the gestating seed of what will come next. Silence *is* information.

An asserted silence—an *articulated silence*—in music becomes more than a count on the temporal, rhythmic grid. An Articulated Silence is a Silence of certainty. A breath before a parting musical thought—

a Silence of Gestation

that becomes a Silence of
Preparation.

A Silence of Preparation is a cognate of sounded feedback we're used to receiving and expressing. Instead of a beep or a chime, or an "Uh-huh," an Articulated Silence in between sounded material asks, "Am I making a connection?" and aggressively asserted insists, "I AM

making

a connection!"

4.4 *Silence is a Social Cue*

Silence *is* a social cue: Silence *engages*. Silence within an unfolding temporal framework accesses Vedic notions of presence. Articulating Silence says, "Now! Be here."

On hearing Silence articulated, the listener understands the social cue and engages the moment. Activating Silence within a musical context has the potential to draw the listener into the present moment along with the performer, insisting that we let go of what's just past to pay attention to *this* moment, yet offering us clues about the next. This is a silence of Integration.

While Brandon Labelle writes, "...music is always already responding" (LaBelle, 2001, 62) I will add that Silence also responds.

4.5 *Silence Leaves No Evidence*

But Silence *is* evidence. Shared silent spaces are creational—are co-creational—reflective of the unutterable 4th syllable of *Om, anahata*. In a moment of contemplative Silence, listeners are energetically enjoined in a mutual, creative experience.

What of a musical experience that has no attachments and no context for emotional memory? This music would ask the listener to contribute emotionally to the immediate experience rather than assume a souvenir-oriented experience. The listener's immediate presence bears the emphasis.

In his book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, composer Michael Nyman quotes late US Experimentalist Robert Ashley as saying, "It seems to me that the most radical redefinition of music that I could think of would be one that defines 'music' without reference to sound" (1974, 11).

Creating a shared, however subjective space that transcends sound or sonic materials in the concert hall, that is, a subjective space within Silence, offers the listener a position within the music itself. It means a listener's experience, at least in part, will be entirely personal, and has the potential for emotional and intellectual exchange with the performer, and in an extended sense, with the composer.

5 *Conclusion*

"As a result of concentration on the pleasures of the senses, such as music or song...the yogi ascends beyond the mind and becomes one with that (supreme)"
(Anonymous, unknown, 32-33).

—*Vijñanabhairava Tantra*

What makes us compulsive about filling spaces?

We know Space, from an object-oriented position, does not change on its own.

Space as an object can *be* changed, and can be invaded while retaining its initial

measurable state. We leave our mark on Space, perhaps to know—like Hansel and Gretel lost in a dark and ominous woods—where we've been.

Silence, on the other hand, is fluid and certain changes or intrusions to Silence, in fact, annihilate its presence—or our perception of its presence—all together. In Vedic terms, Silence vibrates with an ambiguity that offers infinite possibilities, each unique in quality and distinctly apart from sounds that surround it. This reveals the *energetic* impulse of Silence that makes it truly meaningful in a musical context—meaningful in and of itself.

The *problem with*—rather, the *power of*—Silence is then, its range as a dynamic expression, and its ability to transform from one state, quality or meaning to another state, quality or meaning—from rest to gestation, to assertion—spontaneously at every instance as it unfolds in the temporal field. While the possibilities of sound are uncountable, they must be somehow quantifiable, whereas the possibilities for Silence are infinite.

So, perhaps not "Why Silence" but "*How* can I use Silence?" How can I access Infinite Silent Interiors to express my musical thought? That is perhaps best explored in a piece of music.

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End Notes

¹ Frey is member of the *Wandelweiser* group, a collective of composers in Germany who have committed their work to forwarding, in a manner of speaking John Cage's ideas about Indeterminate Composition.

² Purely by coincidence, David Tudor premiered 4'33" in 1952 during a thunderstorm.

³ I'm reminded here of recent correspondence with a friend who lamented to me her memory of my first apartment. In her words it had, "sadly, very little in it." As an 18-year old adult, freshly liberated from my parents' over-furnished house, I recall distinctly that the emptiness was absolutely intentional!

⁴ The *Vedas* are differentiated from the *Vedanta*, additional core texts of Hinduism that come significantly later, and are considered the "end" of the *Vedas*. To many historians they signify the beginning of Hinduism as we identify it today. Texts that come later than the *Vedas* do not aim at supplanting them, rather focus on outlining a world-view that extends the reason and purpose of ritual religion described in seminal Vedic texts.

This goal leads to metaphysical notions of the universe that come later and are more aligned with Hinduism directly—*karma* and so on (see note #10 below)—and Hindu-associated practices such as *yoga*. It is notable that Hinduism and Vedism are differentiated as separate religions, though Hinduism openly folds Vedism into its paradigm and cites all of the Vedic literature as its own, most sacred text. This is not to suggest that Vedism and Hinduism are in any way at odds; the tenants of Vedism itself and Hinduism after it mutually emphasize individual human enlightenment. Vedism however, was ritualized by priests who presided over ceremony, whereas Hinduism is practiced by individuals outside of clerical hierarchy

and connecting directly to divinity itself. Hence the rise of yoga and related practices which are inclusive and integrated into daily living, and emphasize an individual's connection to and place in the cosmic creation. In Hinduism, actuated individual practice and personal divinity, fundamental beliefs of Vedism, were not abandoned, but re-situated within Hinduism so as to enable and facilitate personal the spiritual practices that envelope Hindu daily life.

⁵ Transliteration from Sanskrit can be inconsistent, dependent on the regional language of the transliterator. Therefore, the Sharada Tilak is also found as *Sarada Tilaka*, *Sharada Tilakam* and other variations.

⁶ On the historical timeline, the *Upaniṣads* fall after the Vedas and before Hinduism proper appears, lending the texts mystic emphasis.

⁷ Sanskrit, literally translated as "wheel."

⁸ According to the online Sanskrit glossary <http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/glossary/glossary_a.html>, *ANAGATA* means "belonging to the future" where *ANAHATA* means "The fourth lotus of the Yogis, opposite the heart; mystic sounds heard by the Yogis." Another website labels *ANAGATA* as meaning "imminent" (i.e. belonging to the future, un-manifest, but on the precipice of being). Apparently <<https://aerialstream.wordpress.com/author/aerialstream/>> the "—gata" suffix in Sanskrit means "conditioned with dynamism, or movement...temporal motion..." All sites accessed 03.27.2014.

⁹ The glossary in Swami Satchidananda's commentary on Patanjali cites *Anagata* as both the unspoken syllable of *Om*, and as the name of the fourth primary chakra, or *Anahata*. The glossary defines *ANAGATA* as "not yet come. (Refers to the silence beyond the OM vibration, the unpronounced *pranavaḥ*)..." p 237

¹⁰ Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 8, Verse 20. The popular Penguin Classics translation by Juan Mascaró offers a less dynamic description: "But beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is an Invisible, higher Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains for ever and ever" (Mascaró, 1962, 79).

¹¹ The concept of *karma* appears in the *Vedanta* (see note #4 above).