

BODYMiND: *A musical self- diagnostic of my independent concentration in Musical Dimensions of Contemplative Study*

*“Writing about music is like dancing about
architecture.”*

- attributed variously to Elvis Costello,
Frank Zappa, Laurie Anderson, Miles Davis,
and others. The most authoritative source
found so far cites Costello.¹

1 <<http://home.pacifier.com/~ascott/they/tamildaa.htm>>

Prologue: Yogic and Western conceptions of sound

Sound is a slippery concept. In order to define it, physics can only offer a constraint on the physical definition of a *wave*: any wave moving through a fluid medium at a frequency within the sensitive range of an organism's ear is potentially a sound. But a timeless *koan* poses an epistemological obstacle to this valiant attempt to define a sound: *If a tree falls in a forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?* With no organism's ear present to help us define *sound*, how are we to know?

Certainly, if we are to accept that trees and falling even exist without an observer present, which, for the purposes of this paper, I must, we can accept that this event produces a *wave*. But the category of *sound* is merely a filter of the definition of *wave*, excluding perfectly good waves not because of any flaw of their own, but because they are simply beyond the audible frequency range of a living observer. Meanwhile, each species has a different audible range, and surely each individual within a species has an audible range that varies slightly, or even significantly, from each other. A contemporary yet already classic example is the 17 kHz “mosquito” ringtone teenagers use to prevent their elder teachers from hearing their cellphones ring in class.²

If *sound* is a wave within an organism's audible frequency range, is the “mosquito” ringtone a *sound* from the teacher's perspective? Certainly, the teacher can surmise that the students can hear the tone and therefore assume that it is a *sound*, just like any other sound one cannot hear, such as one occurring miles away. Likewise, if we can cheat the *koan* by assuming the presence of deer and voles in the proverbial forest, and those animals scatter when the tree falls, we can assume that a *sound* took place. Or, at least, to satisfy the nitpicker, we can put a deer or a vole in a blank, empty room and play the sound of a tree falling and watch them respond, probably by looking in the direction of the speaker. But could there not be a hypothetical species that could hear 40 kHz waves? Would that not expand our

2 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/12/technology/12ring.html>>

definition of sound? What about elephant estrus calls, in which female elephants produce sub-audible seismic vibrations, which their potential mates detect through the vibrations in the bones of their feet, which vibrate up their whole bodies and into their middle ear?³ Indeed, it begins to seem that any wave at all has at least theoretical potential to be a sound.

Contemporary philosophers might want to restrict *sound* by saying it refers to a *percept*, not the stimulus that produces it, but that doesn't solve our *koan*. Or rather, it suggests that the answer to the *koan* (*does it make a sound?*) might be “no,” which is deeply troubling to the rational mind. Perhaps that is the purpose of the *koan*, and “no” is indeed the answer. It would accord with the Zen teaching of Emptiness to answer that way, provided one did not think about it at all first. But to the Western mind, equipped with the triple-edged sword of Judeo-Christian religion, Classical philosophy, and the scientific method, this answer would be absurd on its face. It seems rational that the tree would still make a sound, given that the physics of the event would theoretically be exactly the same, with or without an ear present. This leads the Western mind to respond: yes, the tree falling would make a sound.

The Western wisdom traditions tend to handle epistemological quandaries such as this with anthropocentric explanations in order to keep their philosophical solutions firmly rooted in a vocabulary that accords with ordinary human experience. When these teachings address an object requiring an explanation, they do so in a language privileging *knowledge*, or human rational apprehension, of the nature, content, and meaning of the object. Perhaps no clearer example of this tendency exists than John 1:1, which states: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”⁴ The word “Word” is translated, using proper capitalization to indicate

3 <<http://esciencenews.com/articles/2009/02/13/when.it.comes.elephant.love.calls.answer.lies.a.bone.shaking.triangle>>

4 John 1:1 (New International Version)

its identification with divinity itself, from the Greek “λόγος” (*logos*)⁵, which admits of a more nuanced meaning than the uncapitalized “word,” connoting a mere unit of vocabulary, for which the Greek “λεξις” (*lexis*) is used. *Logos* also encompasses the inward intention underlying the act of speech, the basis of “reason” or “hypothesis” upon which ideas can be formed and thus expressed.⁶ Nevertheless, both *logos* and *lexis* derive from the verb “λέγω” (*legō*), to count, tell, say, or speak.⁷ The obvious intention of *logos* is to imply a *log*-ical notion, which can be thought or spoken. Therefore, taking into account the proper capitalization of “Word” from John 1:1, it is logical to assume that, in this oft-quoted instance, the gospel identifies *logos*, “reason,” with “God” itself. In other words, it is an *idea*, amenable to human contemplation and understanding, which constitutes the divine essence.

This *logos* exists *a priori*, which is to say that it was “out there,” “with God,” as the gospel of John says, ready to be apprehended by the human mind prior to God's creation of humankind. It is by this infallible *log*-ic that God created the universe. Therefore, in answer to the *koan*, God, the creator of sound, trees, and falling, is eminently logical, and it is logical that the tree and its falling would be unchanged by the absence of a listening observer, so the believer can answer “yes” to the *koan* in good faith. That faith, however, must not be taken lightly. The Western religious tradition does allow for miracles, to which our fallible, incomplete view of the world must adapt, and, accordingly, the scientific method is inherently agnostic, allowing for the infinitesimal chance that the tree would make no sound, requiring us to rewrite physics from the ground up. The grounding for the Western assumption that the tree will make a sound is based on sound reasoning, and is therefore quite robust, but it is still an act of faith to answer an affirmative “yes” to a *koan*. This answer represents a fundamental belief about *sound*, namely that it behaves in accordance with reason. In contrast, the

5 John 1:1 (The Greek English New Testament). Christianity Today. 1975.)

6 Liddel & Scott, entry for “*logos*,” online at <<http://archimedes.fas.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/dict?name=lsj&lang=el&word=lo%2fgos&filter=GreekXlit>>

7 Ibid, entry for “*legō*,” online at <<http://archimedes.fas.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/dict?name=lsj&lang=el&word=le%2fgw&filter=GreekXlit>>

Vedic tradition responds “yes” to the *koan* for entirely different reasons, because its conception of *sound* is not dependent on reason at all. Rather, the Vedic/Yogic/Hindu traditions hold that reason, speech, *logos* itself *depends* on sound.

In the Vedic tradition, the philosophical origin of both Hinduism and Buddhism, the Sanskrit term *mantra* plays a role analogous to that of *logos* in the gospel of John. Like *logos*, *mantra* is the utmost *expression* of divinity, to which the human mind and body can relate through *word*. Guy Beck translates *mantra* as an “instrument of thought, speech, sacred text,”⁸ which resembles Liddel & Scott's translation of *logos*, while building into the term *mantra* the notion of “sacredness,” whereas the gospel of John must make that association with *logos* explicit (“*the Word was God*”).

This distinction seems minor, but in their religious contexts, these two terms serve very different functional purposes. In the Judeo-Christian context, the “Word” is identifiable with divinity, and thus humankind approaches holiness through contemplation of the *logos*, the *log-ic* of the sacred scriptures. In the Vedic tradition, *mantra*, the “instrument” of sacred text, is literally heard. Sri Aurobindo writes: “The language of the *Veda* is itself a *sruti*, a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge.”⁹ It still appears that the distinction between *mantra* and Judeo-Christian scripture is minor, as the biblical scriptures were revealed to “the inner audience” of human prophets as well, but it is Vedic insistence that the *mantras* are “not composed by the intellect” in which the ritual and philosophical difference lies. *Mantra* is not amenable to personal knowledge (as opposed to Sri Aurobindo's “impersonal knowledge”), nor does it come from the *logos*, conceptual thought. *Mantra* is “vibrat[ed].” Vibration, when “heard,” creates the percept we know as sound. As Sri Aurobindo writes, the sound of *mantra* “came vibrating out of the Infinite”

8 Beck, 30.

9 Coward & Goa, 13.

before taking root in its recipient as “the impersonal knowledge.” According to this understanding, the medium for the divine in the Vedic tradition is *sound*, to which *knowledge* is secondary.

The *Chandogya-Upanishad*, attached to the *Sama-Veda*, states the primacy of sound by invoking the syllable *OM*, which it describes as the seed sound from which all other sounds, such as the Vedas themselves, emanate. Beginning with the sharp sound *A*, moving into the open sound *O*, moving to the closed sound, *M*, ending ultimately with the nasal stop, the Vedic traditions and all those that followed regarded the syllable as a complete sonic description of reality. Ultimately, the *Chandogya-Upanishad* goes so far as to reduce the very essence of humanity to speech, the root of which is *OM*:

The essence of a person is speech. The essence of speech is the *Rg* (hymn). The essence of the *Rg* is the *Saman* (chant). The essence of the *Saman* is the *udgitha* (loud singing). ... The *udgitha* is the syllable Om [which joins together the pair of speech and breath].¹⁰

The text regards human beings as essentially composed of their words, but human speech reduces to sacred speech, which reduces to rhythmic chant, simply voiced sound, and then the essential sound itself. Beck's bracketed note adds that *OM* is essential because it *joins* speech, the human essence, with *breath*, the movement of the air with which the body generates vibration. Thus, the *sound* imbues *words* with their essence, rather than the contrary. Beck cites additional examples from the *Chandogya-Upanishad*, as well as other *Upanishads*, which further describe *OM* and the importance of its nature as a sound:

“As leaves are held together by a spike, so all speech is held together by Om. Verily, Om is the world-all. Verily, Om is this world all.” This latter concept is echoed by the *Taittiriya-Upanishad* (1.8), which contains a short glorification of the sacred word *Om*: “Om is Brahman. Om is the whole world.”¹¹

These *Upanishadic* passages obviously describe something much more fundamental than the

¹⁰ Beck, 42.

¹¹ Ibid.

human utterance of a syllable. The sacred *OM* described here as “the whole world” can only be the referent of the spoken syllable. As the first above passage from the *Chandogya-Upanishad* points out, human speech reduces to sacred speech, which ultimately reduces to sound itself, *OM*. Later devotees who emphasized the sacred primacy of sound came to create a tradition of Yogic sound practice known as *Nada-Yoga*, in which meditation on sound itself could be used to bring about *samadhi*, or ultimate release.

Nada, according to Beck, can be defined as “m. a loud sound, roaring, bellowing, crying; any sound or tone.”¹² The major philosophical term for sacred sound used in this tradition is *Nada-Brahman*, which attaches *nada* to *Brahman*, the undifferentiated, non-conceptual, ultimate Unity in Indian traditions. Though the divinity of sound is made clear in the Vedic hymns, the ancient Vedic religion outlined many other necessary practices, though the ritual chanting of the hymns was fundamental. Later philosophical developments within the Yogic tradition placed greater emphasis on personal practice with sound as a primary religious devotion.

The *Yogasikha-Upanishad* explicitly states not only that sound is the fundamental reality but that sound Yoga constitutes the ultimate devotional practice: “There is no *mantra* higher than the *nada*: there is no god higher than one's own Atman (Self); there is no worship higher than investigation of the *nada* and there is no higher satisfaction.”¹³ The *Nadabindu-Upanishad*, to which Beck refers as “possibly the oldest document on the 'Yoga of Sound'”¹⁴, describes specific meditative practices focusing on internal sounds, the objective of which is, as Beck quotes from Eliade, “to transform the whole cosmos into a vast sonorous theophany.”¹⁵

The Yogi should always listen to the sound [*nada*] in the interior of his right ear. This

12 Beck.

13 Ibid, 92-93.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid, 93.

sound, when constantly practiced, will drown every sound [*dhvani*] from the outside. ... By persisting ... the sound will be heard subtler and subtler. At first, it will be like what is produced by the ocean [*jaladhi*], the cloud [*jimuta*], the kettle-drum [*bheri*], and the water-fall [*nirjhara*]. ... A little later it will be like the sound produced by a tabor [*mardala*, or small drum], a big bell [*ghanta*], and a military drum [*kahala*]; and finally like the sound of the tinkling bell [*kinkini*], the bamboo-flute [*vamsa*], the harp [*vina*], and the bee [*bhramara*]. ... Leaving all thoughts and devoid of all actions, he should meditate upon *nada* alone. This mind will then merge completely in the *nada*.¹⁶

Already, the *Yoga-Upanishads* have drawn the direct link between sacred sound and musical practice, as the body sounds upon which the Yogi meditates are compared explicitly to a variety of musical instruments. Just as Beck refers to the spoken *mantra* as a metaphorical “instrument,” the *Nadabindu-Upanishad* compares the body to musical instruments. Later sects of Nada Yogis further developed this connection, integrating other Yogic bodily concepts into the practice of Sound Yoga and paving the way for the extension of this practice outside of the body through the highly devotional practices of Indian classical music. Beck grants the musicological truism that Indian classical music originated with the Vedic chants, but he insists that it was not until the development of the concept of *Nada-Brahman* that the philosophical seeds for the refined musical system took root.¹⁷

The philosopher Matanga provides perhaps the first explicit connection between Nada-Brahman and instrumental music, writing that “without Nada-Brahman, there is no song, no musical notes, no dance; the entire universe consists of Nada-Brahman.”¹⁸ This passage, in addition to reducing music to its essence in *Nada-Brahman*, also strengthens the link between sound and the body by incorporating dance. The *Sangita-Ratnakara*, a subsequent musicological text, makes explicit connections between elements of the burgeoning Indian music theory and the Yogic schematics of the body. The text pairs the seven *cakras*, the crucial Yogic energy centers in the central channel of the body, with seven *svaras*, or the fundamental intervals of the musical scale, and it matches the 22 *nâdîs*, or subtle arteries

16 Ibid.

17 Beck, 107.

18 Ibid, 109.

perceived in Yogic meditation, with the 22 *srutis*, the microtones which divide up the octave in Indian music, which rise in pitch as they move higher in the body.¹⁹ The classical Indian musical system, one of the subtlest and most articulate theories of music in the world, has its root in Yogic practices, which regard the body as the channel for the divine sound.

Indian instrumental music reduces to vocal music in the same chain in which the voice, in turn, reduces to *OM*. Singing, specifically the recitation of the Vedic hymns, was the first ritual music in India, and vocal music retains its importance to the entire musical tradition. In the disciplines of instrumental music, the centrality of vocal music is evidenced by the aesthetic value of *gayaki*, in which instrumentalists aspire to emulate the tonal qualities of the human voice,²⁰ and the term *bol*, literally “voice,” which is used generically for any stroke on a drum or stringed instrument.²¹ So even in the contemporary practice of Indian classical music, which is now seen as a distinct discipline from Yogic practices, the techniques and concepts refer directly to the human body and to its inner sounds, which emanate from the seed sound *OM*.

How does the emergence of Indian classical music relate to the tree falling in the forest? To answer that question, we must return to the question of what constitutes a *sound*, given the centrality of sound in Yogic practice. A sound is a vibration, as established by both physics and Nada Yoga. Vibrations are measured in number of cycles per unit time. In our hypothetical forest scenario, the Western approach would be interested in the number of cycles per second in the vibrations caused by the falling tree. If the number fell within the audible range, which it almost certainly would, the Western thinker would have sufficient evidence to answer the *koan* with a “yes.” The Yogic scientist, meanwhile, would already know that the answer was yes, simply by virtue of the fact that a vibration took place. He or she may also be interested in the number of cycles per century in the wave that

19 Ibid, 109-110.

20 Viswanathan & Allen, 4.

21 Ruckert.

knocked the tree down, for this wave propagated from an endless cascade of waves, reaching back to the seed sound *OM* that planted the first tree in the first place, and back before that. But the Yogic notion of *sound* is not limited to frequencies audible to humans; the range of *human* sound is a tinny and ephemeral overtone whistling over the unceasing sound of *OM*. To the Yogi, the sound of the tree falling is divine, because it is the Divine Sound. To John The Baptist, the sound of the tree falling is also divine, because it was God's idea.

In short, to answer “yes” to the *koan* is to agree that sound is divine and transcends human experience, because it does not depend on a human being present. Without this faith in the divinity of sound, how would we account for music? Both the Vedic/Yogic/Hindu and Judeo-Christian traditions embrace music as divine, even if for different reasons. The Nada Yogis wrote that music is divine because it aligns our whole bodies with the seed sound *OM*. Western music is divine because of its order, its conceptual rigor, and its inspirational power. No matter one's philosophical tendencies, music is always a profound act of creation, one that takes sound, our primary medium of communication, and lifts it up, above words, into the realm of pure vibration. This ability is so profound that only music itself can fully express its implications.

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I. Muladhara [“Root,” or “Introduction”]

As the culmination of my independent concentration in Music & Mind, I have created a recording that serves as a musical self-diagnostic of my undergraduate concentration and its effects on my whole self, comprising my intellect, my values, my relationships to others, and indeed my entire position as a human being and an organism at the time of its composition. As a purely musical choice, this subject matter seems impossibly broad, not to mention totally narcissistic. Devoting an entire song cycle to oneself, if done for solely artistic purposes, is terribly presumptuous, even vain. If my sole aim in composing this piece had been to create a musical work that would stand alone and be admired by others for its sheer artistic merit, I would have certainly chosen a subject more accessible than the inner workings of my own mind.

However, such a composition would not have achieved the goals of my concentration. My aim in pursuing this concentration was to explore the use of sound as a means of direct contemplation to achieve direct, pre-intellectual, meditative states of consciousness. This composition reflects the trueness of that aim. After the academic study and practice of meditation and a variety of longstanding traditions of contemplative music, the sounds of this recording emanated, almost without prompt, from my very body and mind. Therefore, naturally, that same body-mind became the academic subject of the work.

The title of this piece, *BODYMiND*, dates back to my sophomore year in the Introduction to Contemplative Studies course. The term became convenient in our class discussions as we wrestled with the Buddhist notion that body and mind cannot be distinguished; they are inextricable, according to the fundamental precept of *dependent arising*, meaning that the arising and cessation of one is dependent on the other. Many forms of Buddhism, but particularly the Vajrayana and Zen traditions, stress the importance of this body-mind unity, but it was David E. Shaner's PhD thesis, published in

1985 and entitled “The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism,” which coined the term “bodymind” in English, translated from the Japanese 心身統一合氣道 (*shinshintouitsu aikidō*).²² In English, the term “bodymind” plays an important role in the secular forms of meditative practice that have emerged recently in order to study the effects of meditation in a Western academic context. Herbert Benson's seminal “relaxation response” technique is a key example, and this is probably the source from which the term arose in the Contemplative Studies class. Benson's research employs the notion of “bodymind” in order to explain how the mental work of meditation relaxes the body and reduces physical stress. The term “bodymind” treats the body and mind as one undifferentiated system, and the research of Benson and those who followed him has shown conclusively that mind and body are deeply intertwined in this way.²³

For me, as a student of contemplative music, “bodymind” took on profound meaning as my studies progressed. The texts I read entered my awareness through the mind, but when I struck upon a particularly profound passage, or when I made a previously unforeseen connection between concepts, texts, authors, or even whole traditions, I experienced the new awareness with a tingle, a warmth, or a chill. The mental state gave rise directly to a bodily sensation. Perhaps more profoundly, my studies involved playing and listening to many varieties of music created specifically for the purpose of illuminating or elevating consciousness, and as my fingers played, my ears heard, or my feet danced to these novel yet deeply familiar kinds of sound, the palpable ecstasy conveyed by these musics, and by the ecstatic people who made them, propelled my mind into some of the deepest states of egoless, undifferentiated awareness that I have ever experienced at this phenomenally early stage of my life and practice. Most importantly of all, my reflection on these experiences after the fact solidified my new

22 Shaner.

23 Benson.

musical knowledge, enabling me to make sounds, using my mind and body, which I could not make before. My concentration taught me, in essence, a fundamental belief in the truth of the unity of bodymind, so I used my bodymind to create this recording as a scholarly testament to its influence on my intellectual life.

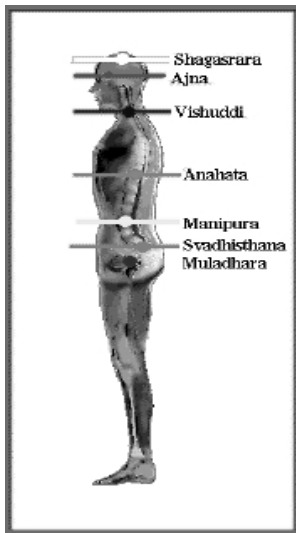
II. Svadisthana [“Seed,” or “Motivation”]

BODYMiND is a song cycle, meaning that it is a long-form work comprised of several distinct but inseparable sections. The piece is organized as an upward movement through the body, beginning in the abdomen and ending in the head, proceeding in seven sections. I chose this direction of movement, as well as the stopping points along the way, in accordance with some of the musical and philosophical traditions I have studied, most notably the Hindu/Tantric notion of *cakras*, also employed in Vajrayana Buddhism. This system locates in the body seven *cakras* (“centers”), aligned vertically along the central channel of the body, connected by energetic channels, or *nâdîs*, through which flows the “life force,” known as *prâna*.²⁴ The *cakras* are arranged along the central channel of the body, located at the perineum, the genitals, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat, the forehead, and the crown of the head.²⁵

See figures below:

24 Feuerstein, 465.

25 Ibid.



26

Each *cakra* has its own distinct energy signature (to be described in section IV) that relates to fundamental attributes of the human bodymind traditionally associated with its corresponding area in the body. I represented these sequential meanings of the *cakras* in the seven parts of the song cycle.

I have found the seven qualities of the *cakras* to be a very useful schematic for diagnosing my “psychospiritual condition,”²⁷ to use Georg Feuerstein's term for the state of one's *cakra* relationships, but I do not profess any fundamental belief in the *cakras'* physical being or their metaphysical importance. Rather, I use the *cakra* system as an organizational method for my meditative practice. Feuerstein suggests that “we can regard [the *cakras*] as idealized versions of actual structures of the... body which are meant to guide the *yogin's* [yoga practitioner's] visualization and contemplation.”²⁸ This is how I view and use the *cakras*. I am agnostic about their physical or metaphysical reality or importance, but I use them conceptually, as points of focus in my personal practices. I believe each *cakra* represents a significant area for continual personal development, so I used the *cakras* as

26 Illustration from Kangra school, late 18th century CE.

27 Feuerstein, 466.

28 Ibid.

intellectual touchstones for the seven sections of this composition. In order to distance myself from the religious commitments of Tantric practices, however, I used my own English translations of the Sanskrit names for the *cakra* points as the titles of the songs. Nevertheless, in my explication of the meaning of each track (see section IV), I will refer to the traditional names and meanings of the *cakras*, but I will interpose those with my own personal interpretations as they factored into my musical choices. Before I describe the *cakras* individually, though, I will explain my choice to use this system to organize my composition.

III. Manipura [“Gut,” or “Inspiration”]

I chose the *cakra* system above other possible organizational principles for this composition because of the particular importance of sacred sound in the Vedic/Hindu tradition, as described in the prologue. Over the course of my concentration, I studied Indian musical theory and practice from both textual and musical angles, culminating in two semesters of one-on-one training in the *sitar*. Throughout my studies, I was continually impressed by the robust philosophical backing of all of the features of Indian music, rooted in the religious belief in the sacred primacy of sound.

As I practiced *sitar*, I came to two simultaneous realizations: I saw that pursuing mastery of the *sitar* would require my total commitment, at the expense of my practices in the Western musical traditions in which I was raised, and I could not allow that to happen. However, I also realized that the fundamental belief in the sacredness of sound had permeated my musical sensibilities completely, and I would henceforth play all music with the same dedication, focus, and spiritual arousal. Because of what I learned from studying *sitar*, my whole body became a part of my musical practice, and my playing became a form of yogic refinement. I latched on to the association between the seven *cakras* and the seven intervals of the scale, which are present in Indian and Western musics alike, and I chose this

schematic as the way to musically represent the state of my bodymind in this composition.

IV. Anahata [“Heart,” or “Relationships”]

As explained in section II, *BODYMiND* moves through the seven *cakras* from bottom to top. This direction moves from the most basic, animal, environmental energies to the highest, most abstract, cosmic/universal ones. I chose this configuration because it maps the creative process by which the composition came about. I began by meditating on the sounds of my environment, the unpredictable, unexpected, often unmusical sounds of my day-to-day experience. This experience heightened my sensitivity to the fact that my every thought and action had these sounds as the soundtrack. Even when I played music, the sounds of the cars driving by outside or the fan in the room provided a counterpoint. My first decision for this composition was that I would incorporate the sounds of my environment into the music I would record.

Next, I noticed that these sounds often had a visceral effect on me, whether noticed or not. Usually, the environmental sounds I heard were quite jarring, such as the back-up alarm of a truck or construction machine. I began to notice this specific sound everywhere, all the time, a totally pervasive and unavoidable part of my reality, and I realized that it caused me great physical tension and stress each time I heard it. At first, this was a serious detriment to my meditative practice, as I would consciously fly into a rage if I heard a truck backing up. Eventually, though, after meditating on the sound and recording it often, I began to hear it as music. This realization helped me to relieve the tension I felt whenever I heard a truck backing up, so I quickly made the connection between this project and my contemplative practices. It was at this point that I thought of mapping the composition using the *cakra* system.

I had also grown more sensitive to other, more pleasant environmental sounds, such as birdsong, the rhythmic footfalls of people walking, even the musical tones of voices in conversation. I began to view all sounds as musical, so I decided to blend the environmental sounds with composed musical sounds played on my instruments. I began to write lyrical texts about the *cakras* and decided to incorporate my voice as well. As I moved from the lower, environmental *cakras* to the higher ones dealing with human relationships and communication, I decided to incorporate vocals to bring the qualities of human interaction into the music. Finally, the idea began to crystallize as a whole, and the exaltation at having conceived of a meaningful, long-form piece of music inspired ecstatic, instrumental bursts of sound-color that would comprise the upper *cakras*.

Each *cakra* in my *BODYMiND* composition has its own musical methodology. I will describe each section in order, beginning each description with a summary of the traditional meaning of the *cakra* in question. I will describe the musical techniques I employed in the composition of each piece by virtue of their connection to the meaning of the corresponding *cakra* as I interpreted it.

1. “Root” – from the Sanskrit “*Muladhara*”

The *muladhara cakra* is located at the perineum. It is associated with the element of earth, the sense of smell, the lower limbs, and is represented by the elephant, a symbol of strength. Its associated color is red.²⁹ This *cakra* governs basic drives and instincts, including reproduction, sensual pleasure, and survival.³⁰ As a natural beginning, I began the composition with an in-breath. I associate this *cakra* with animal motivations and our instinctual relationship to our environment. I represented this musically by creating a collage of recorded samples from the neighborhood near my apartment, using automobile noise, fire engine sirens, loud ventilation fans, and other city sounds. This track is agitating

29 Feuerstein, 469.

30 Mercier, 91.

and challenging to listen to, and it reinforces the noisy and disorienting reality of city life, which is not good for the animal, in my opinion.

2. “Seed” – from the Sanskrit “*Svadisthana*”

The *svadisthana cakra* is located at the genitals, and it is associated with the element of water, the sense of taste, the hands, and what Feuerstein calls “an aquatic monster resembling a crocodile,” a symbol of fertility. Its associated color is orange.³¹ This *cakra*, by virtue of its location, is obviously associated with sex, and more generally our emotional needs of other people.³² This track was the most enjoyable to make. I represented this *cakra* by creating what is ostensibly a dance song using only sounds generated by my own body. I produced the beat with voice and drumming on various body parts, layering five long, improvised tracks of percussive sounds over each other, and I built tension by adding in breathing, panting, and vocalized, non-verbal sounds. Stylistically, this piece resembles computerized dance music, but the use of only body sounds as instrumentation lends it a sensual urgency and strips it of all clean, mechanical, inorganic precision.

3. “Gut” – from the Sanskrit “*Manipura*”

This *cakra* is located at the navel. It is associated with fire, vision, the anus, and the ram, which is a fire symbol in both the Tantric and Western astrological traditions. Its associated color is yellow.³³ The *manipura cakra* deals with issues of identity, fear, anxiety, opinion formation, and other ego concerns.³⁴ This track begins with a burp, jarring the listener out of the sensual groove of “Seed,” and immediately features the first lyric of the song cycle:

I found a feeling

31 Feuerstein, 470.

32 Mercier, 127.

33 Feuerstein, 470.

34 Mercier, 167.

In the pit of my stomach
It's there when I breathe
It's there when I smile
I think it's me
I think the feeling is me

I felt my feeling
when I stepped outside
and my nose got cold
I opened my eyes
and I saw the world
I saw myself and the world

OoooOoooOoooOooh....

My energy My energy
My energy My energy
I'm shining I'm shining through

This song speaks from a very limited, first-person perspective, in which the subject gradually awakens to a larger “world” and his relationship to it. It is through reflection on bodily sensations that he comes to see his experience as arising from a more fundamental, interconnected reality of which he is only a small part. The tones of the instruments in this song are meant to reflect the wavering, wiggly quality of visceral sensations, and the whistling backup vocals sound far above the deep instrumental sounds, suggesting a higher state of harmony that the subject has not yet attained.

4. “Heart” – from the Sanskrit “Anahata”

This *cakra* is located at the heart. It represents the metaphorical heart of the composition for an esoteric reason apart from the simple fact of its location; *anahata* means “unstruck,” and it refers to the “unstruck,” meaning metaphysical, sound of *nada*. This is the *cakra* at which the sacred sound of *nada* is heard.³⁵ The *anahata* is associated with air, the sense of touch, the penis, a black antelope as a

35 Feuerstein, 470.

symbol of swiftness, and the color green.³⁶ This *cakra* deals with relationships of all kinds. The song starts immediately following the end of “Gut,” and its lyric begins with a verse expressing loving devotion to all the people to whom the subject is close:

I'm in love with everyone around me
Can't take my eyes off of you
And why would I want to?

My heart beats when I see you in the street.
And when we chance to meet,
you sweep me off my feet

This verse is followed by a guitar solo, during which the instrumental accompaniment builds in intensity. The second verse begins to express the other side of relationship, which is the feeling of unbridgeable separation, compounded by the modern tragedy of the dislocation of social relationships into intangible, digitized, virtual worlds.

You're a picture floating on the air
I see you everywhere
But you're not really there

WE ARE LIGHTS PROJECTED ON A SCREEN
ELECTRIC SLEEP MACHINES
I'll see you in my dreams

This verse marks the turning point toward more serious subject matter, as the narrator begins to realize alienation and discord in the world. The bass solo after this verse ends on a sinking minor chord, and the electrical hum of all the instruments lingers on until the track fades out.

36 Ibid.

5. “Throat” – from the Sanskrit “*Vishuddha*”

The *vishuddha cakra* is situated at the throat, associated with blue, the element of ether, the auditory sense, the mouth and skin, and a white elephant, a symbol of pure strength.³⁷ This *cakra* concerns speech, communication, and the expression of ideas.³⁸ To me, this *cakra* took on a decidedly dark character, as I wrote this whole composition during a time of great social upheaval and ideological discord. Communication seemed to have broken down, and people seemed to be talking across purposes in the face of the economic crisis without listening to each other. I speculated on what would happen if all our sophisticated, technologically-dependent modes of communication broke down, and I wrote this poem, which I read over the track.

11 billion people
someday, suddenly
all develop
malignant cancers
at the same time.

some kind
of wave
wipes all the satellites
out of the sky.

it ripples
through every
nervous system
ripping
tissues
tearing
membranes
mutating

37 Feuerstein, 471.

38 Mercier, 233.

cells.

error

404

address not found.

No network coverage.

One moment, please.

We are having
technical difficulties.

The backing track to “Throat” is several overdubs of wordless singing I regularly practice with my dear friend and spiritual comrade Nathaniel. We refer to the practice as “OM-ing,” as we are both enamored with the Indian philosophy of sacred sound. OM-ing with Nat is one of the purest forms of communication I have ever discovered. We listen exclusively to each other, and the music evolves in a sort of conversation. I felt that the juxtaposition of the breakdown of ordinary communication with the purely spiritual communication of OM-ing with Nat created a transition from the worldly concerns of the lower *cakras* into the higher, more abstract, universal realms of the upper *cakras*.

6. “Mind” – from the Sanskrit “Ajna”

This *cakra* corresponds to the “third eye,” or the seat of intuition.³⁹ Its color is purple. This is the *cakra* at which teachings from the *guru*, or spiritual master, are received.⁴⁰ Therefore, this *cakra* does not deal with ordinary human ideas, such as those communicated in “Throat,” but rather more fundamental ideas accessible through contemplative practice. I interpreted this musically by doing away with the lyrics and simply chanting the fundamental mantra OM AH HUM, layering several tracks of my voice on top of one another. I used an auto-tune plugin to enhance the clarity of the track,

39 Feuerstein, 471.

40 Ibid.

as well as to introduce the ironic effect of this pop music technique and how artificial it sounds, and yet how universally appealing auto-tuned music is. That seemed to be some kind of Tantric metaphor.

7. “Crown” – from the Sanskrit “Sahasrara”

The *sahasrara cakra* is situated at the top of the head, and it transcends the body as the link between the limited, bodily self and the higher consciousness.⁴¹ At this point, the music leaves the ground and expands into abstract, synthesized, alien forms. The wisdom of this *cakra* is not limited to human understanding, so here the music loses formal coherence and must simply be felt. I demonstrated this by playing the whole composition in reverse, with the speed and pitch accelerating incrementally, and layering more and more absurd and abstract forms on top of it. As the forms grow deeper and more distant, they eventually retreat into silence. The final sound of the composition is an exhalation, which releases the breath inhaled at the beginning, as though the entire experience is contained within a single breath.

V. Vishuddha [“Throat,” or “Conclusion”]

This composition very nearly wrote itself, without my conscious intervention, and the above explication of its meaning and underlying principles is largely a retroactive description of a work that was already conceptually complete. Many of the interpretations this project forced me to make were based more on intuition than scholarly conceit, specifically those of the individual meanings of the *cakras*. The scholarly sources disagree considerably on these interpretations; even Feuerstein's books, which are totally definitive summaries of many aspects of yogic philosophy and practice, expound quite briefly and vaguely on the meanings of the individual *cakras*. I was forced to further interpret the *cakras* based on my own contemplative experiences working with those locations in my body;

41 Feuerstein, 472.

whatever thoughts, feelings, and energies arose in my practice with those *cakras* proved much more valuable to my musical interpretations of their meanings than any of the vague and conflicting summaries I read.

But as regards the overarching structure of the composition, as well as the musical techniques I employed from my study of *sitar*, my various scholarly studies in contemplative music have proven intellectually invaluable and emotionally enriching. The Vedic/Hindu theology of sound speaks to me of a gaping void in Western theologies and music theory alike. The fundamental lesson of my concentration has been that artful listening is a form of deep meditation. Everything from my subconscious psychological state as a city-dweller to my romantic relationship to my work ethic to my connection to my parents has been immeasurably strengthened by my ability to listen mindfully to the sounds of those experiences and the words of my friends, family, teachers, and neighbors. I feel that I have learned much more than a scholarly discipline; my concentration has taught me life lessons directly from the source material.

The most rewarding part of all, though, was the process of composing my own long work of music. I have achieved a lifelong artistic goal just by virtue of finishing such a project, and now that I truly know I can write music, the sky is the limit.

VI. Ajna [“Third eye,” or “Bibliography”]

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VII. Sahasrara [“Crown”]

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