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**Sourcing Within:
A Reflexive Investigation of
a Creative Path**

Gey Pin Ang

Practice-as-Research PhD: Drama

(Word count: 42 308)

**Under the supervision of Prof. Paul Allain
& Dr Angeliki Varakis-Martin**

ABSTRACT

My Practice-as-Research doctoral dissertation, *Sourcing Within: A Reflexive Investigation of a Creative Path* explores potential sources for performer training and the creative process in performance work. I draw extensively from my embodied research in Taijiquan and songs from my Chinese cultural source, which I have explored since the early 1990s. Stemming from this embodied practice, I examine the notion of “care of the self” since Greco-Roman time, and how it can enhance the work of the performer via her physical and vocal presence. My research methodology draws upon Robin Nelson’s writings on Practice as Research, Foucault’s ideas in *Practice of Self* and Clark Moustakas’s *Phenomenological Research*, primarily Heuristic Inquiry with the practitioner and her experiences as key resources.

In parallel to care of the self runs the idea of care of the craft as in Konstantin Stanislavski’s notion. What I argue for is a persistent practice on/through the source techniques that can lead to a unity of the bodymind, thus elevating the quality of the performer’s practice. My hands-on experiences have also nourished my pedagogical work with cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural performing practitioners through my *Sourcing Within* project (since 2006). All these human interactions and shared experiences have enriched and expanded the scope of my research, as evidenced in my writing.

Part of my Practice-as-Research is a creative synthesis entitled *Wandering Sounds* which I have created in collaboration with musician Nickolai D. Nickolov. Our collaboration explores the coalescence of text, song, music, and movement within a performance. The performance encompasses “musicality” and asks whether musical and performative integration can yield a renewed path for creativity. It aims at reaching audiences from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This piece has served as an important platform in my investigation of whether or not it is possible to transmit the insight gained in a performer’s self-practice to the audience in the performance context. *Wandering Sounds* has also facilitated my inquiry into whether or not the audience can follow the performer’s process of self-transformation by watching it in performance.

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CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

There has been a significant increase in Practice-as-Research (hereafter PaR for short) within academic institutions over the past decade or so. PaR entails research in which “practice is a key method of inquiry” and “is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry” (Nelson 2013: 8-9). Although embedded in traditional methodologies and concerns, PaR challenges long established modes of awarding an academic research degree. In view of the fact that an increasing number of performance practitioners have brought practice-based research into the academic domain, examination guidelines have evolved to include creative synthesis as part of doctoral study. The insertion of artistic work into higher education has pushed the boundaries of research assessment criteria. Yet performance-based artistic interactions happen always in ephemeral circumstances, which makes their documentation difficult. Furthermore, visual or written documentation seldom captures the impact of live performance. This inherent limitation asks us to look for alternative mode(s) of assessing and evidencing PaR in academia.

In this respect, phenomenological research, first conceived by Edmund Husserl early in the last century, is encouraging for practice-oriented research in arts and performance. The word phenomenon has its origin in the Greek *phainomenon*, “a thing appearing to view”; thus, phenomenology is “an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience.”¹ Therefore, research that emphasizes a phenomenological view focuses on the study of human experience as what it is, rather than what can be interpreted about it or what it represents.

There have been many developments in the methodology of phenomenological research. Among these, ‘heuristic inquiry’, first developed by humanistic psychologist Clark Moustakas, “is not concerned with discovering

¹ Sourced from Cambridge dictionary. Available from: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/phenomenon?s=ts> [Accessed 5 November 2014].

theories or testing hypotheses, but is concerned directly with human knowing and especially, with self-inquiry” (Hiles 2008: 2). This approach serves as a crucial reference point for and resonates closely with my research in which my performance-as-experience in my role as a practitioner predominantly determines the research as outcome.

As a locus of research for a performance practitioner, practice is not unfamiliar in the process of arts- and performance- making. Practice is an “action rather than thought or idea”; it is “the act of doing something regularly or repeatedly to improve your skill at doing it.”² This definition³ points to the essence of heuristic experience. I have come to experience practice as a methodology that engages systematic training in which I can perfect my craft as a performer. On a persistent basis, I, as a practitioner, am experiencing a bodymind⁴ (Zarrilli 2008) practice, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2 and to less of an extent Chapter 3, referring to the modes and content of my practice.

At the beginning of the last century, Konstantin Stanislavski established research on actor training “by way of work over oneself and over the material of the role” (2004: 571). In other words, the work on the actor as a person is parallel and indispensable to their work on the craft. There is evidence that Stanislavski included elements from yoga in his method of actors’ work (Tcherkasski 2012: 4), albeit without indicating this source.⁵ The theatre master’s methodology has remained central to actor training for more than a century in both the East and the West, from text-based to experimental theatre. Today, Eastern disciplines that privilege the self-awareness of the bodymind

² Sourced from Cambridge dictionary. Available from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/practice> [Accessed 11 November 2014].

³ For definitions of words in my thesis, I have sought the closest meaning(s) for each word from various dictionaries, and I do not rely on a single online source.

⁴ Throughout this thesis, I have used Zarrilli’s term “bodymind” to refer to a totality of body and mind, an embodied being. At times, I have chosen to separate ‘body’ and ‘mind’ to give emphasis to each component.

⁵ Stanislavsky’s hesitation to disclose yoga as a source for actor training comes from the fact that the Communist regime disfavored any practices linked to what could be framed as being of a spiritual nature.

such as yoga, Taijiquan⁶, meditation and qigong figure prominently in contemporary theatre as key elements of performance pedagogy and training. Transforming and improving oneself are equally dominant ideas in Western history. There is evidence that Eastern cultures have encouraged personal development for over two thousand years. Ancient and contemporary philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Michel Foucault have testified to the role of self-cultivation in human experience as far back in history as Greco-Roman civilization, recognized as the cradle of Western theatre.

Discovering a connection to our inner self and our innate potential are what has activated my inquiries into and through my own embodied practice for over twenty-five years. Drawing on this experience, I will argue that the work toward refining the self is parallel to that of acquiring mastery in the actor's craft. Without a consistent practice that is directed at enhancing the quality of the self, the craft of a performance practitioner can, over time, easily deteriorate to become mere technique. My research attempts to help me resist a common danger in contemporary theatre; as practitioners rush between projects and productions, they are robbed of time for self-training. The absence of periods for artistic and self-cultivation can lead to formulaic performances that are repeated lifelessly. Such conditions prevent both the practitioner and audiences from experiencing the performance act as a live and refreshing experience.

The PaR that I developed during the course of the doctoral program led me to ask whether or not performer training as work on the self is as significant for contemporary performance as it was at the time of Stanislavski. As I connected different disciplines and practices focused on work on the self, I repositioned my query from the perspective of intercultural theatre research. My experiences as a pedagogue and artist working in Europe and elsewhere for nearly two decades, prompted me to pose this question informed by my international and intercultural professional career.

⁶ Taijiquan is a soft form of Chinese martial arts. 'Tai ji', the supreme ultimate; 'quan', fist: the martial arts boxing. Throughout my writing, I have chosen to use Taijiquan, the full name of the original Chinese words 太极拳 though in different contexts it is written as T'ai chi ch'uan, t'ai chi, taiji, or tai chi. This may be the case in citations and testimonies used in my writing.

It is important that PaR is of use and interest for scholarly knowledge, that it does not just serve and follow personal whim or desire. Effective PaR yields to concerns shared across different disciplines of research. Other than self-experience, my PaR on the cultivation of the self has connected with the investigations of other cross-cultural performance practitioners via *Sourcing Within* workshops, mainly held in Europe. The performance titled *Wandering Sounds*, created in collaboration with musician Nickolai D. Nickolov⁷, represents the principal outcome and creative synthesis of my research. Developed over the course of my 3-year PhD study, *Wandering Sounds* stems from my self-practice. It explores the bridge between the disciplines of theatre and music, and aims at reaching audiences from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This piece, which I discuss in great detail in Chapter 4, has served as an important platform in my investigation of whether or not it is possible to transmit the insight gained in a performer's self-practice to the audience in a performance context. *Wandering Sounds* has also facilitated my inquiry into whether or not the audience can follow the performer's process of self-transformation by watching it in performance. I consider that workshops and performance are shared and collective human experiences; I include feedback from workshop participants (in Chapters 2 & 3) and performance spectators (in Chapter 4) as well as in my audio/video documentation (in Appendix C) because they reflect the phenomenological nature of my PaR.

2. Brief overview for the readers

My PaR stems from my embodied practice which has now existed for some two decades: investigating the modes through which I do my practical research, the sources that I draw upon, and the links between the chosen sources and myself. I position myself as a Practice-as-Researcher working against the danger of the disembodiment of the bodymind as both performer and person. As such, this writing is intended to be useful for practitioners as well as researchers

⁷ Nickolov, my life and work partner, is a Bulgarian musician based in Italy. See Chapter 4 on our collaboration in my PaR performance *Wandering Sounds*.

who have some degree of practice, as well as those who are newer to the area of embodied practice. Evidence is drawn from my own experience in practice, with literary references that best articulate and communicate my practical knowledge, ranging from performer training to the creative process.

I have organised my thesis into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction with historical context on PaR, the background to my practice, definitions of key terms, and the methodology of my research. In Chapter 2 on the practice of the physical work, I examine the notion of “self” within the experience of practice. This is then followed by demonstrating how my practice in Taijiquan finds and adopts a playful approach in my *Sourcing Within* workshops; which provides a bridge between this Eastern discipline and intercultural and interdisciplinary practitioners. Subsequently, in Chapter 3 on the practice of voice work, I take on a physiological and phenomenological examination of the voice. Thereafter, I present examples of my diverse modes of working with individuals in order better to understand how to deal with individual difficulties in the process of voice work. Finally, Chapter 4 offers some background on my home country Singapore, on my relationship with “home”, and what “memories” mean for me. This is then extended to the creative synthesis of my PaR, a performance titled *Wandering Sounds*, made in close collaboration with musician Nickolai D. Nickolov. Readers will find traces through which I have created different layers of materials and ways in which the audience’s experiences and feedback have influenced the creative process of the piece. To go with my thesis, I have prepared video and audio documentation to further assist and guide the reader. In addition, the documentation serves to clarify certain points in my writing through phenomenological reflections on actual practical moments during my training or my performance when I interacted with the audience.

3. Definition of key terms

Before the further discussion of my research, it is necessary to specify key words and terms used in my writing. First and foremost I should explain the significance of the words “source” and “self” in the actor’s creative process:

i) The etymology of “source” is

n. Mid-14c., "support, base," from Old French source "a rising, beginning, fountainhead of a river or stream" (12c.), fem. noun taken from past participle of *sourdre* "to rise, spring up," from Latin *surgere* "to rise" (see surge (n.)). Meaning "a first cause" is from late 14c., as is that of "fountain-head of a river." Meaning "written work (later also a person) supplying information or evidence" is from 1788 (*Dictionary.com*).⁸

“Sourcing” (the verb) means “to give or trace the source for, or to find or acquire a source” (*Dictionary.com*). I have deliberately chosen the above definitions which best suggest “sourcing” as it is used in my research, denoting the active possibility of finding something from a certain source, or letting that source rise and spring up. It suggests that it is through a person - the “self”, other than written work - from which evidence can be gathered.

“Source” is used throughout my writing in different contexts, always in relation to “self”, the person doing, such as:

- “Source” as in source techniques in the context of Phillip Zarrilli, originating from Eastern disciplines, including Kalaripayattu, yoga and Taijiquan. “*Source techniques*”, when mentioned in the context of my PaR, mainly refer to Taijiquan and songs from my Chinese cultural roots. These embodied disciplines are mostly passed from person to person, usually master to disciple, teacher to student.
- “Source” as in the actor’s creative capacity involves one’s imagination, associations and reflections, within oneself as well as in relation to other co-actors.

⁸ Sourced from Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. Available from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/source> [Accessed 3 March, 2017].

ii) For the word “self”,⁹ I have adopted a meaning which essentially expresses the main concern of my research, referring to “a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action” (*Oxford Dictionaries*). “Care of self” indicates one’s innate capacity to take care of oneself with understanding and realisation of one’s progress in terms of the quality of one’s practice (as in my research focus). “Self” as a term can be found in the following contexts throughout my writing:

- Foucault’s *self-care* (See 5.6);
- *Self-inquiry* as in a heuristic approach (See 5.3);
- *Self as the person doing* in Practice-as-Research (See 5.8);
- *Work on the self* in parallel to work on craft as in Stanislavski’s context (See 5.7); and
- *Non-self, or self-less*, as in the context of Buddhism (See Chapter 2 *The self as embodied in a practice*).

Readers will be guided to understand the “self” with greater detail when each of these contexts is introduced in later paragraphs in this and the following chapters.

Embedded in a practice standpoint, my research finds a close relationship between “source” (source technique) and “self” (the person doing) in the creative work of an actor. (See more in *The invaluable relation between the source and the self* in Chapter 2, and developed further in Chapters 3 and 4) Early in the last century, Stanislavski had already disguised the Eastern technique of yoga within his system of the actor’s work (Tcherkasski 2012: 4). He pointed to the potential within an actor, their inner life – the real practice that each artist should strive for, as the essence of art and the foundation of the theatre. This relationship between “source” and the “self” is equally important in Grotowski’s research in which “sources [...] present themselves as a kind of work on one’s self...” (Kumiega 1985: 231). I find a parallel in U Theatre, Taiwan (See 3.2), another crucial influence in the initial years of my theatre practice. The

⁹ Sourced from Oxford Dictionaries. Available from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/self> [Accessed 3 March, 2017].

company's consistent striving for quality in each performer through practising source techniques such as Taijiquan and meditation, strongly appealed to me while I was a young actress in the late 1980s. All these practitioners were searching in their own system for a favourable condition that could nourish the soul of the actor, in order that such a connection becomes deeply rooted and can flourish in their artistic life. They had (or have) a "shared interest in non-Western conceptions of consciousness that foreground the relationship between mind and body [which] significantly informed their respective investigations of performance practice" (Magnat 2014: 21). It is verifiable that an Eastern source technique, attested for many centuries, has been proven to be beneficial to the work of Western as well as Eastern actors: this can be seen as an invaluable thread linking the self to the source, and being resourceful for the self. It is with a similar concern that my PaR revolves around my work as an actress alongside my work on my self rooted in Taijiquan practice, a concern I have transmitted to intercultural performance practitioners via my *Sourcing Within* project.

In addition, I consider it important to provide brief reasons for why other words in my thesis title have been chosen, as follows:

iii) The original inspiration for "within" came from my reading of *To Live Within* (Anirvan, Reymond and Needleman 2007) many years ago. It has the sense of being in contact with one's own inner self.

iv) The word "reflexive" draws from the context of the practice of the self, regarding having potentially transformed oneself in terms of quality. I will examine this link through Foucault's notion of "care of the self" in later paragraphs.

v) "Creative path" is a path that allows one to search for quality in the self via a performance. Creativity within oneself is where our breathe, or chi 气 (as in Taijiquan), can flow along with and close to the essence of the self.

4. Questioning Research

4.1. The research questions

My PaR explores potential sources for performer training and the creative process in performance work. Stemming from my embodied practice, in the dissertation I examine if and how the notion of “care of the self” can enhance the work of the performer via her¹⁰ physical and vocal presence. Furthermore, can my understanding of “care of the self” for performers, which I principally draw from the practice of Taijiquan and songs¹¹ from my Chinese cultural origin, be transmittable to practitioners of diverse cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds in the course of my pedagogical project *Sourcing Within*?

Part of my PaR is a performance titled *Wandering Sounds* created in collaboration with Nickolov, who holds a degree in Electronic Music from the “Luigi Cherubini” Conservatoire of Music, in Italy. Our collaboration explores the coalescence of text, song, music, and movement in performance. Its research encompasses “musicality” (Roesner 2014: 5) in performance (see Chapter 4). In this branch of my investigation, I ask if the unearthing of traditional performative sources can yield a renewed path for creativity and be applicable in our contemporary theatre and music context. As the borders of music and theatre in performance creations are ambiguous, might there be helpful guidelines for musical experimentation in theatrical work? Stemming from questions around my interest in a mode of speaking-singing in this writing, I examine approaches to the embodiment of storytelling, singing and musicking. What intrigues me is whether or not music, which often transcends language and culture differences, can be experienced as a source that exists within oneself. Can music hold the potential to elevate a performer and can it become a theatrical act

¹⁰ I have chosen to use “her” in most parts of my writing, so as not to repeat numerous “his/her”; this might possibly ease the reading.

¹¹ See Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento’s *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor’s Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge* in which my earlier work on songs from my Chinese cultural roots is examined. In Chapter 4, I will also trace this earlier research based on my Chinese dialect via my leading of Theatre OX in Singapore in the 1990s. [Note for reader: My current thesis is not an account of my professional trajectory. While I may refer to the different phases of my performative works, they serve as practical examples to support my discussions, and will not come in chronological order in my thesis].

that connects performer and audience in a non-discursive way? How might the audiences of my PaR performances be influenced in the process of watching? Can these human interactions and shared experiences enrich and expand the scope of my research?

4.2. The question of subject/object relationship in my research

In an attempt to respond to my PaR questions, I began to challenge the dualism of mind and body from my own understanding. I probed into questions such as

- What kind of researcher am I, one with a performance practice background?
- How can I be objective in my research, when the locus of the research is the person who is conducting the research (myself)?
- Will I be able to investigate the practitioner in me (the object of my research) as separate from the researcher in me (the subject of my investigation)?

I tend to dissociate the performer from the researcher in me when I pose such questions. The process is similar to the one when I separate the actor from the director in me while working on a solo piece. Each of these facets of myself is a separate subject that serves specific functions yet at times they are all correlated. Just as is the case of the actor and director in a solo project, there lies an intrinsic and delicate connection between the researcher and the performer. The more I look into myself, the more I perceive the subtle relationship between the mind and the body (hence the use of Zarrilli's term *bodymind*), the intellect and the being, all of which interconnect within me. All these separate, different, and yet interconnected aspects of my Self are unavoidable and natural. In my PaR, the performer and the researcher co-exist to balance, exchange, and communicate with the different potentials in me. The dynamic between these different selves brings together instinct and intellect, corporeal and mental faculties.

The process of gaining knowledge about research through practice-based performative work cannot come from external examination. As a researcher and artist, I need to participate, engage with, *and do* the creative process. At the same time, active observation requires an extraordinary effort; such a mode of experience asks that I do not focus on giving my experience an exterior account and appearance that is not an echo of the experience itself.

A practice that engages self-questioning – as is the case with the Eastern disciplines that I have experienced, among them the focus on mindfulness stressed by the tradition of Buddhism – can seek answers for questions that are at the root of the human experience. The practice of these disciplines becomes a practical methodology that aims at capturing a better understanding of the human mind while utilising one’s capacity to be mindful. A phenomenon that human beings are able to experience is that of thoughts that are constantly changing; they come and go, and appear and disappear from us. This realization allows us to imagine a constantly moving object; and then, in the next moment, we may grasp that the visualization of such a moving object brings us the necessary awareness for the contemplation that the phenomenon also presents the observer with a “lack” – the object is never in place or in a place. It is as if to imagine the sensation provoked by this disappearing object allows us to project this lack as a phenomenon that can also happen with the Self.¹² In a heuristic inquiry (see more in 3.3. of this chapter), I employ self-questioning into my practice, into my experience as an object of study and into myself as the subject of the research. They become transparent and illuminating as I connect deeper to the research and everything that is related to it.

¹² This idea is based on a talk given by Kelsang Deden, a resident Buddhist nun at Jampel Kadampa Meditation Centre, in Canterbury, which I attended on October 13, 2014, on “Sutra of the Four Noble Truths of Buddha”.

4.3. Self-questioning¹³ – the beginning to the research

People engage in a regular practice to give form to their impulse toward self-discovery, growth, and empowerment; those who sustain a practice continue to develop the capacity to investigate and learn. As such, there is a great distance between the standpoints of a practitioner and a non-practitioner of any specific practice. For a practitioner, awareness is of her own lack – introspecting within herself. For a non-practitioner, her eyes turn outward for understanding to a foreign and unfamiliar phenomenon she is yet to know. However, if the intention of the non-practitioner’s questioning comes from a simple curiosity – like that of a child who asks, “Why do birds fly?” (perhaps the child wishes she could fly one day as well) – then the non-practitioner’s question arises out of aspiration and empathy towards the other in a way that remind us of the “second-person approach” (Varela and Shear 1999: 8). The drive is for something one wants to be able to or at least wishes to do. Since she knows that she does not know how to do that action but still wishes for an opportunity to do it, the non-practitioner might begin to listen like a child to find out how she may discover flight as a phenomenon. In this trajectory, the way of questioning as a child softens the interrogation and judgemental eye on the phenomenon. This approach gives rise to ample space within one’s bodymind that opens the inquiry to aspiration, however impossible the act of flying might seem to be. I find this proximity in observing a practice to be the most appropriate one.

It is important to pay attention to each moment in one’s contact with the self’s potential. Techniques or disciplines coming from longstanding cultural sources, some 2,500 years old, are beneficial to this process. What is important for a performer like me is to draw elements from these disciplines so that they may work as models for my research and practice. This is not to say that these

¹³ I attended the *Effective Researcher Program*, in October 2014, a research workshop designed for postgraduate researchers offered by the University of Kent. The instructor of the workshop raised the concern: “As a researcher, we usually ask “what” in relation to our own research, but people who do not know our research, ask ‘why’”. The question of “what” and “why” highlights precisely the phenomenologically different perspective between a practitioner and someone who is outside of that practice.

elements are drawn without modification or adaptation to our current needs—including my own as a practitioner and thus the subject of my heuristic research.

5. Methodology/approach

5.1. Practice as the core of self

The PaR that I present here is the culmination of my experience as a performance practitioner for some 25 years. After completing my A-Level education, I began my artistic life in the late 1980s in Singapore as an apprentice in “Practice Theatre Ensemble” (now “The Theatre Practice”). The company strongly believes in the importance of ‘practice’ in every aspect of theatre-making. As a new company member I was promptly required to possess efficiency and competence in every area of theatre production. Over the course of the two-year apprenticeship I worked in ticketing, stage management, administration, props making, acting, school outreach tours, as well as the core company members’ study group on various arts and humanity subjects and interests. Initiative and self-motivation became absolutely crucial to my learning and knowing, and I acquired skills through trial and error. My practice stems from this foundation, and has since been established through a process of self-investigation and discovery. My knowledge about theatre and performance is centered on my direct relationship to doing and experiencing. Practice is the foundation of my knowledge of performance. It is a knowledge grounded in embodiment (see Chapter 2), embedded in corporeal and vocal experience (see Chapter 3). Through experiential processes I have come to understand more deeply the meanings of the written or spoken works I have encountered in my professional life. Practice lies at the very core of my research, as the questions I wish to investigate cannot find their answers outside the methodology and experiences afforded by practice.

I utilized *Sourcing Within* workshops as contexts for furthering my queries. As a pedagogue, my research aims to instill an experiential understanding of “practice” in each and every performer, regardless of a group

of participants' cultural and disciplinary differences. I have worked with performance practitioners from different disciplinary, cultural, and language backgrounds that have had a direct impact on my PaR. These diverse practitioners have also provided insightful responses that are reflected in my writing. In a sense, I consider them to be collaborators in this project. They come from the fields of theatre, dance, music, film, anthropology, physics, psychology, education and more; most importantly, they share experience in performance and the arts. Without them, my practice would not have come to full fruition. I initially planned to conduct a survey with participants (and spectators), but quickly saw that each individual could contribute a unique perspective that no standard questionnaire could do justice to; furthermore, to insist in the initial plan would mean to downplay the phenomenological input of this PaR. The input I received from the participants' individual experiences demonstrated (or not) that gaining knowledge of the self in artistic practice could greatly stimulate one's creativity. These testimonies, which I collected in writing, helped me evaluate and determine whether *experiencing the self* in artistic training is a substantial and credible path toward honing the craft and raising the quality of one's performance practice. These first-hand accounts act as a necessary step in understanding any practice.

5.2. A Phenomenological Perspective in Performance as Research

My PaR is based on an interactive and inter-subjective experience between others and myself. It engages the embodiment of specific cultural sources aimed at a process of self-knowledge. My practical knowledge is rooted in Eastern disciplines directed at work on the self, and finds affinity with heuristic inquiry approaches. My performance experience is informed by work on the self that is directed at raising awareness of bodymind via techniques such as Taijiquan, and the singing of traditional songs. I note that the aforementioned techniques come from Chinese culture, my culture of origin.¹⁴ In my research, I have explored the key principles behind these practices as cultural sources, my experience and

¹⁴ My paternal grandparents migrated to Singapore from Fujian province in Southern China in the early 1930s. I was born and raised in Singapore. Chinese was my first language in school.

growth through encountering them, and the elements that I have found useful in pedagogical and performance work.

Over the years, it has become clear to me that one can only gain self-knowledge by actually *doing* a given discipline (such as Taijiquan, yoga, meditation) or live performance. The depth and knowledge that stems from the experience of practice cannot be transmitted from one person to another [or by a third party]; someone else's account cannot replace this unique and very personal experience, though the performer's embodiment of it and its process may be communicated to an audience.

Clark Moustakas' view on phenomenological research methods provides a solid foundation for PaR projects such as mine. While phenomenological study puts emphasis "on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts", it emphasizes also a "search for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations" (Moustakas 1994: 21). The importance of this twofold methodology – the parallel consideration of the holistic experience and its meanings – in artistic research rests on its applicability to the experience of the investigation's primary subject: the researcher and her lived experience as a phenomenon. From my standpoint as a practitioner, such a method of research is most valuable for people who *have, are* or *will be* experiencing something. Prior to encountering Moustakas' work, my lived experience of practice alone had to prove "self-evident." His writings on phenomenological methodology have provided me with a theoretical frame that I can utilize to better communicate my research. I find that his points illuminate what I have learned in the studio and have come to realize that I had unknowingly been using the principles of his methodology in my practice over the course of several years.

My position is that a practice or training that involves various levels of *experiencing* is necessary before I can engage in the lived and live act of performance; I grow – as an artist and as a person – at each phase of these experiences. It is through practice that I am able to experience *something*, and with experience, I grow. What makes me grow is of great importance, a key

criterion in my research that also falls in line with Moustakas' writings on phenomenological inquiry (1994: 172). What is the object that my "self" should act upon? In the musician's case, their chosen instrument is "a separate object for the self to act on and through" (Condrón 2014: 8). Unlike a musician, the actor's "object [is] the 'Self'. One is one's own instrument" as Condrón has pointed out in his Masters thesis *Acting Every Day - Towards a Solo Self-Practice* (2014). Following this train of thought, a musician needs to practice his instrument to develop stronger skills. As such, the actor has no other alternative than to practice their own instrument – in my case, to practice with my Self – to raise the level of their craft.

A similar investigation has long been highly associated with the performer in ancient China and such an approach relates to my own PaR. In Chinese, the word 优 (pronounced 'u'), "[means] 'excellence'... [and in] ancient China, the same word also meant 'performers'." ¹⁵ The use of this word to denote both excellence and performer reveals an ancient wisdom and remarkable concern with quality in the work of a performer. The Taiwanese U Theatre chose 优 for its name. ¹⁶ Company performers train in meditation, Taijiquan, drumming from Zen practice, and traditional Chinese percussion techniques. It is no accident that U Theatre has chosen to associate its work with 优; the decision indicates the company members' great emphasis and conscious effort toward transforming the level of their craft and honing the performer's bodymind via a focus on quality.

I was deeply inspired by U Theatre when I first sought a consistent training for Theatre OX (1995-2007), a group that I founded and led alongside other performers. Company members began by practising yoga and meditation – we kept these practices for our first year and decided to abandon them as part of our group training. I note that at various times I returned to meditation as part of

¹⁵ Word sourced from U-Theatre, Taiwan. Available from: <http://www.utheatre.org.tw/eng/engabout.htm> [Accessed 10 October 2014].

¹⁶ U Theatre's artistic director Liu Ruo-Yu (formerly known as Liu Ching-Min), who was my first mentor and who introduced me to Grotowski's research, has had a strong influence on me. She attended Grotowski's Objective Drama Research in Irvine, California in 1985. After that, she was invited by Practice Theatre Ensemble (now Theatre Practice) to Singapore in 1987 to lead us as a group of actors in a seven-week workshop.

my individual training. Differently, Taijiquan has remained an essential part of the group training and it has become of great significance for my PaR to date. Not only do I practice Taijiquan, but I also introduce it to the intercultural practitioners and students who attend my workshops and classes.¹⁷ My pedagogical approach is to devise lively ways for practitioners of mixed cultural backgrounds to experience a link between self-discovery and their creative potential in their work on Taijiquan. While my approach to assisting participants in their individual processes embodying this Chinese discipline is playful, that does not mean that I do not expect each actor to pay great attention to the quality of its execution. Rather, with a spirit of play, many have found joy in structuring their work and developing their creative expression.

Though I am not always conscious of how its influence translates into artistic work, my long practice of Taijiquan has considerably informed my way of performing. In the following chapters, I will examine the connection between the Chinese discipline and my work as a performer in light of and with the addition of further insights from “descriptions of [the performance and workshop] experience through [the] first-person accounts [of myself, and of spectators and workshop participants]” (Moustakas 1994: 21). Moustakas’ point that phenomenological methodology should attend to “the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts” (1994: 21) resonates with my experience as a practitioner. He validates my perception that one’s self-knowledge may act as the best source from which a practitioner such as myself can learn. From my observation and conversations with workshop participants, I have come to see that my findings and realizations can motivate others to engage in reflection and search within for resources that are innate in them (See *Testimonies* in Appendix B).

¹⁷ I refer to the intercultural participants of the workshops I have led in my *Sourcing Within* project from 2006 onwards.

5.3. From the Standpoint of a Heuristic Inquiry

From the field of phenomenological research, I have found that a heuristic inquiry method is particularly useful for my investigation. The linguistic root of the term *heuristic* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of a given experience, and develops methods and procedures for its further investigation and analysis (Moustakas 1990: 9). Here I will pinpoint the core premise of this methodology:

The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries (Moustakas 1990: 9).

I approach my practice-based work on the self – that is, my embodiment of Taijiquan or singing of songs from my cultural roots – as a process of heuristic inquiry. This philosophical frame transforms the practice of such disciplines into a mode of or path for knowing my thoughts, emotions, needs, and ultimately knowing my *self*. The application of a heuristic view in PaR considers my experiential understanding of the practice, its exercises and movements, its songs and texts. In short, it privileges my direct experience of performative elements for what they are, rather than an analytical approach to capturing them outside of my process.

Time is a key factor for the practitioner's continuous training and practice, and personal discipline is also key to PaR. Similarly to what Moustakas outlines about heuristic inquiry, the process of my PaR

Is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey (1990: 14).

Active investigation is at the forefront in PaR, as it is “through exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in active experience, one is able to get inside the question, become one with it, and thus achieve an understanding of it” (Moustakas 1990: 15). In pursuit of a heuristic approach to my PaR, I find myself awakening a creative potential that until that moment was unknown to me and unconscious; getting to know myself as a holistic bodymind; and realising I have needs and lacks that have long not been attended to.¹⁸ My practice has raised my awareness of my surroundings and myself; it takes place day after day, and so my awareness has grown and has become one of heightened sensibility and attention as I engage in the performance act and move through life. What is important to this process is the emphasis of *it* and *how*, the experience itself and the mode in which I do something, rather than the *why* I do such and such. This quest and interest in my own instrument and in *myself* has opened up an unknown territory that renews my relationship with myself. They bring me new perspectives on my connection with that which is around me, modes of being, and perceptions of time.

5.4. A Self-Reflexive Approach

I have also selected methodologies that suggest a reflexive relationship with one’s own doing process. In *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher – Using Our Selves in Research*, Kim Etherington suggests that “Reflexive methodologies seem to be close to the hearts and minds of practitioners who value using themselves in *all* areas of their practices” (2004: 16). My practice is best served by a model of reflexive investigation, as I connect with the idea that “We need to ask ourselves where we locate ourselves as researchers in the field, how much we reveal of ourselves, and how we reconcile our different roles and positions” (Ruth Behar in Etherington 2004: 25). The emphasis in my practice is on paying attention to each moment in the process of *doing*, on executing my training or performance. The importance lies in one’s reflection about one’s practice. Constant assessment is necessary to one’s practice, and it is essential to adapt to

¹⁸ To have a glimpse of this process of my work through songs, please read more in Chapter 3.

my changing needs as a practitioner. Perhaps the work of an actor is so close to the work on one's self that a practitioner inevitably needs to know that

The idea of the Self that is our real self is not meant to remain only an idea. It is meant to call us to an entirely new kind of life within the everyday life we are now living. It is a representation in words referring to an actual force that occupies a very central place within the scale of forces in the universe itself. The idea tells us that a human being is meant to live in conscious, palpable relationship to this force – not to settle only for thinking about it, or feeling great interest in it or a sense of wonder about it (Anirvan, Reymond, and Needleman 2007: ix).

A sense of connection that one has with one's own self is relatively unknown in scholarly approaches to knowledge. I find this to be a challenging yet so very important perspective: to go past an intellectual level of discourse when observing research that is rooted in practice. It is necessary to employ an empirical approach to a practice in relation to one's self so as to convey the entire realm of new experience and the actual phenomenon of self-knowledge.

5.5. The second person approach in practice

Holistic approaches to physical and vocal training stemming from Eastern philosophy have widely been used as pedagogical approaches at institutions of higher education and other professional training venues in the contemporary performance world (Boston *et al.* 2009). The value of these holistic methodologies is evident in the work of practitioners who have experienced and benefited from processes that privilege bodymind work. Many of them transmit what they have learnt to younger generations, and so they contribute to renewing the value of these ancient Eastern sources in contemporary artistic contexts. They demonstrate how ancient Eastern forms remain valuable methods of self-investigation and can add to contemporary performance pedagogy.

Perhaps paradoxically, these Eastern sources and techniques are renewed through the experiences of the Western practitioners. My position is that their experiments with Eastern practices and methodologies – both with the aim of

creating performance and in their pedagogies – have productively widened the scope of PaR, produced new knowledge about the actor’s work, and crossed cultural boundaries. Similarly, I connect my work as a pedagogue to the findings I have learnt in my embodied practice as a performer – I detail this aspect of my PaR in the chapters *The Practice of Physical Work* and *The Practice of Voice Work*. In my own experience, many of these Eastern approaches often call for the researcher’s empathy and mindfulness that can be diffused towards the so-called “second person” (Varela and Shear 1999: 8) approach; with “a curious intermediate position...in becoming familiar with a particular method” (Varela and Shear 1999: 8). This intermediate perspective makes possible an “open, connected and receptive” (Middleton and Chamberlain 2012: 14) experience for any researcher to then write about an “object”. This approach demands that the research subject – the practitioner – is also its object of investigation, so that the investigation is directed at the task of getting to ‘know’ the object rather than to ‘know about’ the object (Middleton and Chamberlain 2012: 13). The methodology of using the direct experience of Eastern sources as proposed by Varela, as well as Middleton and Chamberlain, reaffirms and is illuminating and stimulating for my practice. This notion of “second person”, for me as a practitioner, clearly conveys the essence of my work. I find that this empathy position opens up a bridge to the understanding of a practice as “know-how” (see more in 3.8. *How to Articulate Practice-as-Research* of this chapter) and makes the “know-why” more thorough and meaningful to my writing about my practice.

5.6. Practice of self

Among the various frames that support research into self-knowledge, I have been drawn to Michel Foucault’s philosophical writings with regard to a “practice of the self” (2000: 282). I came across the work of Foucault at the start of my PaR and thus geared my investigation toward his writings about practice that emphasize “taking care of oneself” (2000: 285) – I am not particularly interested in the philosopher’s consideration of an ethical sense of logos or rules

of conduct. Foucault's claims about "care of self" intrigued me largely due to my own interest in the practice of Eastern meditative disciplines directed toward the development of self-awareness. What is striking for me in Foucault's introduction is the French philosopher's note that in the Greco-Roman world "care of the self" reflected individual freedom – or civic liberty, up to a point – and so stood as ethical behaviour (2000: 284). Foucault explains that

Among the Greeks and Romans – especially the Greeks – concern with the self and care of the self were required for right conduct and the proper practice of freedom, in order to know oneself [se connaitre] – the familiar aspect of the *gnothi seauton* – as well as to form oneself, to surpass oneself, to master the appetites that threaten to overwhelm one (2000: 285).

The philosopher posited ethics as "the conscious [reflexive] practice of freedom", "the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection" (2000: 284). In this work, Foucault highlights "*ethos* of freedom as a way of caring for others" (2000: 287). When mentioning Socrates as an example, Foucault says that "He is the man who cares about the care of others..." (2000: 287). Foucault then went on to state that

A person who took proper care of himself would, by the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others...The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior (2000: 287).

According to Foucault's logic, "Taking care of oneself requires knowing [connaitre] oneself. Care of the self is, of course, knowledge [connaissance] of the self--this is the Socratic-Platonic aspect..." (2000: 285) and he presses the reader to recognise that "the individual soul is to turn its gaze upon itself, to recognise itself in what it is and, recognizing itself in what it is, to recall the truths that issue from it and that it has been able to contemplate..." (2000: 285). Foucault believed and recognised that the Greco-Roman concern with care of the self in order to know oneself was a foundation for the citizens' right conduct and the proper practice of freedom. Foucault refers to Descartes in his argument:

It is remarkable to find in the *Meditations* this same spiritual concern with the attainment of a mode of being where doubt was no longer possible, and where one could finally know [connait] [...] this mode of being is defined in terms of knowledge, and that philosophy in turn is defined in terms of the developing of the knowing [connaisant] subject, or of what qualifies the subject as such. From this perspective, it seems to me that philosophy superimposes the functions of spirituality upon the ideal of a grounding for scientificity (2000: 294).

Foucault argued that “scientificity” is necessary for a concrete, solid, and accessible mode of articulating a practice of self. My close reading of Foucault has allowed me to establish a strong connection between this thoughts on “care of the self” and my PaR, and serves as a basis for the positioning of my research. This stems from an Asian context and culture but unfolds in the environment of European theatre and research. My experience as an artist-researcher is that the concept of practice as closely linked to the care and investigation of the self is obviously not a new one, but is little discussed or acknowledged in contemporary academic circles. It is important to me to articulate how the benefits of a practice of self are not limited to religious or health concerns, but is also very useful in the arts and humanities as well. Foucault’s analysis has helped me to reflect on my performance practice in order to:

- Determine my position as a practitioner-researcher on the care of self;
- Understand the link that I as a performer find with certain disciplines linked to my cultural sources;
- Focus on my relationship with these sources so that I may awaken the self and the being in me as a performer; and
- Regard the contribution that I can bring to contemporary performer training, pedagogy, and performance through my embodied research.

5.7. Practice of craft

While I found myself deeply inspired by Foucault’s arguments, my goal is to expand such ideas via my PaR. I intend to explore the precise axis of the relationship that exists between a practice of care of the self and that of the

actor's craft close to Stanislavski's use of the term.¹⁹ I will elaborate my understanding of Stanislavski's notion of work on oneself within the actor's craft, under *The invaluable relation between the source and the self* in Chapter 2, and develop further in Chapter 3 and 4. Through long practice, I have come to understand the importance of work on oneself despite a vocational and industrial emphasis in our arts education and professions. A century ago, Stanislavski was already aware of this necessity and problem and had pointed to a pathway for our younger generations of artists where they had to keep working on themselves: "[N]othing can fix and pass on to our descendants those inner paths of feeling, that conscious road to the gates of the unconscious, which, and which alone, are the true foundation of the art of the theatre" (Stanislavsky 2004: 571). He perceived that the inner paths – the actor's own inner journeys cannot be passed on and conveyed fully to someone else except through one's truthful practice; these are where the essence of art, and true foundation of theatre can be found. The master further reiterated that among all elements, the one of real importance is "the play of imagination and creation of creative faith" and "[the] childlike naiveté and the sincerity of artistic emotion" (2004: 467). He accentuated that a "favourable condition" (2004: 462) is to be found, and through his lifelong research, he had realised that the "creative mood...[is through] spiritual and physical mood" (2004: 462). Stanislavski was searching for a system in which an appropriate circumstance can make it possible to nourish the soul of the actor whereby inspiration can flow. This "favourable condition" would not be miraculously present but through perseverance of a training for each actor, whether experienced or a novice. Of those predecessors as well as master performers of the Chinese traditional theatre, many had

¹⁹ I first came across Stanislavski's work on "physical action" during my 7 weeks of workshop in Grotowski's Objective Drama Research led by James Slowiak in University of Irvine, California, in 1992. (See more in Lisa Wolford's *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*.) Later, during my residency works at Grotowski's Workcenter in Pontedera, 1994 & 1998-2006, I further understood "physical action" through my work as an actor under the guidance of Mario Biagini and Thomas Richards. (See Thomas Richards' *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*.) I will draw upon my previous performative experiences at the Workcenter but it is not the focus of my current thesis' research. For more information, please see *The Bridge – Developing Theatre Arts* (1999-2006). Available from:

<http://www.theworkcenter.org/about-the-workcenter/research/the-bridge-developing-theatre-arts-1999-2006/> [Accessed 26 August 2016].

trained for their entire life. Perhaps seeing my connection to the Chinese tradition, Grotowski had once said to me during my first year at his Workcenter in Italy in 1994:

If you do not train for a day, you know yourself;
If you do not train for two days, your colleagues know; and
If you do not train for three days, your audiences know (Ang 1994, personal diary notes).

These words have influenced my own practice over the years, and continue to live within my work and that I do with others. It is up to me to find strategies in my pedagogies and training to foster such an attitude and care.

5.8. How to Articulate Practice-as-Research

The field of PaR immediately poses questions with regard to the precise terms and language one should utilize to write about the experiential process. I have often asked myself what words I should employ to articulate my practical experience as a performer. Robin Nelson's approach to defining PaR has helped find partial answers. He emphasizes the optimum connection between the researcher and practitioner. He argues for the value of the practitioner engaged in PaR within and for the academic context. His position is undoubtedly of key importance to the study of performance as it irrevocably depends on practice carried by the act of doing. PaR necessitates a *doer*.

In his article "Practice-as-research and the Problem of Knowledge", Nelson states that "the 'problem of knowledge' has been a topic for debate in the Western philosophical tradition since Plato" (2006: 105). He points out that an emphasis on "mind as the sole locus in certain knowledge" has empowered the "Western intellectual tradition" (2006: 105). Nelson further examines the embodied nature of PaR projects. He raises the issue of whether the physical product of PaR might be sufficiently disseminated without its articulation through words, be they spoken or written (Nelson 2006: 105). I agree with his point, but at the same time am equally convinced that the written and

performance components of my PaR, including audio-visual documentation, are interdependent and thus inseparable. Without either of the two, the understanding of my PaR study would not be complete.

Among Nelson's different investigations into/or the links between knowledge and practice is "reason appealing to a *priori* truth (by definition agreed in advance)" (2006: 106). In this statement, Nelson acknowledges that he privileges the curiosity in us, as human beings, to always want to know something before doing it. Such a disposition or logic has been present throughout the history of Western culture. On the other hand we encounter the concern with a kind of "know-how" that points to a way of doing and experiencing that welcomes the theorising of knowing. An example of how the term "know-how" may be applied to the performer's craft is best illustrated by Pears' question of "knowing how to ride a bicycle" (Nelson 2006: 9). One cannot take a bicycle on the road without having actual knowledge of how to ride it. Similarly, without the lived experience of performing, I cannot say that I know how to perform. Such a definition of "know-how" empathetically resonates with me in my ceaseless experiencing as both human being and performer.

Any practice definitely needs both empirical and theoretical frames so that it may be transmitted. The question that I often contemplate is *to whom* should my practice be communicated? My sense is that it will support those who might have concerns similar to mine and who conduct practices in theatre or other fields that have parallels with my research. The transmission of my PaR may also be useful for researchers who may not be able to actually do this practice but need it for reasons that pertain to their own fields of investigation. These could be, for example, anthropologists, philosophers, and so forth. There is also the case of the person who, unable or uninterested in performing, still feels compelled to watch others perform; or someone who does not know how to sing, but who wants to – maybe *needs* to – listen to songs. Such people remind us of the fact that human beings have a quest for experience. A phenomenological understanding of performance research as an important part of human experience helps us grasp the value of PaR.

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 2 THE PRACTICE OF PHYSICAL WORK

Part I The phenomenology of a practice

Back to the body

Having established in my introductory chapter the key methodologies underpinning my practice-based research, I will now turn to the actual work which I have been practising and researching. This chapter is comprised of *Part I, The phenomenology of a practice* and *Part II, The experiential practice*. My PaR has investigated the performer's physical and vocal work, from the process of training to performance. Based on my embodied experience primarily sourced through Taijiquan and songs from my Chinese cultural roots, my study intends to reveal potential and useful tools found through practising these source techniques, and examine how they might enhance the quality of the performer in the act of performing.

The practice in relation to these source techniques that I have experienced has primarily been enacted through a mode of transmission from a master practitioner to a novice. It involves a process of heuristic learning and enquiry that emphasizes the practitioner's bodily participation and experiential involvement. As mentioned in my Introduction, the source techniques that I have encountered in the past or which are currently on going emphasize body knowledge and experiencing. While Taijiquan continues to be my main practice and the emphasis of my research writing, at times I may draw on my experiences such as in mindfulness meditation (Buddhism).

Today, many Eastern source techniques have been practised globally despite their cultural or social origins. Drew Leder, a professor of Western and Eastern philosophy who combines research in medicine and spirituality, pointed out even as long ago as in 1990 that we are in a "disembodied" (1990: 3) mode of living dominated by machines and technology. In response to our "decorporealized existence" (Leder 1990: 3), these source techniques have become popularised by calling for our attention to how we might get back into

our bodies. They have been utilized increasingly in various fields of research including medicine, cognitive science, neurosciences, and psychology, though I do not have space to explore this further here. Likewise, performing arts training and practice have incorporated and considered such resources that can have a lasting effect on the performer's bodymind. Having been a practitioner and a pedagogue in performing arts education for many years, I would argue that while our professional and institutional systems stress the pre-eminence of skills and techniques, it is equally important to allow every performer the time and space for the daily practice of rejuvenation. "The undertaking of [the] bodymind training practice certainly can result in a changing of a conceptualization of the sense of 'self'" (Daboo 2009: 124). Care for the self should be balanced proportionally with the training of skills.

I hope to shed light on my embodied practice found through and nourished by the resourceful means, primarily stemming from Taijiquan and songs of my tradition, which have had influential effects in raising my skill levels as an actress. Though physical and vocal works are inseparable in my practice, I have decided to attempt an epistemological examination, dedicating this chapter to physical work and the following chapter to voice work. At times, I will be referring to "embodied" experiences, which naturally include the totality of the bodymind, and "physical" or "vocal" work which indicates their respective areas within my research.

Through the course of my PaR, I have come to reaffirm that practice is a lived experience evidenced by *living*, *practising*, and *realising* it. A practice of any sort by its own nature is not supposed to be verbalised but to be experienced. For instance, I might ask why do I drink water? The need to drink water arises because I am thirsty. The experience of drinking water has its phenomenological significance when it is 'done' by someone. The value of this experience lies in the act itself, even without necessarily verbalizing it. We don't usually talk about drinking water unless the context makes it an unusual or urgent act perhaps. We just do it. I have a similar concern when it comes to my practice with the aforementioned source techniques.

Bodymind in an experience

Heuristically, I have come to experience that there can exist different degrees of knowing in terms of one's practice. Experience, especially in source techniques, means enough time and space to develop the deeper learning of skills and knowledge. My mind and body might disagree prior to, and during my experience. Let us imagine, for instance, the experience of raining:

1. If my mind is dominating, I might simply "*think*", question and even doubt if it is in fact raining. I do not allow myself to have a sensory experience of the rain;
2. If there is a separation between my mind and body, my mind sees that it "*is*" raining while my body wants to just walk into it. My mind may think about whether I should just observe or go into the rain. This thought prevents me from actually doing it; or
3. if my bodymind unites as one entity and my mind has no doubts, I "*act and walk*" into the rain. I experience the rain, and "*am*" in the rain.

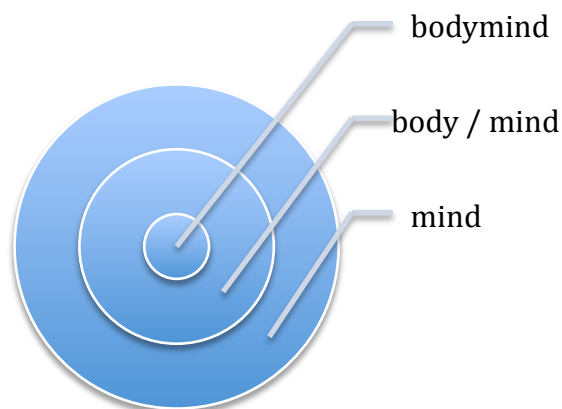


Figure 1. A chart on the body and mind in relation to an experience.

If I consider the chart above as my experience of rain, there are different degrees of accordant/discordant between my body and mind in relation to the experience. I begin to see that when there is unity of my bodymind, this is the closest to the centre of my experience – my embodied self. On the other hand, if

my mind dominates my body, this is the farthest away from my experience of the rain. In this sense, my mind, if it only thinks about the rain, does not necessarily constitute the entire process of my experience. “Experience” as I have examined it here has a kinesthetic sense and is at the core of my practice.

To extend the above three modes of the body and mind relationship to my practice on physical work, I see that my experience can vary:

1. My mind *believes and analyzes* my practice without necessarily doing the practice; or
2. my mind *thinks and doubts* my capacity for doing prior to or during my practice; or
3. my bodymind is in accord and I am *stretching, bending, and jumping*.

The farther I am away from the actual practice, the greater distance I find myself from that experience. Speaking and writing about my practice are yet another phenomenon and *not* my doing itself. They belong to the faculty of my mind, serving my understanding in a different manner. Here I see that my “practice” (on physical work) is a phenomenon of doing. In this sense, *practice IS doing*. Practice begins from my bodymind, and my bodymind initiates the practice. This discovers an interrelation in the *experience: PRACTICE* equates to *DOING* equates to the *BODYMIND*.

Experiencing a practice

We have now come closer to practice being a matter of experiencing through doing. While more and more practitioners have become Practice-as-Researchers within institutions, it is necessary to acknowledge that the domain for a Practice-as-Researcher *exists* and is generally *evidenced in* the researcher’s experience of the research. Doorways have been opened to practitioners by institutions, which clearly indicate their interest and the potential benefits for academic research. Similarly, practitioners, including myself, have come to institutions in need of support for their practice. In this respect, practitioners draw themselves near to the territories that used to belong only to researchers,

and academic researchers have crossed over and become familiar with the territory of practitioners. The pioneers of Practice-as-Research have opened the path for, drawn continuous evidence from and given firm support to practice-orientated work. Within the academy, Robin Nelson has pointed out that “practical knowing-in-doing is at the heart of Practice as Research” (2013: 10) and “knowing-doing is inherent in the practice and practice is at the heart of the inquiry” (2013: 9). Likewise, Bradley Haseman, an Australia-based professor in Performing Arts and Creative Writing, draws upon Carole Gray’s mode of practice-led research to outline that a practitioner-researcher

Captures the nuances and subtleties of their research processes and accurately reflects the process to research funding bodies. Above all it asserts the primacy of practice and insists that because creative practice is both on-going and persistent, practitioner-researchers do not merely ‘think’ their way through or out of a problem, but rather they ‘practice’ to a resolution (2010: 147).

It is this “practice to a resolution” that I consider that I, as a Practice-as-Researcher, should undertake, and be capable of doing so professionally. Unlike the traditional literary-based mode of doing research, myself as a Practice-as-Researcher would need to act and experience, as in the example of the rain examined previously. “To experience” is necessary within the boundaries of what a Practice-as-Researcher does. This is what I have learned since my theatre apprenticeship in my home country of Singapore – practice and practice!

The knowledge of my theatre practice has often been acquired step by step through my doing and experiencing; at times even gained through failure and from making mistakes in the process. As an apprentice in Practice Theatre Ensemble between 1986 and 1988, I learnt that the comprehension and acquiring of skills come via a process of eliminating (shifting and changing) the unknown to the known. Thereafter, in the educational systems that I was exposed to in Singapore, the USA and most recently the UK, an objective or an aim prior to learning and a learning outcome are key to any curriculum, and should be made known to the learners before a course commences. On the contrary, what I experienced through my initial theatre practice was the

opposite of the educational systems to which many of us are accustomed. With Liu Ruo-Yu²⁰ (see more in Part II of this chapter), my first mentor and guest director, my education was primarily a non-verbal learning process with her through physical practice; often through my self-discovery of embodying the precision of the postures and exercises. Day after day, step-by-step, doing and repeating for a long while, I began to let the practical knowledge embed within my doing. Any discourse about skill from Liu only happened after a relatively long period of practice. The indispensable prerequisite to a lucid and coherent achievement is one's "persistent and untiring practice" (Yang 2012), according to the third lineage Yang style Taijiquan master Yang Chengfu. This statement became more and more concrete in my practice over the years especially with several of my Taijiquan teachers.²¹

'Practice' is the common ground in my craft and practice-based research. In the course of my practice, there is a natural process of constantly reflecting on what I am practising and making it better each time. While reflecting on his practice through/in his writing, Phillip Zarrilli stresses that

In a long-term training [...] first and foremost there is knowledge gained in and for an ever-deepening relationship to the act of practice – a sense of assiduous attentiveness in the moment of performance or doing. Second is knowledge *about* my engagement, i.e. my active reflection, here and now, in this writing, on this experience [...] Third is my knowledge *about* the metatheoretical issues implicit in, and extrapolated from this mode of practice, i.e. my reflections upon the relationship between the body and mind in modes of embodied practice [...] (2001: 36).

I am more than convinced of Zarrilli's proposed mode of "knowing my practice". In addition, positioning myself as a "reflective practitioner, embracing practice in action" (Haseman 2006: 3) also appeals to me as the most natural and appropriate approach for articulating my practice; reflecting upon and consolidating what I have previously undertaken and developing it further. "The research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners" (Gray 1996:

²⁰ See footnote 13.

²¹ These teachers include Master Chen Xiao Wang (the 19th lineage Chen style Taijiquan), the late Master Yang Zhiquan (Wu style), and Master Foo Shang Wee (Chen style).

3). Haseman claims that “practice in practice-led research is the necessary pre-condition of engagement in performative research” (2006: 6). In this respect, my writing aims to explore “new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider’s understandings of action in context” (Haseman 2006: 3). This heuristic point of view relies on evidence as discovered in/through me. Haseman states that through

Modifying existing research methods to create new ways of looking, interpreting and representing knowledge claims, performative researchers are inventing their own methods to probe the phenomena of practice (2006: 8).

“Inventing” is crucial in my research that demands my lively involvement; investigating and reviewing my practice that retains its practical nature. As Haseman has suggested, “go along with” (2006: 8) the practice: “to take it at face value in the first instance” (2006: 8). Essentially, the task is to engage with empathy towards my own work rather than imposing a rigor of being critical. Furthermore, my own experience has revealed that an empathetic and metaphorical language within an embodied practice helps to suggest greater creative possibilities for the performer. A working language has only arisen out of my necessity when working with others: to communicate with them, and for them to be able to find effective means for their own training and practice. While I work alone, my experience is happening in my body internally, and I can understand things instantly and kinesthetically. My body experiences, improves and perfects it. While working with others, I was in need of and began to use a metaphorical or non-verbal mode of investigation and communication in the training and practice. The use of a seemingly empirical language serves to bring my description closer to the experience of the practitioner.

This “near-to-experience” finds a parallel in regards to a “second person” approach as outlined in my introductory chapter (Varela and Shear 1999: 8). It makes possible an “open, connected and receptive” (Middleton and Chamberlain 2012: 14) experience between the first person approach (of the practitioner) and the third person approach (of the researcher). This prompts a most natural and nourishing relationship in which I can place myself as a researcher within

my own practice. It reminds me of my leading of workshops, and my viewing of the works of other actors or dancers. According to Middleton and Chamberlain, it is to investigate with an “embodied response”: “What is it like to be in this practice?” “How does this experience appear to [me] from the inside” (2012: 3)? These modes of questioning suggest that I can adopt and view another’s or my own practice with a certain sense of empathy and embodiment; giving the creative practice the space and time for further growth and development. I am researching and at the same time living in my body in relation to my practice. I am neither seeing from the perspective of an external observer, nor am I close enough to understand my practice; yet I am not in the moment when I practice. A Practice-as-Researcher should be such that after having experienced, for instance, the stretching and bending of her body, she begins to trace her experience and only then writes about it. A Practice-as-Researcher *only begins to write* after having worked physically, after having her ‘self’ embodied in a practice.

Embodiment

What precisely does the experience of embodying constitute? The topic of embodiment has attracted wide discussion. Embodiment is conveyed and manifested through the coherent experience of the person in practice. The process of embodiment clearly surpasses the anatomical physique of a person. Theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte claims, “Man is embodied mind. No human can be reduced just to body or mind [...] The mind cannot exist without the body; it articulates itself through physicality” (2008: 99). In this sense, the embodying process suggests a totality of engaging, participating, and revealing of an experience:

[T]he human body is not a material [...] to be shaped and controlled at will. It constitutes a living organism, constantly engaged in the process of becoming, of permanent transformation. The human body knows no state of being; it exists only in a state of becoming (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 92).

Through a subtle yet complex process of internal transformation, changes begin to happen in one's bodymind over the course of time and via practice. In a similar way, phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty claimed that "*Embodiment* [...] encompasses both the body as a lived, experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms" (Varela 1993: xii). He perceived "our bodies both as physical structures and as lived, experiential structures; [...] "outer" and "inner", biological and phenomenological" (Varela 1993: Introduction). Drew Leder has posited the same idea through the root in German of "*Körper* (physical body) to differentiate from *Leib* (living body)" (1990: 5). He has argued that the lived body always includes a physical body which "reveals the deeper significance of corporeality" (Leder 1990: 5). Leder argues that "the lived body, equate[s] with the embodied self that lives and breathes, perceives and acts, speaks and reasons" (1990: 6). In terms of embodiment, Merleau-Ponty believed that "I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body" (2002: 173). He favoured and suggested the domination of "*corps propre* (one's own body)" (Leder 1990: 6). These corporeal phenomenological examinations reveal that a certain degree of direct experience in practice is necessary for any research into and about the body. From an embodied study standpoint, what we should avoid is being alienated from actual contact with and instead to be in close proximity to a practice.

The self as embodied in a practice

Embodiment implies a "livingness" whereby "self" is the most essential factor in any experience of practice. My "self" needs to be in the act of experiencing, of living it. Without a self, there is no practice per se. Before any skill can exist, the self has to be at the centre of a practice in order to gain that experience. This experience involves a process of "cultivation [...] that develops both a physical and mental shift in what and how someone knows and understands [...] the utilization of one's total mind and body [...] to learn with the body" (Daboo 2009: 124). It requires a tremendous amount of time and effort for the self to become embodied in the practice. "If the body as lived structure is a

locus of experience, then one need not ascribe this capacity to a decorporealized mind. The self is viewed as an integrated being” (Leder 1990: 5). Being a locus of practice, my ‘self’ unblocks and uncovers ways to understand the bodymind of myself who practises it. The ultimate aim for me is to renew, revise, and free myself while practising it. Through time, the skill will become naturally located within my bodymind. While I learn the source techniques, it is inevitable that it involves a process of engaging myself: to see, to adjust, to discover, to question, and to reflect. In light of this, Francisco Varela²², a biologist/philosopher/neuroscientist, asked, “Where can we turn for a tradition that can provide an examination of human experience in both its reflective and its immediate, lived aspects” (1993: 21)? Varela went further: “By not including ourselves in the reflection, we pursue only a partial reflection, and our question becomes disembodied” (1993: 27). He claimed that “The validation of [Buddhist] tradition is derived from its ability to transform progressively our lived experience and self-understanding” (Varela 1993: xix). Any human practice demands the practitioner’s authentic experience. How else can one be near to this experience other than to engage oneself in a self-discovered journey? The verdict of that experience is evidenced by the person who has done it, through trial and error, the complexity of her thinking and feelings, involving her flesh and bones; a physical yet non-physical experience.

An Eastern discipline such as Taijiquan takes on a bodily structure and form that are far from my daily postures and manners. In my initial learning process, this had often distanced me from the core of the practice. Before practising the required postures, I found it useful to be mindful to follow closely the doing of the master-teacher with whom I was learning. This mode of attention, in time, has led to my self-awareness, where my attention turns inward to the sensations traveling and circulating throughout my movements.

Mindfulness, according to Buddhism, often requires the practitioner to withdraw from mundane matters with a long silent retreat, with an immersive concentration on observing one’s breathing, or a self-questioning “Who am I?”

²² Varela’s theory, which has been developed for some decades, is termed ‘Enactive Cognition’, integrating cognitive science with Buddhist philosophy. Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/embodied-cognition/> [Accessed 08 September 2016].

which gradually allows one, potentially, to understand one's thought process. This ancient bodily discipline/technique has long been spread worldwide with millions of practitioners. According to Varela,

The rediscovery of Asian philosophy, particularly of the Buddhist tradition, is a second renaissance in the cultural history of the West, with the potential to be equally important as the rediscovery of Greek thought in the European renaissance [...] Within the Buddhist tradition, [...] mindfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience; mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one's experience itself (1993: 22 & 27).

This process of a direct and mindful face-to-face to oneself means an immediate, moment-to-moment awareness which has only gradually become a concrete embodiment for me. Any practice remains abstract if one looks and observes from its doorway. With Varela's insightful view, I further reiterate through the chart below that the key factor in PaR operates between my lived body and I as the practitioner. The chart illustrates the interrelatedness of the self with the experience, the lived body, the practice, and embodying. They circulate on and on, contributing and interconnecting to a totality of experience within a practice. Without any one of these elements, a practice cannot be complete and valid.

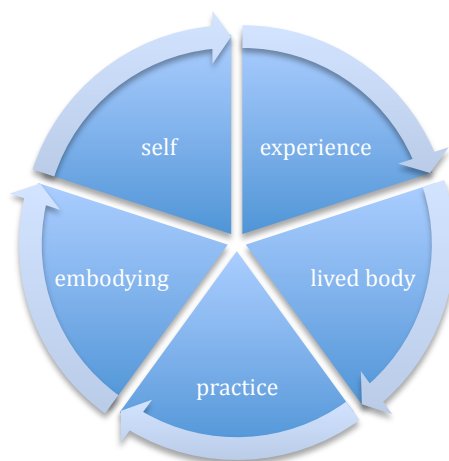


Figure 2. A chart of "the self as embodied in a practice".

Part II The experiential practice

My initial experience of my bodymind

All the examinations above lead me to Part II of this chapter, *The experiential practice*. Ironically, there is no ready formula or recipe for my experience in my practice. The reality is that in the beginning I did not even know what it would be like to learn a disciplined bodily technique such as Taijiquan, and whether I would continue practising it or not or for how long if I did. I was following my urge to learn something “other” than my formative education. With this intention, I began to search around. When I asked with whom I could learn Taijiquan, a dance choreographer teacher Goh Lay Kuan replied, “I will introduce you to *shifu* (master) Yang²³ only if you promise not to resign soon after your practice begins, as many people have done!” I nodded my head strongly to signify “Yes”! With this, I began alongside some theatre friends in practice with Yang Zhi Qun, our master-teacher of Taijiquan in Singapore, in 1993. I embarked on this journey without knowing what it would lead me to, and that it would affect and change my bodymind following years of practice.

In comparison to other skills such as learning to play the piano or ballet, my learning of Taijiquan came considerably late as a learner – at the age of 26. Since my childhood years I have known Taijiquan as an exercise practised by some elderly people in the park in the morning. In this sense, I felt myself young as a beginner. Today, Taijiquan is still practised in the park in my home country Singapore. In my opinion, this ancient yet heuristic mode of learning directly with a teacher provides the objective circumstances for me to constantly perfect my skill. The process of deepening my execution naturally comes through following the teacher closely. Without this living learning with a skilled practitioner that constantly demands my attention and awareness, my practice could have easily fallen into mechanical routine. This was my initial step into Taijiquan, into a corporealized and embodied practice.

²³ Late Master Yang Zhi Qun was my first master of Taijiquan. I have persistently practised this form when I am away from Singapore. Until 2010, whenever I returned to my home city, I went to practise with him.

I owe to my elementary years of education my ability to be able to endure the strenuous physical warm-up exercises prior to doing the structure of Taijiquan, and to remember the precise details in the exercises sequence. Only after some years of practising Taijiquan, did I begin to realise that my discipline and ability to memorise details might have been gained through Huang, my teacher between the third and sixth grade in elementary school. Under her teaching, we had to memorise a text each day and be able to recite every single word, even the punctuation exactly as it was written, without making mistakes. We also had to write a page of calligraphy per day, 6 days a week. Whoever was late or had forgotten to turn in schoolwork would be punished with a cane. I only came to realize how this early discipline and imprint have helped in my performative work. These early experiences had embodied the abilities in me and have had a strong influence and impact on my learning of any practice.

The fact that I learned Taijiquan following some years of theatre practice might have also aided my learning of it. With certain sensitivity in my physical awareness, I was able to follow promptly *shifu* Yang in the Taijiquan sequence. My practice of Taijiquan happened after some years of the intensive training I had had with Liu Ruo-Yu, based on her experience in Grotowski's Objective Drama Research Program, University of California, Irvine, USA. My initial training in 1987 with Liu comprised of 5 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the evening, 5 days a week, for a total of 7 weeks. Through working on diverse physical exercises I began to expand my awareness of my bodymind. Along with a group of theatre practitioners in Singapore, I encountered each day's training that totally opened up or shocked my bodymind which I had never experienced before. Whether training indoors or outdoors led by Liu, I was being challenged physically – a territory unknown till then, given my limited knowledge concerning my body. That initial metaphysical experience demanded and shifted my perceptions from a daily level to something beyond, only to realise later on that those exercises had aided me to improve, enhance, and empower my self-awareness, my innate capacity. That was something unfamiliar and new to me then at the age of 20, and has since inspired me. These exercises were mocked in our theatre circle as being “mysterious” or “esoteric”. That somehow never put

me off from getting closer to understanding them. Instead, I searched for and became engrossed in reading many related books. This was my first inquiry related to research into theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, begun in 1987. The range of reading materials that I had read and been exposed to included books surrounding Carlos Castaneda, Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Grotowski. Through my training, I began to connect with my reading which made sense only during my practice. This relationship between writing and reading still exists in such a way for my PaR.

During those 7 weeks of training, there were times when I faced obstacles, often “mind-related” rather than “physical”. Some days, I was faced with my thoughts of fear, laziness, boredom or fatigue in doing the exercises, which were physically strenuous and challenging. Again, it was my early years of discipline that saved me from giving up. I was able to refine and refresh my motivation in doing the training again. I had never liked physical education in school, especially running. However, I ran continuously for one scene of *The Silly Little Girl and The Funny Old Tree* (1987), a performance under Liu’s direction. I would not have imagined myself to be on an ongoing journey of a self-motivated, self-overcoming process in physical training that has lasted till this day. As I reflexively look at my early experience, I begin to see that I was able to execute these tasks more easily than many of my peers then not because of any physical talent which I possessed. Most importantly, it was related to the way I thought and acted that had effectively changed my body, bringing my potential to the full. That early experience had a strong impact on me and had revealed to me that *the practice of physical work is beyond the physical*, something that I only came to realise much later. This convincingly reaffirms to me that physical exercises can only be encountered, confronted, and understood in the very moment, as I live in and embody them. My *body* is my *experience*.

A creative path towards *Sourcing Within*

I now want to make the link from these early traces to the most recent phase of my practical research called *Sourcing Within*. After nearly a decade of

my residency at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, from 1998 to 2006 and earlier in 1994, I began my own independent work in 2006. In parallel to performing, I did a lot of teaching through workshops or in institutions; but my work remains essentially practice-based. My practice has developed through training, rehearsals and performances, collaborating with others as well as working alone. Over the course of time, my work has evolved to be part of the network which I call *Sourcing Within*. Many of these work sessions, my teaching and performances have toured the world, mainly through word-of-mouth from practitioners who have experienced my workshops. 2016 marks the 10th anniversary of *Sourcing Within*; my approach to embodying practice remains very much my key concern and interest.

All the formative influences on my practice and in me have opened up a creative and technical pathway for my work through *Sourcing Within*. My practice primarily emphasizes that the performer discover their own potential, placing this interrelated human experience within a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary context. A typical *Sourcing Within* workshop is composed of physical, vocal and individual solo work, (be it acting or a dance piece, text-based, vocal or movement work). It normally lasts for 5 days, 6 hours per day. However, there have been occasions of a varied duration, of a week, 10 days, a weekend or a day. (See Appendix A, *Sourcing Within* work session content).

In a contemporary theatre context, we tend to consider that the energy level of an actor in performance is attributable mainly to the actor's presence. Often, it is through the performer's energy levels and their effort in demonstrating their desired skill that a good performance transmits to an audience and is recognised. In *Sourcing Within*, we perceive energy as a mode of effortlessness, something that might seem unfamiliar to many practitioners when they first come to our work. Alongside this mode of effortlessness, the other key concerns in the approach of *Sourcing Within* are play and repose, following intuition and flow. Through time and practice, one begins to discover these with ease. This mode of effortlessness can also occur during moments of fatigue or illness; here one can discover one's body becoming a channel to heal, recover, refresh, renew, relinquish; of voluntarily ceasing to resist the body

simply by releasing one's mind holding over it and by giving up control of it. Such freedom towards or with one's body is what we aspire to; it is this within which we intend to find the source. Fischer-Lichte's notion of presence emphasizes a "presentness" (2008: 94) through which one can source towards something:

Through specific processes of embodiment, the actor can bring forth his phenomenal body in a way that enables him to command both space and the audience's attention [...] based on his mastery of certain techniques and practices to which the spectators respond [...] To the spectators, [...] they sense the power emanating from the actor that forces them to focus their full attention on him without feeling overwhelmed and perceive it as a source of energy. [...] The spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present. To them, presence occurs as an intense experience of presentness (2008: 96).

Sourcing Within recognises that such "presentness" is fueled by aliveness, playfulness, organicity, flow and effortlessness; these are the means for the person and performer to have a liberating experience. Emphasizing the "here and now" oneself and with others, an interactive experience can happen immediately and continuously among people. *Sourcing Within* is the creative platform through which my development and evolution as a practitioner can exist.

From the doorway of Taijiquan to a playful body

I consider Taijiquan to be a bridge from which I connect to myself, or where participants of *Sourcing Within* can discover some useful tools for their creative paths. Taijiquan, as I have conducted it via *Sourcing Within*, can act as an influence for someone. It is like the wind that we feel when it blows and passes through us, or like the air that we simply breathe without noticing it. With time and practice, the body of the practitioner changes. Practice leads the practitioner to a subtle presence and awareness. It is through this mode of influence, if I might so call it, which I work with others. It is only through practising in near proximity to someone with more experience that one begins to possibly feel the nourishment gained through our work. This is without force. Through invitation,

the participants play, and begin to feel the need to play. Their own selves invite them, if they need it, not to compete or rush, where their body begins to repose. This begins a process where their potential and freedom in creativity can emerge and can be uncovered. (See Appendix B, *Testimonies*)

The evidence for confirming the efficacy of such an approach and process can mainly be revealed through participants' testimonies, though as teacher/workshop leader I also vouch for their proven value. The following paragraphs are some practical and experiential accounts of my own practice and practice with others within the framework of *Sourcing Within*. These are provided to give the reader a more detailed sense of the work and how it operates from both the participants' and my perspectives.

At dawn, while my body was still half-awake, I would hop onto an air-conditioned bus for almost an hour's journey to the city centre. Upon arriving, at 7am, in a park near the central district in Singapore, I would begin a series of stretching exercises, often with the old master Yang coaching beside me: 'Stretch more, sink down, kick higher, and don't stop' (Ang 2014, personal diary notes).

This, I recalled, was not the most difficult part of the training I have undertaken since 1993, as I endured much discipline in my early education through Huang as mentioned. It was rather the humidity in the air and the mosquito bites at times that were more challenging for me in sustaining my attention throughout the two-hour practice. The preparatory exercises generated an awakened bodymind in me before the actual doing of following the master in Taijiquan. This exercise of circulating and mobilising the internal body through a sequence of external postures has since accompanied me in parallel with my creative work as a performer.

Since 2006, *Sourcing Within* theatrical workshops led by me have been organised for international performing artists, primarily in Europe, as well as Asia, North and South America. One early spring day at 9am in the countryside in Umbria, Italy, many participants in such a workshop were covered with layers of clothing and, for some, their eyes had hardly opened yet. In the slight chill, we

began outdoors for a day's work. Here, Riccardo Brunetti²⁴ gives a vivid insider's testimony:

On a workday morning, we started our warm-up session with some stretching exercises outdoors, on gravel. I do not remember who started, but some little stones started to fly around, quickly thrown, hiding, as a practical joke. Soon the situation turned into a gravel "war". We were still stretching, but the stretches were integrated in what we were doing. For instance, squatting while elongating the legs was not a movement with an end in itself, but was used to dodge the flying small stones. The gravel was used as projectile, or to be introduced in someone's shirt or trousers, or kept in balance on the head or on the shoulders. At the end of the session I went to put back my shoes and I discovered that while we were working, someone filled them with gravel (2011: 151).

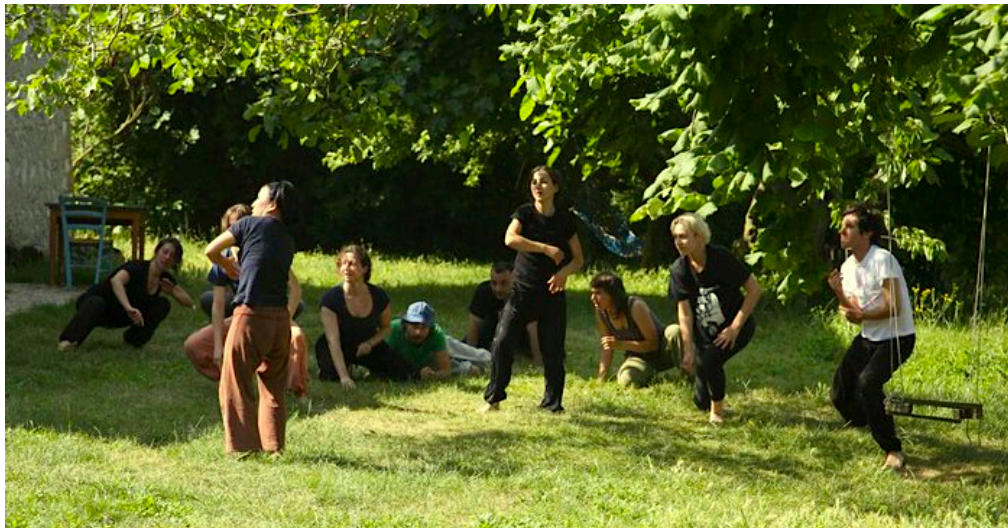


Illustration 1: Work session participants playing in the outdoor before Taijiquan practice, at Vallenera, Umbria, Italy, 2010. Photo: Garth Williams.

Following this thread of playing, a day's work would continue into discovering different movements that resemble Taijiquan postures in daily and manual activities such as planting in the field, flying a kite, walking in water, washing dishes, kneading bread and more. Through playing, we began to release our stiffness and rigidity, thus helping the flexibility in and strengthening our hands, legs, shoulders and hips muscles. Often after long preparatory work, these daily and manual movements are then easily reshaped and transformed into the

²⁴ Riccardo Brunetti is a close collaborator whom I have worked with from 2006 to 2011. He has organized numerous residential workshops of *Sourcing Within* in a countryside space, Umbria (Italy), managed by Orma Fluens (Rome), till 2011. The testimony is his translation from his original writing in Italian.

structured postures of Taijiquan. From this point on, we then began to coordinate the different parts of our body, hands, legs, “constantly changing direction” (Yang 2012), as it is in the sequence of Taijiquan. Silent awareness had fallen over each of us in the workspace, which sometimes lasted the entire day.

The thought of introducing “playing” into my work in *Sourcing Within* has been stirring inside me for some time, and it became concrete one day to me while reading Stephen Nachmanovich’s *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. This is another way to understand the principle in our work of ‘effortlessness’, of letting things, non-forcefully, fall into place. Nachmanovich emphasizes that “play is an attitude, a spirit, a way of doing things” (1990: 43). I was deliberately experimenting with different approaches and researching feasible solutions for my work with participants from various backgrounds. Time after time, this inventive way of playing has proven to be constructive for the workshop participants. It has activated the soft and supple part in us, something valued by Chinese philosopher *Lao Zi*, pointing towards a receptive quality in the performer:

Man at birth, supple and soft.
At death, rigid and hard.
All million things, grass and wood are born soft and fragile.
At death, withered and dry.
Unbending rigor is the mate of death.
Wielding softness, the company of life.

-- Lao Zi (Lao Tzu), Tao Te Ching Chapter 76²⁵

The child-like being, beckoning for the soft and supple, is reminiscent of the source of Taijiquan. Rooted in *Taoism*, Taijiquan points towards the spirit of *Lao Zi*, an old child; old but young. This spirit is the key in uncovering all aspects of our work, be it physical, vocal or creative.

In spring 2014, another group of workshop participants gathered in Tuscany, Italy. Each morning, we would play, run, climb the hill or walk the land

²⁵ Based on the translation by Garofalo (2014), this text has been altered resulting from my attempt to make the words come closer to the original Chinese text.

of the country house²⁶ where our residential work was held. At times, our playing conjured up some imaginary tools in our hands, for instance, ploughing in the field. At one moment, many of the participants had one of their legs slightly bent and rooted in the earth, while the other leg was stretching out, as they lifted or shifted their weight following their imagination. Unnoticeably their hips had sunk, with their hands gently lifted and their knees bent as well. They had arrived at specific postures from Taijiquan, diving into the depth necessary for this practice. We had uncovered a doorway into the structured movements, tackled and delivered in a simple yet lively mode.



Illustration 2 & 3: (above) Work session participants imagining themselves 'ploughing' in the field, which resembles a posture in Taijiquan (below) with their front knee half bent and upper body tilted forward, in Casa Cares, Reggello, Italy, 2014. Still from video by Nickolai D. Nickolov.



²⁶ The location was Casa Cares, Reggello (Tuscany), Italy.

The intention behind the playing is to divert our attention and ‘trick’ our body into postures from a tradition which seemingly are “unfamiliar and thus foreign” (Nascimento 2008: 61). By playing, we familiarize ourselves with these foreign and learned movements. Playing surpasses the stamina and endurance levels that any new learner would need for Taijiquan as I have experienced it. Unlike learning through hard discipline, playing connects us to our young self²⁷ - the child within us. Our body, our organism and our thought processes suddenly become less rigid and resistant. It seems then that this can transform the physical exercises that would be difficult to comprehend if a verbal explanation was given first. When our organic process becomes alive in us, freedom is then found.

In effect, the physical work based on Taijiquan within the workshop is useful to search for a mode of doing through “not doing”, 无为 ‘*wu wei*’ in Mandarin; this is a notion found in the wisdom and writing of *Lao Zi*. One succumbs to non-interference and non-effort in one’s doing rather than a passive non-action. This is close to an experience that becomes fused with flow, aliveness, internal strength and silence within the bodymind, which is extremely beneficial for the performer. Often, after a few days of our workshop lasting 5 days or more, the participants, to different degrees, tend to become less resistant, and their bodies less rigid; a mode of ‘non-effort’ begins to be present in them when they move, speak or sing.

The central question lies in how to transmit to someone such a quality that is sourced from a traditional practice, and then transforms it for the act of performing? I could see that the discipline that I had experienced in the past would not be effective for the participants, who have different backgrounds from me, and who have come only for a few days of work. A new working language needs to be imparted, as each comes from different education systems. This means that I must simply demonstrate through my doing with a metaphorical

²⁷ See the next chapter on *The Practice of Vocal Work* in the section about ‘speak-sing’ through playing.

language or non-verbal communication (as outlined in Part I) a process which can be unfamiliar for someone who is used to relying on verbal explanation in practical work.

Unequivocally, this leads to questions about the “Western gate” (Barrett 2006: 45-54). Barrett, a western scientist who practises Taijiquan, claims that scientific research is like a gate that often impedes our discoveries of what science has not discovered. This implies that any human experience that has not yet been tested and proven by science remains in doubt. Barrett has more than a quarter century of Taijiquan practice, at the same time applying a scientific analysis to this ancient Chinese technique. He identifies that in the logic of Western thinking we tend to acknowledge “the importance of the substantial aspect of things” that are “firmly [e]mbedded in the physical world” (Barrett 2006: 46), whereas Taijiquan essentially reveals the co-existence of 阴阳 *yin/yang*, 虚实 *xu/shi*; soft-solid in all things. If we can overcome this “Western gate” limitation, we might be illuminated by the wisdom hidden in Taijiquan, which can only be realised after extensive practice. Although Barrett warns against overreliance on a scientific approach, I am convinced that science can equally offer empirical knowledge, only if “verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic.”²⁸

Potential elements as a creative means

I will now list some of the potential elements from Taijiquan that I have drawn on considerably for my practical work. This uncovering of a natural resource for a performer has not arisen for me in one instance alone. Some of these elements have become embodied in me and their potential has only been revealed to me over time²⁹:

²⁸Definition of ‘empirical’ sourced from the Oxford dictionary. Available from: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/empirical?q=empirical> [Accessed 14 May 2014].

²⁹ Refer to the documentary DVD, *The Practice of Physical Work*, the last section, *Taijiquan Demo by Gey Pin Ang*, while reading the following section of my writing, in order as to have another layer of understanding.

1. 沉 ‘Chen’, to sink, is heavily emphasized throughout executing the Taijiquan movements: 沉肩 ‘chen jian’, sink the shoulder; 坠肘 ‘zui zou’, drop the elbow; 松腕 ‘song wan’, de-contrast the wrist; 松胯 ‘song kua’, liberate the hip; and so on. All these bodily joints are involved in sinking towards the earth. The shoulders keep sinking when one arm lifts and spreads out like a ‘wing’; never overstretched or overextended. One leg is deeply rooted like a tree, and one leg agile to attack or to escape from an attack; the weight always shifts between the two legs. As my body sinks into the depths, a sensation of flow and agility can be experienced if no unnecessary force is exerted. A related exercise that I have proposed in workshops is to imagine the lower part of the body from the waist level down walking in and through water, as if in the sea. The legs exert only what strength is necessary while standing in the water. Immediately some aspect of sinking down below the abdominal level appears; there is no unnecessary tension in the leg muscles, but strength in the feet empowers the participant not to lose balance as they are moved by the waves. This can become effective in contributing to a mode of agility yet with a centred presence for the performer. This way of sinking can help one to plunge into moments of a performance.

2. 虚 ‘Xu’, soft, insubstantial, and 实 ‘shi’, solid, substantial, are principles that co-exist simultaneously in each moment of the movements. It is often incomprehensible for someone as to how to let these opposing forces exist at the same time. For instance, one leg is rooted while the other leg is free; one hand defends, the other attacks; one hand lifts up, one hand shifts down, and so on. A continuous striving for a good balance between ‘xu’ and ‘shi’ is what leads one to good practice.

3. 丹田 ‘Dantian’ is the deep centre underneath our belly button, or metaphorically, a ‘power station’ as I have often called it during the workshops. 意 ‘Yi’, an intention, is a thought that calls forth each part of the body in spontaneous responses. When ‘yi’ follows this centre ‘dantian’ closely, our attention can detect the subtle details and the minute movements of all parts of our body, useful for clearly articulated performance.

4. Essentially there is 劲 *'jin'*. This internal strength, in between the movements, comes as an explosive punch after the deep silence of sinking into each part of our body. After a punch of *'jin'*, the body and mind are refreshed. Such renewed attention can heighten the quality of our presence.

I have chosen to highlight these elements of Taijiquan based on my practice. They are important and selected elements as I have realized and uncovered over time. I have never singled each element out from their workshop context, and never verbalised these to the participants. Here, it is for its philosophical context which might be of interest for the reader. It would always be useful to return to one's practice after reading this. In reality, a practitioner would need a great deal of practice in order to fully grasp these essences and to begin sensing any possible effect and benefit from the intangible energy in oneself and in performance, through the source.



Illustration 4: The Taijiquan position described in 1. *'chen jian'*, *'zui zou'* and *'song wan'*, in Reggello, Italy, 2014. Still from video by Nickolai D. Nickolov.

The invaluable relation between the source and the self

There exists an invaluable relation between the source and the self, also in terms of performance. My impetus for my research in Taijiquan draws from extensive discussions on the influence of yoga on Stanislavski's work. Sharon Carnicke claims that Stanislavski's utilising of the sources in yoga and Hinduism was significant in different exercises for the actors (2008). This influence from

yoga is further elaborated and justified in Sergei Tcherkasski's writing, where he presents the coherent connection of bodymind, "working on oneself" (Tcherkasski 2012: 14) with the craft for the actor in the Stanislavski's research. What the system gives to the actors is indeed a structure that enables them to deeply focus their attention to greater details and care for our craft. As experienced by one of his great actors, Toporkov,

Stanislavski demanded of his actors a sense of truth, the ability to give themselves to the events of the play easily and with complete sincerity, to follow the logical line of their actions continuously, to believe the other actor's logic as well as their own. These qualities, which Varlamov possessed by intuition, may be acquired by other actors only by persistent work (2004: 158).

French scholar Virginie Magnat, likewise, has outlined the crucial influence of Hinduism and yoga in the lineage of Stanislavski as well as of Grotowski. She points out that both directors had a "shared interest in non-Western conceptions of consciousness that foreground the relationship between mind and body [which] significantly informed their respective investigations of performance practice" (Magnat 2014: 21). It is verifiable that an Eastern source technique attested for many centuries has been proven to be beneficial to Western actors' work: this can be seen as an invaluable thread linking the self from the source, and being resourceful for the self.

Listening to the source, returning to a present body

Like yoga, Taijiquan has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is a potential source with which one can converse with the secret of knowledge flowing and breathing through our subtle being. A metaphor related to Taijiquan practice says it all: 'a lotus, after being cut apart, is like a thread of a silk which still links to the other parts of the lotus, never disconnected'.³⁰ Taijiquan is this lotus connecting me to my cultural roots, extending to my craft as a performer. The relationship one has with a source technique, I emphasize, is a matter of

³⁰ I have often heard this metaphor of a lotus from working with Master Foo Shang Wee with whom I work currently when I return to Singapore.

one's capacity to grasp through practice. The work of the performer is indubitably in those moments in which one is present alone during the performance act. The secret of craft lies in self-realising and self-accomplishing, and no one can replace me. Hearing my body, I delve into and yield to the creative source within.

In this process of returning back to the source, the endpoint is a creative one. I have received and am receiving constant nourishment from practising the source of Taijiquan in my personal and artistic life. The shared experiences with the others connect us back to the source. Those who have come to work with me discover their creative need as well, such as Brunetti:

Let the form resonate in the body's *hic et nunc*, in that body that is executing it now, evoking nuances – allowing the small details to emerge and lead its execution. The feeling, following who is leading the structure, is for me always more that of "listening" to the form, more than executing it. The message that I get from this act of listening³¹ is paradoxical: Tai Chi always tells me something about my personal body. It was during these morning sessions that I always felt clearly under my skin how to find spontaneity, life inside a given structure. And the personal result has always been that of hearing a far Asian voice that tells me something about myself: it tells me something about my body, my roots, about continuity, about listening and receiving (2011: 143).

Without a *heart* of listening, of receiving the flow into each present moment within the body, the doorway to creativity would not be unlocked. A 'listening' body is persistent throughout a prolific practice. 'Receiving' is when our chattering mind ceases. In an embodied practice, one does not hold on to any pre-knowledge but a process of constant 'forgetting' of what is known. Instead, we look for a renewed understanding each time of our doing in the sequence of Taijiquan.

Our body has its own wisdom that only through time can we experience. When I was in my early 20s, I was determined and driven to do things, such as learning Taijiquan. After more than two decades of practising Taijiquan, I am still keen and motivated, mostly without force or effort, but with ease, to accomplish

³¹ The 'act of listening' is also centred in the voice work as examined in *A Practice on Vocal Work*.

tasks only as necessary. When younger, I might have pushed and been pushed to do the training and exercises. Now, perhaps, with more graciousness, I flow with time to complete my doing. In a sense, this is the spirit of a free wanderer; the philosophy of Taoism, a part of my family culture, that comes closer in residing in my body. This mode of living, and attitude towards life brings me nearer to home. After all, Taoism is a ritual in my family which I saw my paternal grandfather practise each day and night when I was a teenager. Never once did he not bless each day and night for the entire family, even when he was ill. He remembered his god in the morning, and he remembered his god in the evening, “Duo Bei Gong [a Hokkien Taoist god], bless all in our family safe and sound!” I would have never thought that my experience of this as a child could stay so strong and embodied in me, and I only come to understand my grandfather and his action after his passing more than 30 years ago – yet another way of a close link between source and self. This part of remembrance came through my residency when I first worked in the Workcenter in 1994 when I was asked to recall and work on my grandfather’s action. This knowledge of a “non-physical” practice is what stimulates me continuously in life and in work. My understanding of physical work links to my ‘livingness’, my lived body, and through my remembering reveals itself to have been evident from a long time ago in my practice. This dialogue with my ancestor finds an invaluable continuation in my PaR performance. (See Chapter 4 on *Wandering Sounds*)

Physical training is not about training one’s skill alone but unveiling the possibilities and richness in one’s soul, or heart as in some traditions. While techniques are important, one’s heart is equally essential in arts. The inclusion of personal associations, memories, dreams, the imagination, and contacts in the space and with others; all of which appear either visible or invisible. The body is inseparable from the mind, both interrelated and affecting each other. The possibility of working through a source technique has provided me with a channel whereby I as an actor find care for my craft through my reflexive inquiry. Through self-inquiry, I engage with a dialogue with myself:

When reflection is done in that way, it can cut the chain of habitual thought patterns and preconceptions such that it can be an open-ended

reflection, open to possibilities other than those contained in one's current representations of the life space. We call this form of reflection *mindful, open-ended reflection* (Varela 1993: p27).

It is through realising the importance of an inner dialogue, of “untying” myself, that work on the self happens regularly in my practice, also through *Sourcing Within*; this serves as a constant reminder, since our ego tends to cling on, working both against and tangled up in our own thoughts. It is through continuous realisation and putting others' interests before one's own that a sense of “non-self” manifests. It is not a denial of the self but rather a co-existence with one's self and others, a “codependence” as viewed by Nagarjuna in the Madhyamika Buddhism tradition (Varela 1993: 224). If our contemporary actor training emphasizes this, we begin to revive the 优, ‘u’, the “quality” or “performer” (As examined in Chapter 1, section 3.2). I perceive *Sourcing Within* to possess a similar concern for a resourceful inwardness but not for one's own self. What is important is the interrelated, co-dependence with other practitioners or the audience. Through reflecting on this self/non-self relationship, I continue to experience it and let the experience be rooted in my bodymind. This evident codependence nourishes and makes itself meaningful for my “self” as the base of and as a source within my PaR. This has been made possible beginning from the source (by practising it) towards resourcefulness in me. A further extension of this work on the self can be discussed in my practice related to voice in the following chapter.



Illustration 5: Gey Pin Ang leading a *Sourcing Within* work session, Vallenera (Umbria), Italy, 2010. Still from video by Nickolai D. Nickolov.

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3 THE PRACTICE OF VOICE WORK (THE CORPOREAL VOICE)

This chapter focuses on voice work that should not be considered separate from physical embodiment. I have deliberately chosen the term ‘voice or vocal’ to include everything that relates to the human voice, ranging from speaking to singing, responses to sounds, and breath – all of which are corporeally rooted. My mode of practice, investigation, discourse and research evidence all comprise such body-based voice work.

My analysis will examine what lies behind my vocal practice: my motivation, approach and mode of inquiry. Certain aspects of the writing, like my physical work, are intended for and hopefully most useful for people who already have some practical experience, and who are searching for an embodied approach. By no means is this chapter about a vocal technique which someone, after reading it, would be able to apply immediately to their performance. Of course a practitioner can always research through trial and error, and investigate what might have driven them to make their own practice. It is crucial that if practice is the basis of one’s research, one should always work in reference to one’s experiencing, and not form an opinion merely based on a theoretical understanding. This requires persistent work and time invested in one’s practice. There is no ready recipe for any vocal outcome. With practice as my primary concern and methodology, this chapter will exemplify the performer’s ‘vocal interior’ by means of self-reflexive diagnosis structured accordingly: 1. Vocal embodiment; 2. Voice work as a cultural journey; 3. Voice work of the self; and 4. Voice work with others.

1. Vocal embodiment

1.1. Embodiment / corporeality

There is a large corpus of work regarding research on, into and through the voice. At one extreme within this corpus is Western classical music which

considers voice “an autonomous object detached from the body”. At the other end of the spectrum is the belief that “corporeality is necessary, intrinsic and – by implication – underestimated in the expressive potential of music, particularly the human voice” (Symonds 2007: 168). Symonds inspects the close relation of the corporeal with the vocal through Burrows’ discussions about a baby crying:

The air waves are activated for the first time and a sudden rush of breath is in-(and ex-)haled. The unfamiliar act of breathing is linked to the unfamiliar ability of oral expression [...] the first clear self-willed physical act of the infant is in the muscle use of diaphragm and larynx (Burrows 1990: 33-34).

One can easily make an anatomical analysis here but however scientific and accessible this might be, for me as a practitioner some understanding of the empirical experiencing is vital. It is through experience that I come to perceive this organic link between my voice and what is happening under my skin. Experience leads me to discover, and through discovery I remember such a natural response as a child. It is within continual training, with care, awareness, and detailed work that my voice reveals itself as embodied as an “organism in which consciousness and instinct are united” (Grotowski 2002: 210). It is this search for organicity which my voice work is aiming at.

Many researchers utilise embodiment in their investigations and pedagogies, be it corporeal and/or vocal. Some use non-Western methodologies or a holistic approach to rejuvenate traditional vocal models, challenging the susceptible “dualistic thinking embedded in western philosophy” (McAllister-Viel in Boston 2009: 113) as claimed in the edited volume on breath/voice which we will examine later. Barrett’s idea of needing to pass the “Western gate” (2006: 45-54) which we discussed in the previous chapter is predicated on the question of whether our perception and sensibility are ready to experience something intangible. He warns that we are at a doorway which “can block entrance to...[the] insubstantiality of [our] deeper nature” (2006: 46). My work in the studio aims to walk every time through this doorway to unblock whatever might prevent me from having a liberated voice.

For the embodied vocal work that I have learned and practised, it was by breaking down such doorways in my rationale that I began to experience this intangibility inside me. This was often not perceptible if I remained only as an observer to my own self. While doing voice work, I have to constantly suspend any preconceptions which I might have gained previously and any judgmental views about my own doing. It is the experiencing and renewing of previous knowledge that can guide me to go through such doorways. Overcoming my rational concerns, my vocal doing each time informs and reveals new creative possibilities in me.

I would like to highlight Virginie Magnat's positioning of embodiment alongside Victor Turner's notion of performance as a process (Turner 1979: 82) suggesting "the involvement of the whole being – body, mind, and heart" (Magnat 2014: 16). Following this definition, embodiment implies for me, a longer period of doing that involves the totality of the self. Heuristically embedded in my PaR, the full engagement of my self within the process of voice practice is vitally important.

1.2. Vocal / breath

If attempting to physiologically locate my voice, it can be seen as linked to a specific part of my body: my mouth. When I articulate a sound, my mouth opens. Or rather, my mouth opens because of a sound. Looked at another way, my voice arises because of my mind, because of a thought, with a specific intention. I follow my thought and my body responds to it, and this articulates itself vocally. If I continue this mode of dissecting, more and more of my body becomes involved: responses and reactions from the tiniest parts of my body, as well as my muscles and my breath. There is voice because there is air going in and out of my mouth: breath.

A breath-related vocal approach is much more complex than I can articulate here. Thanks to extensive research and pedagogy we have many insights into investigations concerning voice and the breath. In the edited

volume *Breath in Action, The Art of Breath in Vocal and Holistic Practice* (Boston *et al.* 2009), Stephanie Martin determines the importance of an anatomical vocal tract with our ancestry through our DNA: “Our life source is our breath, the breath that give us voice, yet the breath of those that gave us life also gave us our voice” (Boston *et al.* 2009: 35). Though doubtless a biological fact, it is through my practice and realization that I uncover this potential ancestry source in me (See 2. *Voice work as a cultural journey*). Breath is not the only factor related to vocal processes. Vocal is more than just breath-related; it engages more parts of my body with complex reflexes and responses altogether. Subsequently, movement specialist Debbie Green examines ‘breath’ as her key discovery whereby physical “re-alignment” brings “awareness of the subtle, sensual messages received through conscious mobilizing of the body through breath” (Boston *et al.* 2009: 163). She stresses the “inner attention and ‘listening in’ to the body...[where] voice results incidentally or accidentally, from...physical discovery” (Boston *et al.* 2009: 163). She emphasizes the need for “time to allow things to happen and a relish for detail”, “personal self-awareness” and “a hunger to engage with the experiential process” (Boston *et al.* 2009: 167). The integrating of body with breath as “responding to stimuli from moment to moment”, “the quality of ease and flow” and “[becoming] an engaged body that is always ready for action” (Boston *et al.* 2009: 164); all of these in Green’s holistic discourse resonate closely with my own vocal approach and concerns.

My understanding of breath in relation to the voice is largely found through being aware of how much space there is in my body at that moment when I vocalize, whether through songs, texts, or sounds. How much breath I need for each articulated sound is relatively different. The amount of breath I have at that moment will determine the length of a specific sound that I am able to make. Mindfully following this mode of attention, I am able to flow with my breath moment to moment while I sing or vocalise. Short breath, short sound. Long breath, long sound. Sudden breath, sudden sound. Feeling a lack of breath, I pause before vocalising. Giving time to that moment, there is a silence in between breaths, in between sounds. That “in-between” space is the voice, vast

and open and perceptible through my awareness of my body (See 3.1 *Fine Tuning*).

The above picture depicts a slice of the voice work I have experienced; and yet the voice is waiting to be discovered anew each time in me. Such is the inexhaustible source of vocal work that I have investigated for more than twenty years; I am still nourished by it each time.

2. Voice work as a cultural journey

2.1. Forgotten memories and the ancestral past

The foremost relation I have discovered through voice work is perhaps my reconnection with my Chinese dialect (See Chapter 4 as well). My mother tongue Hokkien is one of the Chinese dialects in Singapore which I spoke at home as a child. When I went to school, all dialects were forbidden from the media and public venues for more than a decade. Mandarin, the official Chinese language, then became the language used in our family. This part of my family history was recollected in an interview Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento conducted with me, *'Forgotten Memories in Action: An Interview with Ang Gey Pin'*, in her book and acts as a source of her discourse in *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor's Work* (Nascimento 2008: 139-150). The banning of Chinese dialects during my childhood has unquestionably contributed to my trajectory regarding voice work. Nascimento focuses on the earlier years of my search for my cultural heritage through songs (2008: 64).

The opening practical step I took towards remembering my dialect songs was initiated by my work with Liu Ruo-Yu (under *My initial experience of my bodymind* in Chapter 2) in 1987, after her experience in Grotowski's Objective Drama Research in Irvine, California. In the workshop she asked each of us participants for a song from our tradition. Through Liu's prompt, I had the chance to gradually "connect back to that unknown mother tongue which I had forgotten" (Nascimento 2008: 141). The work on recalling our Chinese dialect songs, along with Taoist texts, later became essential lines of research in Theatre

OX³², a theatre troupe which I was then leading. We asked ourselves questions such as

‘Do you remember any songs?...What was your grandmother doing when you heard her sing this song? What was she thinking, remembering?...Do you remember? If you do not remember, then who remembers?’ We approach songs by going to their sources, seeking for the song’s life, and the relationship between the song and ourselves (Nascimento 2008: 141).

This “active search” (Nascimento 2008: 64) to remember my dialect has transformed into an artistic process as I yearn for something forgotten and lost. Voice work begins with hearing: hearing an inner world of reminiscences, of memories, associations, impressions, sensations, perceptions and thoughts from the forgotten past which have been neglected within me. In observing and analysing my performance on *One Breath Left* (1998-2002), a performative opus³³ of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Nascimento wrote:

[I]t was in her body, in her use of voice and language, that both spectrums of memory—actual and imagined, personal and familial—could exist. In this chain of investigations into family memories, Ang could access or activate traditions located far back in her history (2008:68).

Through singing, I conversed with my memories, thoughts and reactions to different existences from my past. These impressions often can be related to some thoughts that are entangled and unresolved for years, in my body and mind as long as I do not pay attention to them. Through a direct, transparent process of confronting them, I recalled my dialect songs and language that I had once known as a child and uncovered a renewed relation with my direct family and distant ancestors.

³² Theatre OX was founded in 1995. It was active in Singapore from 1995 to 1997. Some core members, including myself, then participated in the work at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Italy, 1998-2006. During our residency years in Italy, the activities and name of Theatre OX was suspended, however it only officially terminated in 2007.

³³ The Workcenter has used the name “performative opuses” for their works created under “Art as Presentation” such as in theatre. The focus is on “the way in which they are structured, oriented towards the perception of the spectator.” Available from: <http://www.theworkcenter.org/about-the-workcenter/research/> [Accessed 29 August 2016].

Regarding this vocal connection to our ancestral link, Virginie Magnat draws on the psychosociologist Bailleux's investigation, which in turn is based on Fonagy's bioenergetic perspective on voice as a "*geste vocal* (vocal gesture)" (Magnat 2014: 129). Fonagy observed that "in vocal gestures [are] traces of an ancestral relationship to sound, a form of embodied cultural memory which connects us to the lived experience of those who came before us" (Magnat 2014: 129). Magnat was convinced that this "body-voice connection... [the] voices of our ancestors might still be resonating within our body memory" (2014: 129). This ancestral link is not only a matter of recalling memories but is also a potential source. In this we can find a resemblance to Grotowski's seminal text from 1988, *Performer*:

One access to the creative way consists of discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation [...] Starting from details you can discover in you somebody other – your grandfather, your mother [...] the corporality of somebody known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor [...] You can arrive very far back, as if your memory awakes. That is a phenomenon of reminiscence, as if you recall *Performer* of the primal ritual. Each time I discover something, I have the feeling it is what I recall. Discoveries are behind us and we must journey back to reach them [...] Is essence the hidden background of the memory? I don't know at all. When I work near essence, I have the impression that memory actualizes. When essence is activated, it is as if strong potentialities are activated. The reminiscence is perhaps one of these potentialities (Wolford & Schechner 2001: 378-379).

Memories, when consciously delved into, can become concrete in a performative context. My PaR performance *Wandering Sounds*, predominantly on songs and voice work connecting to my cultural source, is an outcome that has arisen from my practical search into my ancestry (More in Chapter 4 *Wandering Sounds*). My homeward-bound experience was not the result of reading Grotowski's text. My PaR is an autobiographical piece relating to notions of 'home' and the 'ancestral', but the source of the decision was not from reading a text. Rather, it arose from Liu's influence on me which related to Grotowski's research. Later my practical search for my long lost Chinese dialects found a conversation or a home and has kept going ever since.

2.2. Reconnecting is a matter of listening

My practical voice research demonstrated the richness of dialects. “[T]he resurfacing of an early childhood language brings, with its sounds and system of communication, one’s earlier memories” (Nascimento 2008: 67). Nascimento stated, via bilingualism researchers Harmers and Blanc, that “relearning a forgotten language they used only in early childhood, heritage learners also activate an entire repertoire of nonverbal behavior” (2008: 67). “Nonverbal behavior” includes responses and memories from one’s childhood language. To a certain extent “language [via my dialect] is my departure point to the work on voice” (Nascimento 2008: 149); but it is essentially a “quality of listening” (Nascimento 2008: 148) that can reconnect me back to my cultural source. Language here is only the channel and not the result. And listening is not limited only to my work on dialect songs, but is pertinent to all my vocal work.

If “the act of listening” (Nascimento 2008: 148) is practised at every moment during the voice work, what then is the process of singing? What motivates me to sing, with or without someone? For what or whom do I sing? What happens in me when I sing; and what happens outside me? How does singing connect my bodymind simultaneously? Embarking on such a mode of questioning, the first step of my voice work with dialect subsequently developed and evolved.

2.3. Departing from singing: Speak-Sing

This brings me to my investigation as realized through what I call *speaking-sing*³⁴ in my recent work. This section is best read along with the chapter on *Wandering Sounds* where a fragment of the performance revolves around this search. Here instead I would like to give some background to this mode of voice work. The choice of the term *speaking-sing* is sourced from 念歌, ‘Liam Gua’ as in my

³⁴ *Speak-sing* is not to be confused with “*Reciting-singing*” (说唱艺术 ‘*Shuo Chang Yi Shu*’), an art form in China.

Hokkien dialect, which literally means *recite/speak-song*.³⁵ Here, I emphasize the act of *speaking* in a melodic mode such as song. From my practice with the Hokkien songs I have come to appreciate the wide range of sound articulations that exist in this dialect. These dialect sounds feel more open and spacious in my body and lower in pitch than the Mandarin³⁶ language that I learnt in school. With my dialect, I feel more grounded and close to the earth, when articulating clearly each sound. Here, to articulate means that I ‘carve’ or ‘sculpt’ the sounds; where a sound can almost be visualised in the space. In so doing, I am singing in a melody but at the same time I am speaking. Through clear articulation, *speaking-sing* gradually reveals a vocal possibility for me.

Speak-sing is proven as well to be a creative solution to the difficulties for the audiences’ understanding of my performance. Over the years, the issue has persisted when I speak and sing with a high pitch and for a long time, as well as when I switch register between a singing and speaking tone. How can I articulate the meanings clearly through a sung text? How can the audience understand me if they are not familiar with the source of high pitched and long notes, for me often associated with the singing modes of traditional Chinese theatre? One strategy I have tried is to sing English texts translated from Chinese while keeping the original melody. The musical pattern is constructed from and inspired by the Chinese language. Though translated into English, the long sounds and the pitch make the words and their meanings difficult for the audience to understand, since they are mostly non-Chinese speakers. Sometimes, feedback from the audience would include questions such as: was I speaking in Chinese then (even when I was using English in a singing mode)? Due to the unfamiliarity of the pitch, long sounds and tones, an audience might

³⁵ I am aware that around the world, for instance, in Middle Eastern or Asiatic countries, there exist many different traditional forms of recitation related to the use of voice, song, and instrumental music. Available from: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/search/?query=central+asia> [Accessed 26 July 2016]. However, it is not within the scope of my thesis to develop a comparison.

³⁶ Mandarin is the official Chinese language in China and is spoken among the Chinese in many Asian countries. In Singapore, an independent country with a history of immigrants, Mandarin is one of the four official languages alongside English, Malay and Tamil. In my growing up years, and later in the context of Chinese theatre circle as well as in the media, I have come to experience a Mandarin where criticism or emphasis are often put on whether an actor is or is not “标准” (biao zhun), using a standardized pronunciation and articulation.

not hear the words and meanings when I sing. This strongly suggests that I need to ‘speak through the songs’ what I mean, what I intend, even more clearly. In this way, the meanings can be transmitted to the audience, especially when I perform in the UK and Europe, retaining the original melodic pattern and structure.

My discovery of the mode of *speak-sing* has been concretized and further developed through the audience’s contribution through their feedback. In one of my previous works I recited some texts continuously. This was immediately noticed by an audience member as a mode of ‘speaking that resembles that of singing’ at the post-performance talk. This audience member³⁷ further said that she had clearly understood my action, and thus the story. When I asked the others if they were able to follow the story of my performance, they responded positively. Among them, many did not understand English and could only speak Portuguese. Not having the same language or cultural background as me did not seem to limit their understanding of this performance spoken and sung in a foreign language: English and Chinese. Their ability to understand through following my body language might be due to their receptiveness to sensorial experience rather than relying on reasoning and intellectual understanding. They might have engaged in the flow of my actions and reactions while I sang and spoke: whom, how, and what I reacted to, and the way I utilized the objects in the performance. It is probable that through these they came to understand the intention, embodied in my movement, singing, and the story I was telling. In addition, the articulation of each sound and word, and the “speaking” of the melody might have effectively bridged across any language barrier and have eased the audience’s watching experience and their understanding. Such is the value of a phenomenological analysis of a PaR.

As examined in the last chapter, the idea of intention and embodiment are equally important in voice work. Intention, 意念, ‘yi nian’ in Chinese, literary means a conscious thought. With a single ‘yi nian’, all of my body can respond

³⁷ This was during a feedback session after my solo performance, *The Chapter with the Missing One* at Casa Laboratorio, Sao Paolo, Brazil, 2012. The theme and conversation with “home” in my current PaR has traces from my previous work including this one. See Appendix E for my performance timelines.

and react to that one thought and intention. During vocal work, an intention, a thought can manifest through the whole of my body. Each movement is articulated with each intention and thought. Originating from an organic body, my body-voice can find a direct and instinctive way to communicate with other people. My argument based on my practice is that the bodily rooted voice work is the culmination of organic impulses. These can be achieved through and associated as child-body where we follow our instincts closely. The child's play of 'becoming' such and such is the starting impulse in our life and in our creativity. This manifests itself potentially in a heightened experience such as in a performance when our bodies and being are actively involved. *Speak-sing* is therefore words being sung and melodies spoken. It linked me to my younger self when I was 3-5 years old, when I used to play and act out at a lady's house I called my aunt the dramas and stories that I saw and heard around me. One day I remembered this instance during my first year at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski³⁸ in 1994. This came after long hours of daily work through physical and vocal training related to drawing out instinctive and organic impulses in the totality of my bodymind.

3. Voice of the self

3.1. Fine-tuning

From this intuitive perspective of my young self, we can move closer to a voice practice that interconnects my bodymind through a process of fine-tuning. Here the fine-tuning is not musical but mindful, from my long residential years of work at the Workcenter, as well as my crucial experience of meditation practice.³⁹ The Eastern bodymind practice that I have encountered involves a

³⁸ The name of the Workcenter was changed to the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in 1996. See under the bibliography of Richards via the Workcenter's website. Available from: <http://www.theworkcenter.org/about-the-workcenter/two-teams/workcenter-members-2/> [Accessed 15 November 2015].

³⁹ This is my practical experience of Zen meditation in the late 1990s. In the early period, meditation was practised along with other aspects of physical and vocal training when we were in Theatre OX. After some months, meditation became an individual practice rather than part of the group training.

direct experiencing of the world around us: the direct seeing and hearing before any thoughts arise and are formulated. This training, if it proceeds over time, helps to be “in tune” with my thoughts. Mindfully practising, it reveals within me the capacity to perceive each thought clearly. With a similar attention in singing, I am able to contemplate things more deeply and thoughtfully.

I find this mindfulness to some extent parallel to the mode of “knowing-doing”, key to *Practice as Research* (Nelson 2013: 3). By entrusting ourselves to self-knowing directly from experiencing, we realize and understand things concerning our self. We can then begin to access a greater capacity and trust within us and ease our fear of not having any verbal explanation for or sense of meaning behind our kinesthetic or sensorial experiences. Magnat, who has worked several times with me in *Sourcing Within* work sessions, has analysed her vocal experience, emphasizing that to “develop an embodied awareness [...] it is important not to try to analyze it [the voice work] but to cultivate instead a deeply visceral sensitivity to this process” (2014: 143). She recognises the importance of “to see, to hear, the changes happening beneath the skin” (2014: 143). Key in the act of vocalizing/singing is to allow our instinctive response to untie any knots of reactions and thoughts that are deep-seated within us, and possibly to listen, meet and be reconciled with our neglected self. Through singing, those parts that are somehow blocked in us are answered and accepted. These hindrances, if not freed, “can create tensions in the body in the form of muscular contractions that can block the flow of the voice” (Magnat 2014).

I will now turn to a heuristic elaboration of my experience on voice, which often suggests an enormous space for my practice. Let us imagine how after a physical work session on my Taijiquan practice I am often reminded of a quality of softness, a sense of rootedness, and a rejuvenating flow of attention in and around me. Suddenly I feel warmth in my heart, the urge to sing.⁴⁰ A song begins to emerge from far off in my stream of consciousness. Just before I sing, I remember a melody. I call and greet it as if like an old friend. The song arrives. I

⁴⁰ To gain a glimpse of my work on singing with the others, view the documentation DVDs, “*Sourcing Within 10 – Traces*” and “*The Practice of Voice Work*” as attached in this thesis. The video should not be understood literally as depicting the text here but rather a visual understanding for the reader.

respond. I continue singing it, yet letting it sing me. A pause in the song. I see a bird fly past the window and I react to it. I begin to 'see' in me a place, someone or a longing. I begin to speak to/with that, at the same time hearing what surrounds me. Immediately my inner world meets the world outside me, whether I am alone or among those with whom I am working, and my voice's resonance changes. As I sing, the resonance continues changing. I let the voices, contact my emotional need, rise up or deepen in me without interfering with them. I allow different parts of my body to always react and move in support of the voices. The song begins to conduct itself as if I am following the flow of a life-river in me. After some cycles of singing, I stop. There is a continuous flow in me. Even in silence there is a song inside me. I allow the body to respond to the subtle changes, without rushing to sing the next song. I give myself time to do this process – I hear, I sing, I question, I respond, and, I am heard, I am sung, I am answered, I am the response. It is my training of the voice, but not only. It is training for my bodymind, my self.⁴¹

Through singing comes a world filled with my personal associations and memories and in relation to the people with whom I sing. Metaphorically, it is as if I am passing a threshold to discover “many different doors or gates opened up, one after another, letting the voice flow through the body, passing through gate after gate” (Magnat 2014: 143). The other people⁴² with whom I sing may begin to create a harmonic conversation from hearing me, or sing the song with me, letting their hearts spontaneously attune and respond as well. These modes of unlocking doorways each time I work vocally come in varied forms. There is no single instance in my practice that is the same. This makes the practice difficult to articulate in words. The next time that I practice may take a completely different shape that I need to face and through which I might find a way to meet my self anew vocally.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

3.2. A need revealed - drinking the source

My early experiences set me off on this vocal journey, but it was my response to “the need” (Nascimento 2008: 141) that actually kept me continually researching. If Liu inspired me to take the first step, my concrete work on songs developed under the close guidance of Thomas Richards, as well as Mario Biagini, at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, in 1994 and between 1998 and 2006. The real challenge working with either or both of them all those years was to confront my own doing. And this continuous doing is rooted in one’s prioritized need.

[W]hat is truly important was not that I “knew” these songs, or whether or not they came from my cultural tradition: the real question is to do. The point is to ask something in and outside of myself, to ask as if someone is missing or as if I lacked something. After years continuously working on this way of asking, there is a chance that one might see that these materials have special places in her body, through her body, and to continually rediscover a personal need to work on these materials. It takes years of practical work for one to discover the need to do (Ang in Nascimento 2008: 147).

Voice work makes sense to me only through practice. The more I practise, the less I am concerned with it being a vocal technique, and instead it becomes personal nourishment. The “need” goes along with what I find lacking in me. A product-oriented question such as “How much have I grown or gained from the vocal practice?” seems to diminish in significance following practice day after day. Vocal work concerned with technical improvement or making one’s vocal performance sound better and “beautifully” sounded would only contradict the process while working on the mode of singing as I have experienced and still am experiencing it. Any substantial change can only become “natural” within me through time. It is important not to look for any shortcuts in the process of vocal work. This would otherwise jeopardise my deep involvement in answering my own questions while singing. The need to sing can be like a sensation of aspiration, joy, longing, sadness, yearning for or missing something or someone. As the sensation appears, it calls me to attend to and take care of myself. Once I am being taken care of (my thoughts, my emotions), I am enriched and

understood. Accepting myself, my sensations changed and revealed how different I was before my internal conversation through singing. The work on songs connects with and unveils to me that which is within me: a rich source, nourishing and therapeutic. The actor's work begins here when one takes care of oneself.

Step by step I have come to realise my need via song search as if through 饮水思源, 'Yin Shui Si Yuan', a Chinese proverb that literally means "knowing the source of the water while drinking from it". While singing my dialect songs, I have the opportunity to remember (my dialects, my ancestral roots). While singing, I have the opportunity to be nourished by the songs. Singing connects me back to the source (the long forgotten dialects and songs). Metaphorically, it is as if I am "drinking the source by singing."

I would echo voice teacher Electa Behren's view that vocal training is a process of researching and adapting to one's own needs (2012). Training via song work recurs for me as a personal need while the source feeds on my lack and hunger, as both person and actor all at the same time. One's quality as an actor finds something in one's quality as a person, and vice versa. Nothing is as fulfilling as when I am inside my practice, both vocal and physical, and after the practice is done and has been accomplished. Nor do I do this as an obligation for something or someone. My practice finds its value even when I am alone in the practice room. Time is a crucial factor that has led to the discovery of "drinking the source by singing". Through time, my thirst has had an opportunity to find its calling in me, sure and certain. That is when I can begin to say 'I care for this need.' The answer to the question 'why the need for practice?' is simple: because I 'care'.

3.3. Care of self: I-I

The idea of "care of oneself" was already evident in the actor's work in the last century established by Stanislavski (2004). But in our contemporary theatre training, how much work on the self remains in actor training specifically? Have

theatrical techniques and technologies dominated this? As mentioned in Chapter 2, Stanislavski had to disguise inside his system of actor training some aspects of yoga technique in order to avoid censorship from the authorities (Tcherkasski 2012). Like his predecessor, Grotowski's deep interest in Eastern philosophies and techniques had an impact on his actor training too. Magnat claims that Grotowski's work with the Polish Theatre Laboratory actors was "a visible spiritual process" (2014: 66) while for Stanislavski, "the bond between the body and the soul is indivisible...In every physical action, unless it is purely mechanical, there is concealed some inner action" (Magnat 2014: 66). These two practitioners had discreetly employed in their practice with their actors some aspects of work on the self.

The notion of "I-I" from Grotowski's text *Performer*, which is based on Martin Buber's text *I and Thou* (2010), reinforces the importance of work on the self from a distinctive perspective:

I-I does not mean to be cut in two but to be double. The question is to be passive in action and active in seeing (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present. To nourish the life of the I-I, *Performer* must develop not an organism-mass, an organism of muscles, athletic, but an organism-channel through which the energies circulate, the energies transform, the subtle is touched (Wolford & Schechner 2001: 378).

The *Performer* that Grotowski refers to "is a man of action...a doer" (Wolford & Schechner 2001: 378). This text speaks about Grotowski's last phase of research, *Art as Vehicle* (Wolford & Schechner 2001: 381-384). Even though this phase of his research was largely outside of a theatre context, with Grotowski preferring to call his actor a 'doer', the mode of attention modelled in the work on I-I can be equally relevant and have potential for any performer today. For instance, the attention needed in vocal work on singing can be such that one part of me is "doing" while another part needs to be non-judgemental with a "silent presence" (Wolford & Schechner 2001: 378).

Let me turn to a phenomenological perspective of "I-I" within my practice. Just as I sing, I move in the space in order to awaken different parts of my body, and then a sense of fluidity and flow around different parts of my body comes

alive. A musical note appears on the tip of my tongue. It's a melody I remember. A sound comes out of my mouth. I remember a phrase, and another phrase. I remember the entire song. I allow myself to remember yet another song, the song begins to remember me. I do not allow any judgement to get in the way of my singing. My thoughts and memories follow this process when singing. My emotional life is engaged in this act of singing, whether my voice is strong or soft, the pitch high or low, the rhythm fast or slow; everything is unpredictable and always changeable. I am guiding the singing yet also letting it guide me. The journey involves my thoughts, something beyond me, someone whom I either remember or forget, a conversation between I-I, one part of my self to another; my attitude, my reaction, my response, my being, all come together to be taken care of within me.

Any further verbalisation about what can happen in me through the work on songs may not be sensible. I am aware that any verbal description might oversimplify the complicated process of an actual singing experience, which often surpasses any verbal or written attempt to recapture it. While my intention of this verbal account is to leave some traces for other practitioners, it is also there for me to measure and evaluate my own vocal practice alongside the references I have drawn on; giving a deep sense of meaning and relationship between theory and practice – a key concern of my PaR. I am deeply intrigued by any analysis that can suggest, stimulate or point towards the possibility of a living source with which practitioners can engage themselves to experience something. It is my hope that more people drink from and understand the source within their own doing. I echo Grotowski scholar Kris Salata's call for a balance in practice and theoretical level as my writing (as a researcher) orientates its "care" with my practice.

Care lies "before" every factual "attitude" and "position" of Da-sein [being]...[T]his phenomenon by no means expresses a priority of "practical" over theoretical behavior. When we determine something objectively present by merely looking at it, this has the character of care ..."Theory" and "praxis" are possibilities of being for a being whose being must be defined as care (Heidegger 1996: 180).

I find the mode of 'care' gained through my vocal practice can often be transformed as well in my writing. Often after a practical session, I get down to writing. Feeling rejuvenated, my thoughts and fingers "flow" onto the keyboard without unnecessary entanglement in my thoughts; the subtlety, amplex or warmth which can possibly be found through the process of my vocal practice.

3.4. Care-in/care-with

"Care" is not limited to a particular presentational form. Salata positions "care", when discussing the Workcenter's work on songs, as being aligned with Heidegger's "being-in" and "being-together-with" (Salata 2013: 140). This aspect of his discussion resonates with my experience during my residency years at the Workcenter. The vocal training I had experienced then extended to *The Bridge* project, another domain of the research of the Workcenter through public presentations of performances.⁴³ I recalled my 'doing' as an actress then as a mode of "care" that was mirrored in Salata's writing. More than a decade ago, while touring with the Workcenter on *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts* (1999-2006), I had to take care of my self when performing. In order not to lose my focus in the piece that I was performing, I had to constantly find strategies to regain and sustain it when I felt my attention was disappearing. Step by step, day after day, I learned to discover and transform the work into not only care for my acting score, for the work through songs, but also care while performing with others, in front of others. Not only did my work as an actor in relation to the audience renew its purpose each time I performed, spoke or sang, so did my vocal work also become more and more revitalising when this actor-audience relationship was redefined each time as regards its meaning in and for me. Questions such as, "Who are the people coming to my performance?", "Why do I enact my acting and singing scores to them?", "What is my true calling today?"

⁴³ As stated in the Workcenter's website, "The research currently conducted at the Workcenter involves both extremities of what Jerzy Grotowski described as "the chain" of performing arts: "Art as vehicle" at one end, and "Art as presentation" at the other." Available from: <http://www.theworkcenter.org/about-the-workcenter/research/> [Accessed 29 August 2016]. See more about the two "chains" in the chapter "From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle" by Jerzy Grotowski in Thomas Richards' book *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*."

and much more. Alone I prepared myself each time prior to performing. Different strategies of preparation, not only in terms of my skill as an actor but also care of my being, were necessary.

I learned to develop a parallel care in (myself) and with (others) through my performing experiences in the opuses of the Workcenter, *One Breath Left* (1999-2002) and *Dies Iræ: The Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show* (2003-2006). The research on *The Bridge Project* was “consciously created with both an arrow of intention that stretched toward those present, watching, and another essential vector of intention related to those doing” (The Bridge: 1999-2006). Those experiences guided me in discovering the mode of “being-in” myself, and “being-together-with” other fellow actors and people who attended the performances. I always found my silent meditative moment before performing a deep creative possibility. It could last from several hours to an entire day, when I was walking, doing my daily chores, reading, or resting. Then followed the moment of “encounter” with others when the silence in me transformed into my “active” doing/performing. The idea of *The Bridge Project* lay in the crossover between “performance/non performance” (Nascimento 2008) as I experienced it at the Workcenter. It was “active” as it needed conscious care and attention to all without and within me when I was performing.

Such “care” could manifest itself on many levels. Through my songs or spoken words, my care transfers onto the musical frequencies, pitches and waves, passing to and among the people (between performers and audience). By the same token, this was within a tight performance structure which I needed to take care of: following my inner score of actions, reacting to other actors’ scores and their actions, lively engaging myself in performing, and adjusting to all the unexpected live situations that I faced at every single performance.

The songs that I sang (or led) in the two opuses of the Workcenter then were sourced from my cultural songs from Hokkien or Mandarin.⁴⁴ Ever since then, care for my self happened through my work on those songs. This informed

⁴⁴ While Hokkien is my mother tongue, Mandarin, the official Chinese language, was the first language in school for me.

and renewed my relation with my home culture, through the performance structures. Such care is out of my own need and autonomy. “The work on the self” and “the work on the craft” care for and nourish one another as I-I, and this relation cannot be separated. By stopping to practise, I can forget this care and can only be re-found each time when I do.

4. Vocal work with others

The vocal work of my *Sourcing Within* sessions conducted with other performing artists goes beyond any linguistic or cultural barriers. I will list, in the next paragraphs, a few examples of participants in this work encountering and confronting their own vocal difficulties. From there, we can see how they turn into possibilities which reconnect them to their own source. There were no shortcuts, but this came about as the result of a long period of practical investigation, realisation, and one’s willingness to ‘open’ oneself.

4.1. Untie fear for singing

As a child, I heard my mother often singing ‘out of tune’, in a conventional sense. Later in my life, at a Theatre OX post-performance sharing session, I again heard her sing. She had a deep voice, with a low pitch, with no tuning problems. She was even improvising her own lyrics in a song about me, her daughter. This experience has remained very important for me, not for sentimental reasons, but as it has become a useful reference point in my work with others. This instance prompted the notion in me that, our mind, if having a clear intention, can direct every part of our body into action. In the case of my mother, it was the non-resistance and non-hesitation throughout her singing that led so vividly to action.

When I began to work with others, I repeatedly encountered people unable to sing in tune, again in conventional terms. I was and am motivated to understand every mechanism behind someone’s obstacles in singing. In vocal

work, when I see someone who is not vocalising or who begins to observe others instead of participating, I often switch from singing to speaking.⁴⁵ Thereafter, I find ways to invite them to join in my speaking. The response is mostly immediate and positive. However, as soon as I switch back to singing, sometimes this reluctance resurfaces. In this case, I speak and sing, switching back and forth. My intention is to divert that person's attention to something our body is more accustomed to: speaking. This however does not always work. Sometimes, if I speak in my language, it might again pull someone away from participating. I begin to play around/with them, till some part of them forgets that they need to work on the voice. Playing has the stimulating effect of releasing the fear of singing. If not on that day, at another moment on another day, that person might begin to articulate melodies and sounds other than speaking tones, allowing the invisible obstacle to singing to fall away.

On some occasions, when I speak a text in my language, someone might respond in his or her own language. This begins a series of playing, of some kind of vocal exchange between us. Once again, playing rids us of our resistant mind. Singing becomes a free channel of our mind inseparable from our body. There is another interesting phenomenon here. As soon as a participant speaks in their own language, something begins to resonate beneath their skin, manifesting in a way as if they have come to know their body for the first time. Through practice, many have confronted their own limitations and finally triumphed over their fear of voice work.

4.2. Returning to one's mother tongue

Some years ago, there was a performer whom I shall call B⁴⁶ who worked with me on a regular basis. When it came to voice work, first she would begin well in tune. Shortly after, however, she would switch to a completely different pitch and tone. Often she would also bring texts written by her in English.

⁴⁵ See also 2.3. *Departing from singing: Speak-Sing*.

⁴⁶ In this section, I have chosen anonymity for the participants for ethical reasons and to protect the individual learning process, which is delicate and special to each.

Though of Latin American origin, she had lived in Northern Europe for years. I suspect that this crossing of cultures might have indirectly influenced her behaviour, which susceptibility could have molded her soft mode of speaking. Based on my own experience on searching for my dialect, one day I intuitively suggested to her to speak the text in her own language. She first reacted as if she had not quite understood what I meant and what she had to do. However, after several attempts, at moments some strong raw sound came out through her body, as if she was about to be torn apart by the voices that crept out of her. After this session, she seemed completely taken over by this experience.

This happened again, but differently, in our subsequent work sessions. After some months, she participated again in our work, this time with an English text for her piece but utilizing sand and water as well. My understanding was that she had the intention to continue exploring her previous experience. However, I saw that those months apart had taken her back to the normality of living, resulting in her once again having a less lively way of speaking. I suggested her to do two versions of her creative piece, one in English, and another in her mother tongue. On the last day of our session, I observed that her usage of the natural elements had been sculpted and connected to her spontaneous reactions rather than illustrating these objects in her performance, as had initially been the case. My impression was that her piece in English was still static, flat and predictable, whereas in the version articulated in her own language, she became alive, instinctive and surprising. Her voice was, metaphorically, as if diving deep into the earth, beneath the root of a tree then dashing out onto the land. Watching her work, I was able to connect to her, to follow her organic process as an audience. Following Barthes' notion of the voice, at that moment there was "the grain of the voice" in B, "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" (Barthes 1986: 270). The work by B demonstrated a lively example of "the body in the singing voice" (Barthes 1986: 276) whereby she had surpassed all technical aspects, vocal or otherwise. What existed in her was her organic reaction, a spontaneous relation between her and her tradition. I find that this connection can occur not only for me, but also any practitioner can discover and develop a "chain of investigation into family

memories” that “could access or activate traditions located far back in her own history” (Nascimento 2008: 68).

4.3. Unearthing the natural drive

For an extensive period during the mid 1990s my colleagues and I in Theatre OX were working on an island on the outskirts of Singapore. When I was speaking with Nascimento regarding our work from that period, I mentioned that

The direction of our training stemmed from specific need, for example, our vocal adjustment we needed to make when working outdoors...it changed both the way we spoke the text and the way we listened to each other...our attention turned into the act of listening (2008: 148).

On the island, while we trained, we could often hear dogs barking, roosters crowing, motorbikes sounding, boat horns, and branches and leaves swaying in the wind. It was a period where we were engaging in meditation practice, among our different trainings, which certainly had sharpened our senses, living and working as we were in a remote island village. Our capacity to hear and see a long way was evident in our way of articulating with the voice and was visible in our performances.

Another performer K overcame her tone deafness, as it is conventionally depicted. K was always troubled by not being able to sing. In a similar yet different way to B, K would have a totally different pitch once she began to articulate a song that she remembered in her family dialect. I had often discouraged her from singing to instead find an alternative way into her textual recitation. At first she was not quite convinced. One day when working on the island, we heard a dog barking. Suddenly she began to follow the barking sound. At times, she would laugh to herself while playing with the dog’s frequency and pitch. This process brought on some surprising progress in her voice work. She could reach a very high pitch that she had not been able to previously. After some extensive work, she created an individual piece with an ancient Taoist text

speaking in her dialect. With extended notes and continually changing pitch, her piece was accompanied with movements that resembled dancing. She took the challenge and transformed the impediment of not being able to sing into a new creative possibility. This recalls what Grotowski had spoken about as 'élan'.⁴⁷ Thomas Richards has a vivid description of it in *At Work With Grotowski On Physical Action*:

The word contained a very specific quality of vocal vibration which was itself the definition. It began with a strong attack (not loud), around the middle of the word you could feel an increase in drive, some sort of inner explosion, and then it ended in a quasi-growl... I spoke it myself, trying to recreate his [Grotowski's] vocal vibration, and the dog in the courtyard, even if it was some forty yards away, reacted and began barking (1995: 84).

What lay behind K's unique and unusual approach to singing was the resonance of 'élan', learning from the frequency of a dog barking. She was overcoming her vocal blockages by creative listening; playing and responding to the barking with the alternating rise and fall of pitches and tones. Her case was among those of the "peculiar voices", voices within "the marginal", "the atypical", "the unusual" as elaborated by Heiner Goebbels (2011: 49). It is this 'peculiarity' which brings out a distinctive voice of a less polished and raw quality that touches me as a human being more than any well trained and controlled vocal technique can.

⁴⁷ I heard this at different instances from Grotowski (1994) and Mario Biagini during my years of practical work at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards (1998-2006).

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 4 *WANDERING SOUNDS (THE PERFORMANCE)*

To capture the resources and powers of telling one's story,
one engages the full range of self-resources.
One draws out all that is present in context
and content in an active and lively unfolding drama,
and brings one's knowledge and experience
into poetical depictions.
(Moustakas 1990: 14)

A. Prior to a performance act

To examine the creative path of how I devised my performance *Wandering Sounds*, I feel it is necessary to look at where I come from; the place, the city, the nation, the culture. By drawing on my personal reflections and associations, I will attempt to trace what might have led to a gradual trajectory in my performance practice and thus became the hidden drive that has progressively led me to creating the performance. It was not a conscious choice to manipulate a specific theme or idea from the beginning of my creative process; rather, it is life circumstances that have steered me, and which have contextualised my ever-growing conversation with “home” via a performative mode. I will speak about my home city first before delving into my research on *Wandering Sounds*, so as to find some threads for an understanding of what lies behind my ongoing embodied practice. I will examine questions of where home is and what kind of theatre I wish to make. Where is the source that nourishes my theatre-making, if it is not from the physical space that I live in? Can it be found somewhere in me? If yes, how? A memory space? An intangible channel? Within myself?

I. The place where memories are uprooted

I have moved far away from my birthplace Singapore which I have revisited periodically since the 1990s. I feel some affinity with what sociologist Paul Connerton has examined as “the catastrophe of uprootedness and the longing for rootedness” (Connerton 2009: 7), when I see how the entire country has gone through a massive transformation. From being a tiny fishing village to

becoming a colonial British state that declared independence in 1965, the authorities have relentlessly demolished, constructed and reconstructed the country without leaving any traces of places and streets from the past. Highways and buildings have erased childhood memories of homes and past modes of living. Singapore's language policy resulted in the banning of all dialects, in public, in schools and in the media during my childhood years in the 1970s.⁴⁸ This, in turn, has seen many of us forgetting our own mother tongues, cutting the connection with our grandparents of whom many spoke only dialects. In effect, it has led to many citizens' alienation from many traditional customs and cultural practices.

When I first began my theatre practice in late 1986, the arts were in what could only be described as a semi-professional phase in Singapore. Professional arts education only became available in the 1990s. At the turn of this millennium, world-class arts events and performances had to be imported since the local arts scene was still in its infancy and no company could fill the nearly 2000-seater Esplanade Theatre or Esplanade Concert Hall. A sudden boosting of culture and the arts advanced as fast as the nation's economic boom.

Today, this tiny city-state is one of the most metropolitan cities in the world. Its financial centre, port, airport and services are world-leading. It has miraculously survived on very little that is homegrown as everything is imported. This has become even more the case in the last few years, as Singapore relies heavily on a workforce of immigrants and foreigners contributing their services, construction and domestic workforce for the nation. This has largely created a cityscape filled with endless skyscrapers above the skyline and a mass rapid transport system weaving across the entire country.

⁴⁸ Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-lingual society with four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil (as also mentioned in Chapter 3). However, English is the nation's main language for communication. Here what I am referring to is merely my experience in the 1970s, when in school we had to speak only Mandarin and English but no dialects. We would get fined if caught speaking dialects. I remember the moment at home when suddenly my parents switched to speaking Mandarin with us, replacing our Hokkien dialect. Other Chinese dialects in Singapore include: Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, Hakka. Though this ban has been gradually relinquished since the late 1990s, many younger generations today may still be alienated from their dialects.

There has been extensive eradication of the existing heritage and architecture, while many buildings were restored with a “new look”. There is the constant bombardment of instantaneous sensory impressions and sounds day and night. While speed and time have molded the way the people live, human contact is often brief and fast; as efficient as any of the nation's infrastructures and services. It is, as Connerton describes, about memory, a forgetting that is linked to modernity: “Superhuman speed, megacities that are so enormous as to be unmemorable, consumerism disconnected from the labour process, the short lifespan of urban architecture, the disappearance of walkable cities” (2009: 5). I find myself trodden on or barged into by strangers, with little physical space for each other in the gigantic food places, mega shopping malls or overcrowded transportation system. Often I get lost strolling through the diverting city scenes, with an enormous gap underneath my feet whenever I am being transported up in a lift to high floors, be it in office buildings, hotels, restaurants or residencies. French philosopher Simone Weil described the alienation I feel as follows: “Money-power and economic domination can so impose a foreign influence as actually to provoke this disease of uprootedness” (Eliot & Weil 2001: 44). She believed that “uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed” (2001: 47). The constant immersion in unceasing change and continual unfamiliarity in my home city have alienated me from calling this place home.

Connerton’s idea of “place-memory” (2009: 4) allows me to further elaborate on how this sense of uprootedness came to be woven into my past and current performative works. I would echo Connerton’s claim that one’s memory is contingent on the steadiness of locations (2009: i). My research was a means of giving a shape, a practical form, to my sense of being lost from home; the main concern of my PaR performance.

II. Residing in unceasing temporality and unfamiliarity

Connerton’s thorough examination of the effect of modernity and various modes of living in urbanisation can lend a valuable perspective to reflect on the

existence of my home country. *Place* has altered its initial meaning of stability or locatedness, giving way to *mobility* (2009: 89). Cultural roots are almost impossible to locate when city spaces change so radically, thus erasing any traces from the past. “Our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past...hence the difficulty of extracting our past from our present” (Connerton 1989: 2). One’s existence is firmly associated with one’s mode of living:

What is being forgotten in modernity is profound, the human-scale-ness of life, the experience of living and working in a world of social relationships that are known. There is some kind of deep transformation in what might be described as the meaning of life based on shared memories, and that meaning is eroded by a structural transformation in the life-spaces of modernity (Connerton 2009: 5).

Given what Connerton has described, it is perhaps not surprising that I felt somehow foreign to the world since my adolescence, and later in my adulthood, finding it safer to reside in my self, *within* my own silence.⁴⁹ After many years of constant mobility around the world via theatre studies and practice, I remain a stranger in my original home city:

Lingering of human emotions, bring my wandering back to the city;
not knowing if this will be the place for my conscience.
I am immersed in and surrounded by souls living with fear.
Each day I wake up with eyes open, begin to prepare for the worst.
Wandering among a bunch of ‘long ties and high heels’ under the
skyscrapers;
and forgetting the familiarity, I walk as if I have never been here.
Passing trees that are shorter than buildings;
I never see them grow and wilt without seasons.
Hearing birds sing everyday, I am once who I was.
I keep spending every cent that I have, bringing loads of things into the
house.
I continuously ‘desire this’ and ‘desire that’.
When it’s time, I still have to wander away.

-- An excerpt of the text from my performance *Wandering.Birds*, 2011⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The on-going *Sourcing Within* workshops I am conducting might have found their root meaning from this sense of sourcing within “oneself”.

⁵⁰ *Wandering.Birds* (2011) is a collaboration I had with a few European performers. This came after their workshop experiences with me. I have extracted several of my solo fragments from

It is interesting to then contemplate what such alienation and subsequent withdrawal into one's inner world might mean for the performer. It most probably allowed a channel to open up in me, whereby I could connect to the people, places and imaginary worlds of my ancestral line; my memories found strong associations with all of these – sourcing within myself everything that already dwelled in me.

III. A culture-in-mobility

It is clear to see that *home* and *memory* are of such importance to me, as conveyed through my performance practice. The place of my growing up has set me on the path of ongoing theatre research that revolves around these themes, and to a certain extent, theatre is where I reside and belong. Through asking questions constantly in/through the act of performance, an active searching process began which manifested itself in performance, where I found and still find a space to make my own response.

Paradoxically, it is the circumstance of my constant entrance into and exit from my home country that has created the possibility of my research into a culture-in-mobility where my “life-spaces bear the marks of mobility rather than locatedness” (Connerton 2009: 89). Without the fast changing temporalities of the country and its fast erasure of the past, the journey of forgetting and remembering would not have been possible. I might not otherwise have considered working with a cultural heritage which was lost and found within my corporeal and vocal research. A concrete example of this stimulus is the demolition of an abandoned rural structure which contributed in the same way to my developing theatre practice. This event in 1997 has remained vivid for me till today.

this previous work and have further developed the materials within my PaR performance. See more in Part B of this chapter, under *I. Early traces of “wandering”*.

In an abandoned rural village house on the tiny island of Ubin⁵¹, outside mainland Singapore, Theatre OX⁵² was asked by officials from the land authorities to leave the building we had been working in. The reason given was that the structure was unsafe. The following weeks saw us seeking voluntary support from several architecture companies. The results of their tests were that the structure was deemed safe for another 10 to 20 years. We appealed to the authorities but to no avail – we could not save the structure.⁵³

From then on, all our dreams of building our own theatre training and performance pieces in this rural patch of land died away. Prior to this, we had begun extensive research into many theatre practitioners and their works. An early inspiration came from Odin Teatret, in part because we had attended the International session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology [ISTA] held in Copenhagen in 1996.⁵⁴ The following year we visited Poland, involving visits to theatre companies in different cities; among which were several trips to Gardzienice Theatre Association, Poland.⁵⁵ There, we watched the company's repertoire (live performances and video documentation) and participated in their training and exchanges of work. We were also deeply drawn to the theatre practice of Tadashi Suzuki (Suzuki 1993; Allain 2002; Allain 2009) and U-Theatre, Taiwan, led by Liu Ruo-Yu (Liu 2011). This coincided with my initial brief work experience that I had had at what was then known as the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Italy. It was after returning from our 4-month theatrical expedition in Poland in 1997, that we wanted to begin ambitiously our own theatre research and practice on this tiny home island. The idyll of a rural space on the island of Ubin was perhaps inspired by the likes of Gardzienice and

⁵¹ The island of Ubin is one of the last villages on the outskirts of Singapore, with modes of living resembling that of the generation of our grandparents.

⁵² I led Theatre OX's training and devised works on the island in an abandoned village house. We were there in the period 1996-97, after which the structure was demolished some months after we left.

⁵³ Now huge parts of the island have developed into recreational and holiday resorts but that piece of land where the abandoned structure used to be has remained a wasteland.

⁵⁴ See more in Hastrup, K. (1996), *The performer's village: times, techniques and theories at ISTA*, Graasten: Drama, Denmark.

⁵⁵ See more in Allain, P. (1997), *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Suzuki. We also followed our noses intuitively where needs arose, considering what the sources of our Chinese⁵⁶ cultural roots might be; practising body techniques such as Taijiquan, researching texts from Taoism and songs from our family dialects.⁵⁷

After this, my rebellious side understood that my dreams had to be transported and transformed in *mobility*, which I had never imagined.⁵⁸ Those foundational years of theatrical research amongst our troupe Theatre OX sparked the act of mobility. They often ignited questions about our numerous artistic experiments in various unconventional spaces in the late 1990s in Singapore. Some of our attempts were among some of the more memorable communal experiences. These instances include:

- A “Memory Search” project on the island of Ubin involving a team of observers consisting of a sociologist, a linguist, an anthropologist, theatre scholars and performing artists; (“The Substation Archive - Wikicliki” 2016)
- A performance created in the open space of the abandoned structure on the island after an 8-month process. Audiences were brought from the city by bus to a jetty in eastern Singapore, then on a bumboat⁵⁹ to the island to watch our performance. There were always post-performance sharings at the end of the evening, with tea and songs shared with and by the audience members⁶⁰; and,

⁵⁶ My paternal grandparents had immigrated to Singapore from the province of Fujian in Southern China. My grandfather practised Taoist ceremonies for his ancestors which are now being carried on by my mother.

⁵⁷ In the initial phase of our group training, we also briefly practised Hatha Yoga. Meditation (Vipassana and Zen tradition) was incorporated at different times into our group training but later became an individual practice.

⁵⁸ “Mobility” might be the initial impulse that led me to the creation of many performances, all of which have related to the theme of wandering.

⁵⁹ A bumboat is a small boat used to ferry supplies to ships moored away from the shore. In Singapore the term “bumboat” is applied to small water taxis and boats that take tourists on short tours. Available from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bumboat> [Accessed 13 July 2016].

⁶⁰ These post-performance sharings mirrored what we had experienced while visiting Gardzienice, Poland in 1997.

- A performance that we toured to residential areas, which was created from materials of Chinese dialect songs and folk legends; sometimes some audience members would begin to sing along with us upon hearing their own dialects.

All of these instances were presented in open and unconventional spaces in Singapore. Often questions and concerns were raised amongst the audience, as well as by arts professionals and intellectuals⁶¹, demanding an explanation of the purpose and aim of remembering dialect songs and tales through this process of theatre-making. Some even questioned whether our ventures were theatrical or not. I was unable to give a ready response faced with this mentality which I felt might have come from the *object-world* (Connerton 2009: 88) that then dominated our society; this is how Connerton denotes the constant obsession for materialistic things in life where there is less empathy towards intangible matters such as memories and dialects.



Illustration 6: Theatre OX's premiere performance, *Songs of the Footprints*, at the Substation - Home for the Arts, Singapore, 1995. Photo: Theatre OX archive.

⁶¹ These included arts funding bodies that had granted us support then.



Illustration 7: After Theatre OX's performance *War, Valley, Tiger, Dream*, on Ubin Island, Singapore, 1996, where songs and tea were shared among the actors and the audience. Photo: Theatre OX archive.



Illustration 8: Theatre OX's community tour of *Sing A Drum, Come Watch!*, a performance of dialect songs and tales, Punggol Park, Singapore, 1996. Photo: Theatre OX archive.

The city-state may not remember the past, though it may have become a model that other nations aspire to – organized, immaculate and efficient. The government has repeatedly announced its plan to build an eight-lane highway through one of the country's most ancient heritage sites, Bukit Brown Cemetery (Lim 2012). Tay Kheng Soon, former president of the Singapore Institute of Architects, has argued that the rapid urbanization of Singapore is reaching a crucial tipping point, as it is on the verge of becoming an ultra modern state with no soul (Purnell 2013). We hear a similar commentary from Aung San Suu Kyi,

the political leader of Burma, hinting at a lack of humanism behind the nation's success:

I want to learn a lot from the standards that Singapore has been able to achieve, but I wonder whether we don't—I don't—want something more for our country,' she said. 'What is the purpose of the workforce? What is the purpose of work? What is the purpose of material wealth? Is that the ultimate aim of human beings? Is that what we all want?' She continued, 'I want to probe more into the successes of Singapore and to find out what we can achieve beyond that (Purnell 2013).

Why would one not yearn for something more worthy beyond the present stability of the country? The story around the demolition only revealed the intolerance of the old values and the past, annihilating a vision of building the arts on one's own homeland. It is not a matter of denying any individual's dream but of neglecting the human being's natural affinity towards home, its place, its past and its ancestors. This authoritarian act brought about a shift in me to find an appropriate place away from all the city's hustle and bustle. *Home* then mattered more and more. Through a spatial activity such as theatre, *home* has resided in my body and voice, in my theatre practice. This can then be anywhere, in any city in the world, just as it is with the *flâneur*, the artist-poet of the modern metropolis:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home... (Baudelaire 1995: 9).

The incessant eradication of home yielded in me a long wandering away from home. It then became a potential source and concrete act within me, as a person and as a performer. Any adversity one has experienced can bring forth the greatest possibility in oneself and in what one does. Such is my artistic venture, embracing my experience, my thoughts, and my aspiration about my home city.

B. On the performance *Wandering Sounds*

In this dream,
I've come to many abandoned houses.
Continue to wander; I hear only my footsteps and birds singing.
Perhaps like a man-bird, would I keep standing yet flying.
Illuminating like the sunset, I am the wander that follows it.
-- An excerpt of the text from *Wandering.Birds*, 2011

Any embodied work is a process filled with adventures, mistakes, surprises; all of the unknowns. Anyone who has some experience in arts practice knows that the pre-performance phase via training and rehearsals is unpredictable and uncertain before a work then becomes fully developed and presentable. It is the instinctive and organic self that needs to be awakened to guide oneself through this experience. I aim to reveal experiential insights as someone who is creating a performance work; what are the impulses behind my creative process, how do different materials come into place, and what accumulative life experiences might have contributed to the complex trajectory involved in creating my work? Whether as a practitioner or a researcher, I feel it is important not to rely overly on my intellect; rather I would like to reveal my experiential practice (as examined in Chapter 2 Part II):

Experience is always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, located in and as the subject's incarnation. Experience can only be understood between mind and body - or across them - in their lived conjunction (Grosz 1994: 95).

"Experience", similarly to my practice of physical or voice work, is also the key to the doorway of my performance that has to be "lived" and understood through doing. Though performance knowledge can be passed from person to person, the actual creation and execution of a performance are always metamorphosing and non transmissible.

To a certain extent, the one who performs relates and interacts *directly* with those present in her performance. This means an act that is to be "done" by someone, the actor, in a common space faced with other human beings, the

audience. The sense of “living-ness” in a performance would not be complete without some scrutiny of “theatre [as] an encounter” (Grotowski 2002: 55), a shared communion, experienced between the one who acts and the one who watches. It is exactly in the living circumstances of a performance that human beings converse and think collectively or individually. It is through my close proximity face-to-face with those present in the performance, that they subsequently become my acquaintances and associates. This sense of “acquaintanceship” also finds a resonance in Dufrenne’s philosophical view of “music as acquaintance, as friend and...the lived music as experience” (Bowman 1998: 267). As a musical performance, *Wandering Sounds* investigates, uncovers and establishes a mode of a receptive encounter and attentive listening. Drawing from a reflexive investigation, my discussion of my creative trajectory will focus on: I) Early traces of “wandering”; II) Perpetual homeward journey; III) Affective potency via musicality; IV) Interactive encounter with the audience; and V) Transformative experience: from the self to the source. Alongside my discussion and writing, I will refer to my live performance of the final version of *Wandering Sounds* in the documentation DVD attached. This, I hope to give a visual and aural understanding; adding to the phenomenological aspect of a PaR.

I) Early traces of “wandering”

The sense of my constant mobility may have begun many years ago. However, it was not until the end of 2006 that I embarked on my practical research into the theme of ‘wandering’. It started from a conversation I had with Nickolai D. Nickolov⁶² when he first mentioned to me the book *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin. Its notion of songs spreading all over the land as perceived by the Aboriginals in Australia affected me deeply. The inseparable relationship one finds through the “footprints of the Ancestors” (Chatwin 1998: 2) resonated strongly in me as did the following ideas:

⁶² Along with Nickolov, my life and work partner, our collaboration between theatre and music began in 2006 and has continued to this day.

Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path – birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes – and so singing the world into existence [...] A song [...] was both map and direction-finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across country [...] There was hardly a rock or creek in the country that could not or had not been sung. [...] Anywhere in the bush you can point to some feature of the landscape and ask the Aboriginal with you, “What’s the story there?” or “Who’s that?” (1998: 2 & 13).

Chatwin’s firsthand experiences gathered during his different travels convinced and moved me. They became the initial resources for me and concretised my move towards my own song and music search linked to my cultural roots. From here, my collaboration with Nickolov via his music creation has since developed into different performances.⁶³ Some of these events involved other European performance practitioners who had been working with me in *Sourcing Within* workshops. Interrelated themes of “walking”, “song” and “home” in these preceding works have contributed to the gradual structuring and development of *Wandering Sounds*.

II) Perpetual homeward journey

1. “Becoming” in a fictional space

Wandering Sounds is an autobiographical performance whereby I both narrate and enact – tracing my personal thoughts and reflections concurrently; shifting the reality between the present and the past; all of which are related to home. The use of the first-person voice in the entire piece is dominant. There is no separation between my telling and my becoming. There is no real characterization as the performance is built from my own story; thus, I am my own character. If there is narration, it is through my personal remembering of a specific life experience through which the story is recounted and being told. There is no real difference between my being a “character” in my story or my narrating the story. I am not solely recalling and recounting but also re-living my

⁶³ See Appendix E for a list of my performance timelines.

story, each time I perform. The past exists in my body in a similar way to how Connerton asserts that

We preserve versions of the past by representing it to ourselves in words and images. Commemorative ceremonies are pre-eminent instances of this. They are re-enactments of the past, its return in a representational guise which normally includes a simulacrum of the scene or situation recaptured [...] Our bodies [...] re-enact an image of the past, keep the past also in an entirely effective form in their continuing ability to perform certain skilled actions (1989: 72).

Connerton continues by referring to a daily activity such as swimming which can become a “habitual skilled remembering” (1989: 72) for the person practising it. By extending his idea to the actor’s work, I would argue that performing is an act of “skilled remembering” that penetrates in/through my body as I am practising it. It is by “commemorating” my past, with words and images, inside a performance structure that I find an unbroken flow of dialogue with my past.

By narrating the materials drawn out of my memories, I am also the materials living and speaking by themselves. Here, I am moving in what Kirsten Hastrup coined as “double belonging” (1987: 50-62), which Claudia Nascimento has examined in her book *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor’s Work*, a segment of which was based on my earlier performance work at the Workcenter. Nascimento analyses it thus: “Hastrup’s explanation of “double belonging” is applicable here in that, as a theatre professional, the intercultural actor is an active and participating partner both in the *real* world of her daily life and the *fictional* one proposed by the play” (Nascimento 2008: 60). “Fictional” in this context can be best understood as the external storyline that the audience perceives which is not that of the actor’s personal story. My approach to a “fictional” story in my past works, however, has always been seeking a personal connection to the story of the performance; narrowing the distance between my daily and fictional realities.

I would say that the term “fictional” has a different significance in my current work in *Wandering Sounds* since the story is not imaginary and is not far from my personal life. My performance nourishes my daily life while feeding me

with new understandings about my past, my home. “Double belonging” continues to exist in me in so far as I am enacting the “subject” of my story – my distant pasts, whilst I am living my life story, the “object”. “Double belonging” takes on a new scope, merges and blurs the boundary between the “daily” and the “fictional”. The moment the distant past is recalled in me, it immediately becomes my present. The past is lived, relived and always present in the moment of my performing. I belong to the past and yet to the present, “making past present again” (Bowman 1998: 272).

Unlike Chinese conventional storytelling⁶⁴ where language can be the main source, my telling of the story embraces my distant memories and associations with my sensorial experience. I immediately become the story in the moment I narrate and enact it. I, the wanderer portrayed in my story, am also the one who is wandering. In a sense, I am “active and participating” (Nascimento 2008: 60) in my story, in my performance. This process of becoming thus brings my perpetual homeward journey closer to its destination. Distance and my physical absence from my home country are indeed essential factors that evoke my re-understanding and renewing of relations with my family. This, in turn, allows me to reconcile myself with things I associate as “home” articulated in a fictional space, a performing space:

Memories bring me more hunger.
From house to house, place-to-place, my hunger forever wanders with me.
Hunger is the best sauce during my wandering.
Through wandering, I find my food. Through wandering, I find my home.
My tongue never forgets the instinct for home.
Whenever I am hungry, I would cook. As mama would say, never forget a bowl of rice for your ancestor. Not only rice, but a feast filled with music and theatre of my ancestors.

-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

My reflexive thoughts on home emerged more and more while travelling from place to place, country to country. Paradoxically, my daily life (my personal

⁶⁴ Here I refer to those belonging to my Chinese cultural sources such as the reciting-singing art form [Shuo Chang Yi Shu 说唱艺术] in China or an older form of storytelling in Singapore where someone tells a story for the duration of the burning of an incense stick. These forms emphasize language, with a minimum of or no bodily enactment.

story) “wanders” in a fictional mode (my performing) whereby I am transported “home” again and again.

2. Continuously residing in the materials

The creative materials of my homeward journey from my previous performances continue to serve, nourish and enrich my current work on *Wandering Sounds*: these are layers upon layers of reflections generated in and by me every time I perform. By providing responses to my thoughts about home, my performance serves as a way of enhancing my individual growth. At the same time, the materials find roots in me through time in which I can refresh the meanings of these. While new materials can replace certain old ones, nothing is eliminated before it has totally lost its significance for me. This allows my research to be investigative and centred on a first person perspective through a continuous, iterative and incremental practice in the act of performing.

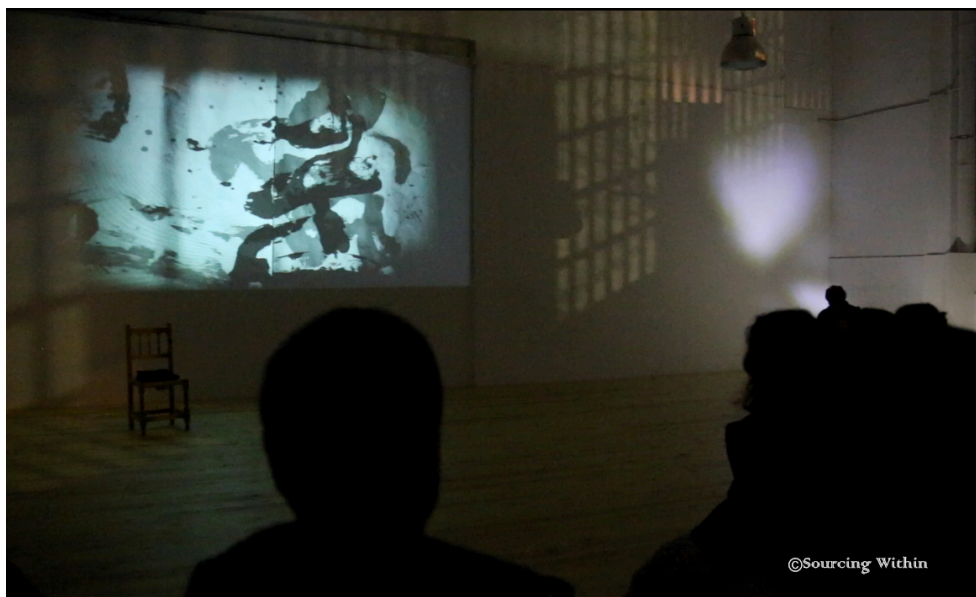


Illustration 9: The projection of calligraphy during the audience’s entrance to the performance of *Wandering Sounds*, Espai Blanc, Barcelona, 2016. Still from video of Sourcing Within.

At the start of the performance piece, there is a prologue consisting of a visual projection of my calligraphy-like drawings onto the backdrop of the performance space, simultaneous with Nickolov’s live playing of a mandolin. Accumulated from my past works, this Chinese writing-cum-drawing that

signifies “walking” [走], “ancestor” [祖] and “music” [音] appear and disappear continuously while the audience members enter. These visual images, designed by Nickolov, are intended to evoke in the audience a sense of transience where nothing lasts in life. After the audience is seated, I articulate some sounds that resemble a bird calling. This is then followed by my singing with Nickolov’s music accompaniment. Building up layer after layer of perceptual engagement, the creative materials feed on me, and I feed on the materials. By so doing, I continue to reflect, sharpen and renew my responses while performing. The materials then become active in this experience, reflecting in and through me in the performance. Reflected are the voices of me that speak up:

I am stubborn and unwilling to give up music in me. Just like chasing after the sunset, I would wander after music, into my inner stream of thoughts, that someone may think that I am a foolish soul.

Day after day, I wander on and on for music, leaving behind all my madness to the city crowds, my drunkenness for the feast and my forever, unfinished chatting and discourses. Nobody ever stops by except you; many have passed me so fast pretending not to see. Oh...do they think that I would stop them and beg for sympathy for my wandering?

-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

The above text from *Wandering Sounds* came from one of my rehearsal journals dated 2006. I was living and rehearsing in the countryside of Tuscany, Italy and had taken a long walk uphill, past fields, valleys, a panoramic view of the sunset, while frightening and being frightened by a ring-necked pheasant. Having slept little that night, my experience of exhaustion and weariness from the long walk dawned on me. The impulse to write down the experience right after the walk was strong. These vivid experiences have remained core texts, with a slight variation in each version, up to the latest version of the performance. Performance serves to reflect upon my living circumstances, and vice versa, my life experience acts as an immediate stimulus for my performance:

Tired bird once gone, never it comes back.

The sun sets down mountain, tomorrow, still rise again.

-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

The “panoramic view of the sunset” and “frightening and being frightened by a ring-necked pheasant” further provoked me. Songs and stories from my childhood years crept in while I was writing the experience of my exhausting yet enlightening walk. Based on a literal translation of the original lyrics in Chinese, the above texts were transformed into English with a reinvented melody consisting of different harmonies. This song, accompanied by Nickolov, has undergone so many transformations that I no longer recall which version is the current one. What is important is that the texts in the latest version of my performance remained the most resonant for me. They are potential sources “residing” in me through many years – to be heard and articulated in a live performing context.



Illustration 10: Gey Pin Ang in *Wandering Sounds*, in Cavallerizza Reale (Cavallerizza Assembly), Turin, Italy, 2014. Photo: Marcella Scopellitti.

3. Interrelation in performance

What lies behind each performance inquiry is a process of investigating the interrelation of ideas and executions. The practical knowledge in my performing, as I have experienced it heuristically, stems from an intuitive mode. Not interfering with the moments of my own playing while creating, materials begin to appear by themselves and take shape. Unlike an intellectual or

discursive mode of activities where words and texts are the means of understanding, performative work demands “intuitive listening” (Petitmengin-Peugeot in Varela 1999: 26). While rehearsing, I spontaneously follow the body- and sound-scapes. This means that I have to be constantly in accord with the live instrumental and visual creation/execution by Nickolov, allowing texts, actions, songs, and images to be spontaneously juxtaposed and intertwined in the creative process.

Likewise, “playing” is crucial within the process of montaging, inserting and editing materials. It is necessary to allow the text and melodies of the songs to alternate from one segment to another while developing my work. As examined in Chapter 2, Stephen Nachmanovitch’s *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (1990) had also a deep influence on my creative process. With a non-judgmental perspective on my own work, I can liberate the instinctive and organic self in me to participate actively:

The intuition discovered, the unconscious made conscious, is always a surprise [...] The cadence or whatever ending I contrive modulates into something else, and out of nowhere comes a totally new melody [...] Keeping open an unrestricted pathway for the creative impulse to play its music straight from the preconscious depths beneath and beyond me. I came to know that blocks are the price of avoiding surrender, and that surrender is not defeat but rather the key to opening out into a world of delight and nonstop creation (Nachmanovitch 1990: 140-141).

Time after time, through practising and experimenting with what I have gained from reading Nachmanovitch’s book, I have consciously or unconsciously applied some of his principles in rehearsals and workshop sessions. Not to abandon the spirit of experimentation, a sense of effortlessness and playfulness comes in the moment of my doing and performing:

It is possible to *become* what you are doing [...] The intensity of your focused concentration and involvement maintains and augments itself, your physical needs decrease, your gaze narrows, your sense of time stops. You feel alert and alive; effort becomes effortless. You lose yourself in your own voice, in the handling of your tools, in your feeling for the rules. Absorbed in the pure fascination of the game, of the textures and resistances and nuances and limitations of that particular medium, you

forget time and place and who you are. The noun of self becomes a verb. This flashpoint of creation in the present moment is where work and play merge (Nachmanovitch 1990: 51-52).

Nachmanovitch's ideas may appear less than explanatory. However, in practice as I have experienced it, heuristically, a metaphorical⁶⁵ language can be very inspiring for opening up my imaginary world and perception. It provokes in me my instinctive senses, where my mental understanding does not interfere during my doing and executing of the performance. In such an instance, I am at the experiential core of "practice".

III) Affective potency via musicality

At the heart and key to the phenomenological nature of performance is its living experience. This "living-ness" naturally amalgamates itself within the music collaboration between Nickolov and myself. A discussion on *Wandering Sounds* would not be complete without addressing its "musicality" (Roesner 2014: 5). Roesner has put forward the notion of "musicality as *dispositif*" with a focus on "the embodied, pre-linguistic aspects of theatre" (2014: 15). He has argued that this "*dispositif*" possesses substantial links to theatre process and performance in the sense of "musicality as a perceptive quality, an embodied quality, or a cognitive and communicative quality" (2014: 13). These are points of references which will help to ground my discussion here.

1. Music and self

"Why include music in my PaR? What has music to do with work on the self?" Nickolov as my essential collaborator in my PaR performance has crucially contributed to the piece through his "musicianship", through active listening in "knowing-in-action", as musician/educator David Elliott calls it (Bowman 2000: 46). According to Bowman, "music's primary experiential values...is its capacity

⁶⁵ "Metaphor" is one of the essential characteristics that theatre scholar David Roesner claims within "musicality", a notion which will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

to provide “flow,” a predominantly cognitive state...that nurtures self-growth and enhances self-awareness” (2000: 46). This is delicate and visible in Nickolov’s way of playing a string instrument such as a Mandolin or guitar when accompanying my performance. Here is his reflexive account:

Through practice and practice, I understand the music [...] now I understand the meaning [...] instantaneously hearing more and more, playing with the rhythms yet not playing the same each time...most importantly, how to surprise myself⁶⁶ (Nickolov 2016).

Bowman identifies “the somatic/corporeal moment in human cognition, and to recognize music as a kind of special celebration of this moment: our here-and-now, embodied mode of being” (2000: 49). For Nickolov, through his embodied practice, music is “a unique way of being in the body: it draws together *knowing*, *being*, and *doing* as nothing else does” (Bowman 2000: 49). Bowman considers “timbre—the ‘quality’ a sound has, the way it rubs against, or pierces, or caresses, or resonates with the body” (2000: 49). He argues that quality is always and has to be closely tied to the body. Without the body, we cannot speak about “quality” (2000: 49). As for Nickolov, quality is about “listening, of finding a better sound, a better expressiveness through the control of the strings. In such a process, one learns and expands his knowledge” (Nickolov 2016). Alongside Nickolov, our investigation goes beyond any disciplinary and cultural differences. Instead, a language of resonance – music – awakens and comes alive in us, bridging across layers of textualised sounds, songs and music (live and amplified) in the performance space and then reaching across to the audience.

⁶⁶ This is drawn from my conversation with Nickolov in July 2016.



Illustration 11: Nickolai D. Nickolov in a rehearsal for *Wandering Sounds*, Casa Cares, Reggello, Italy, 2016. Photo: Gey Pin Ang.

2. Musicality as a heuristic approach

The 'hidden world of our inner life',
which needs to be expressed in art:
'this life cannot be expressed
except through music, and
music can express only that life'.
(Appia in Roesner 2014: 25)

Theatre and music, though conceivably distinct and separate art forms as there can be, do not function as two separate paradigms in my performance. The collaboration between Nickolov and myself, as in Roesner's notion of "musicality" (2014: 5), is less concerned with offering explanation about what it is but instead depends on "how music is experienced" (Bowman 1998: 255). Music as a heuristic practice cannot be reached with a thorough understanding if approached through verbal discourse. Music "reveal[s] things as they are...[and] instead of explaining, it describes" (Bowman 1998: 255). Likewise, a phenomenological method in music claims that "people can be brought face to

face with the innermost essences of things” (Bowman 1998: 255). Roesner perceives music as not being “normative” following Wayne Bowman’s definition:

[...] music is whatever people choose to recognize as such, and its meanings are constituted by an open-ended interpretive process constrained only by sounds and the live experiences of those engaged with them. [...] Music is thus plural and dynamic, and its meanings are relative to a potentially infinite range of interpretive variables (Bowman 1998: 201).

This emphasizes the importance of music to be experienced “live”. Music has the capacity to stimulate our various senses all at once. My practical experience revolving around music has been sensorial, being enacted with my whole body. When my senses are open, I begin to perceive music as I have experienced it.

Music is here.
Whether I call for it or not, it is always here.
I cannot resist.
Song is my way. All land, music.
I’ve walked past where my ancestors had walked,
and I have been welcomed home!
...I am stubborn and unwilling to give up music in me.
-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

I am reminded of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological view where the “centrality of the body and perceptual experience” (Bowman 1998: 255) has been widely drawn on for discussions about music. Corporeality and embodiment continue to be a very active part of my creative process. Through songs and music, my performance is woven and arises from my perceptual experience.

One instance is the childhood song that I remembered, titled “Tired Bird”, as examined earlier. It was originally a song with three harmonised parts from one of my previous works. It had a dynamic flow and variations of different voices from a few actors. However, to keep this song within my current performance, I needed to reinvent another way of executing it, not losing the dynamic that the song had previously. So, it was vital that I looked for new ways of retaining its organicity and the richness of the different harmonised parts. I have to sing the song more times, each time with a different harmony, all by

myself. It challenged my continuous involvement while singing and moving at the same time. How could I not allow myself to be repetitive and lifeless, not be drowned by any tiresome thoughts that might occur, or not be affected by the external conditions such as the acoustics or temperature of the space in which I was performing? The degree of attention required in me surpasses any technical level of singing. It demands constant awareness in my doing and performing of the song, adjusting each moment to Nickolov's music. Music in my performance has parallels with what Thomas Clifton describes: "music is [...] what I am when I experience it" (Bowman 1998: 256).

Any musical idea needs to be executed as an accomplished act. Let us examine another instance of the song I deliver while holding a frying pan. I sing, "I am hungry! I am hungry!" I recall different people in my life whom I have watched cooking. It might be my grandmother, my nanny or a food vendor. Hitting with a wooden stick the inside and edge of the pan, the sounds of street vendors and street theatre reverberate in me. My memories stream back to a time when I was little. This "hungry" song is montaged and juxtaposed with a visual projection by Nickolov of an old man preparing a traditional candy in earlier versions and a man cooking in a wok on a big fire in the last version, each of these memories resembling one from my childhood.



Illustration 12: The scene of "hungry" song in *Wandering Sounds* in Espai Blanc, Barcelona, Spain, 2016. Visual projection designed by Nickolai D. Nickolov. Still from video of Sourcing Within.

The original melody of “I am hungry” comes from a song from a tribal community in the province of Hualian, in southern Taiwan.⁶⁷ Upon hearing it, Nickolov, who has a Western musical background, exclaimed that the song sounded like the blues⁶⁸ to him. For me, it is the voice of the old singer that has evoked in me a sense of “home”. As for Nickolov, the blues music represents yet another form of hunger for expression among the African American community at the turn of the 19th century. From there, I began to sing while Nickolov spontaneously played the mandolin in a blues style. The song has another “flavour” through our musical encounter; an associative connection which we have built upon with our own impressions. It became a new song and music with a specific yet shared meaning for us. Gradually, I inserted the text “I am hungry”, replacing the original lyrics⁶⁹ that then added a dramaturgical meaning to my performance. This heuristic experience in music took us on a new musical trajectory, surrounded by what we had encountered. Bridging through the music, the pan as a prop (and instrument) comes alive in and through me in the performance as Appia claimed:

Music becomes an intermediary between [the actor] and any props or small design elements...this very transformation, which deprives the actor of his personal, arbitrary life, brings him closer to the inanimate elements of the production, and those elements are forced by the music to furnish a degree of expression proper to their close relationship with the living actor (Roesner 2014: 30-31).

The use of the object is never unanimated or isolated in itself inside the performance. The “hungry” song with the pan intensifies an aspect of life as I have lived it. It was then woven together with another excerpt of song in my Hokkien dialect. I had heard it on the radio before Chinese dialects were banned

⁶⁷ I research Taiwanese songs as they have the same dialect as mine, though the former calls it “Min-nan” and the latter “Hokkien”. While Chinese dialects in Singapore have been banned, my memories remain intact of songs that I heard on the radio when I was a child.

⁶⁸ About blues music, see more in Oakley (1997). *The Devil’s Music: History of the Blues*. 2nd edition. New York: DaCapo Press.

⁶⁹ This song comes from a tribal community in Taiwan where I do not speak the language; however, it was the deep and rooted voice of an old man in the original version that drew me to it.

in Singapore. It is a song about the relations between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, but I only had a partial memory of it. Using the colloquial mode of speaking of my dialect with varied tones and pitches, distant memories of different female voices I had heard from my grandmother's village came back to me. This is further juxtaposed with another excerpt of text originating from a classic story in the Chinese Yuan dynasty about a lost soul wandering in the dark. Following my associations, early memories and my initial exposure to traditional Hokkien theatre as I had experienced it in my grandmother's village all fused and vividly came back to life in me. All these associative images and hidden voices arise from my sensory self enhanced through music. Employing musicality with these fragments of the performance gives rise to more imaginative ideas and provokes various ancestral 'beings' inside me; even though the past mode of living such as in my grandmother's village has long since vanished and yielded to the country's motorways.

3. Associative enactment via speaking-singing⁷⁰

There is an aspect of my musical experimentation that I have called *speaking-singing*⁷¹, applying two different registers of my vocal capacity. One register is a verbal speaking mode, the other a melodic pattern as in singing. This began during my rehearsals alone where I deliberately experimented with speaking and singing alternately. On top of this, a wide range of open investigation between songs and speaking words, singing and instrumental music, live performance and projected images, are intertwined in the whole of *Wandering Sounds*. Often, songs in the performance began as improvisations⁷², and Nickolov would instinctively play along with the mandolin. At other times, I would sing the text I had composed while he played music to it. With his instrumental sounds, he converses with my singing, every moment adjusting

⁷⁰ This is another aspect of "speak-sing" in parallel to Chapter 3, 2.3 *Departing from singing: Speak-Sing*.

⁷¹ One may be reminded of Sprechgesang technique, "spoken song, speech-song". Available from: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100525335> [Accessed 29 August 2016]. However, this is not within the scope of my discussion.

⁷² Many of our improvisations were then structured into the performance.

accordingly. Following my emotions in each song or text, he never failed to provide the right musical melodic pattern for each one. The song with the lyrics below sounded “Eastern”⁷³ in our collaboration,

With a veil over my head, I’ve opened my door, from my heart to the living spirits of my home, between the inner life of my family and myself.

(Sing) Anybody home? Anybody home? Anybody home?

(Speak) Once, I went to a big temple. It was humming like

(Sing) the beehives, ha ha ha

(Speak) There, I saw a group of men facing to

(Sing) the sunrise, ha ha ha

(Speak) Some women were just looking from behind

(Sing) the door, ha ha ha

(Speak) Many have never stepped out from there; but spending their entire life serving

(Sing) the home, home, home...⁷⁴

An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

When my associations were released and swam beyond my memories and my associations towards another pattern, he responded as well. With Nickolov and his mandolin, there was a magical tune with which I was instantaneously transported home.

⁷³ See *Wandering Sounds*, fragments of the performance in the documentation DVD.

⁷⁴ Ibid.



Illustration 13: Gey Pin Ang in *Wandering Sounds*, in Cavallerizza Reale (Cavallerizza Assembly), Turin, Italy, 2014. Photo: Marcella Scopellitti.

Deliberately switching between speaking and singing, the process lifted and shifted my emotions up and down, back and forth, from strong to light. Inspired by Liselle Reymond's *My Life With a Brahmin Family* (1972), where she speaks about her experience of living with an Indian Brahmin family as a Western nun, the above texts formed and came alive. The melody on the other hand comes from some Indian chant that I remembered from my first trip to India years ago. I found myself recalling and improvising a tune from my association gained through my reading experience. Recently, Nickolov has elaborated the song with a high pitch created from the bowing of the strings on the mandolin. Here, "intuitive listening" once again has proved to be essential in a musical journey. Music as our intermediate experience brings us to a concrete and meaningful collaboration.

Half way through my performance, there is a silent action juxtaposed with a voice-over of a text from Franz Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* (2014). The amplitude of "hunger" demonstrated in Kafka's text is something I as an artist deeply associate with. It gives a very concrete resonance to the "hunger" that arises from my wandering away from home. It suddenly transforms my personal hunger for home into my hunger as an artist that also exists in the social context today:

Some permanent watchers selected by the public, usually butchers, strangely enough, and it was their task to watch the hunger artist day and night, in case the hunger artist should have some secret recourse to nourishment. Sufficiently, she would sing during their watch for as long as she could keep going, to show them how unjust their suspicions were (Kafka 2014: 134).

The voice-over⁷⁵ juxtaposed with my silent enactment intensifies the spatial relationship between the one who performs (who is hungry) and the one who watches the “hunger artist”.

Towards the end of the performance, there is a speak-sing fragment on the “man⁷⁶-bird” relation. In an earlier version of the performance, the visual projections by Nickolov are with many flying, winged figures. It came from some anonymous graffiti on a street wall I noticed while walking along a city in southeast Spain some years ago. It was an image of a man with his brain opened up, with many smaller winged men flying out of it; flying horizontally, slanting, standing, and squatting on every level (See illustration 6). This inspired a text that I was working on then, which revolved around the relationship between men and birds. This text keeps developing over the years. It began as a spoken text, and the current version of this text is woven sonically and visually – combining speaking, singing and the projection of winged images of men:

(Sing) At times, during my wandering, I found myself among a valley of wind; with some man-birds, looking and waving to me.

(Speak) They remind me that I could fly.

At one moment,

(Sing) These man-birds, seemed to be the parts of me that I have lost during my wandering.

(Wooden blocks dropping on ground)

They live high above the valley, their gravities float high and wings flap on and on.

(Wooden blocks dropping on ground)

(Sing) I went in the direction of these man-birds. My body remembered

⁷⁵ The voice-over is in courtesy of Riccardo Brunetti, one of my collaborators mentioned in Chapter 2.

⁷⁶ “Man” here simply refers to “human being” or 人 “ren” as in Chinese. There is no intention to differentiate it as “man” from “woman”.

without effort, and wings grew out from my shoulders.
The wind carried me and I was flying, flying.
Flying, flying. Flying, flying.⁷⁷

-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

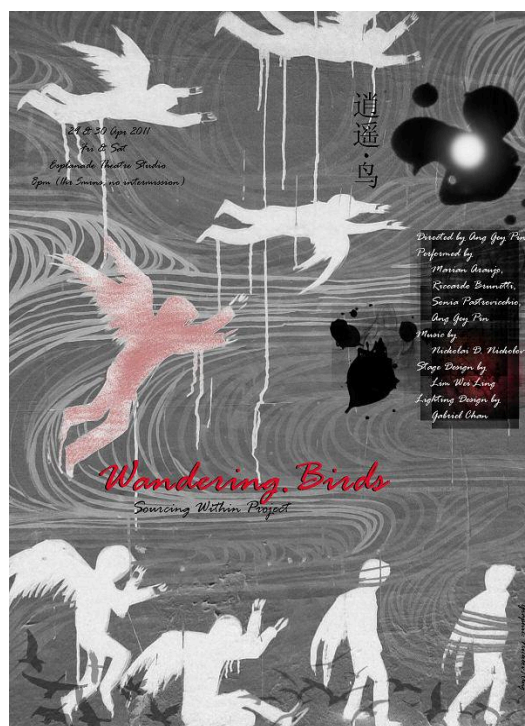


Illustration 14: Some anonymous graffiti became the inspiration for the poster of *Wandering Birds*, 2011, designed by Ang and Nikolov, which is where the source of ‘man-bird’ text in *Wandering Sounds* came from.

Following this fragment, there is a song from the Miao tribal community in southern China, found whilst I was searching for songs in the first year of my PhD study. In approaching this song, Nikolov and I decided to keep the original voices from a group of women in that tribe, juxtaposing them with my spiralling⁷⁸ while clapping together two wooden blocks, with Nikolov playing a native Bulgarian tune that he remembered in the course of our collaboration. What came out of these sounds in the performance space was incredibly resonant, resulting from layers of articulated sounds. This is then followed by my quick exit from the performance space while the recorded sounds and instrumental music remain till they gradually fade away in the dark. As Nachmanovitch observes,

⁷⁷ See *Wandering Sounds*, fragments of the performance in the documentation DVD.

⁷⁸ The final version of this fragment had been added with a big plastic sheet. This can be viewed in *Wandering Sounds*, fragments of the performance in the documentation DVD.

In dealing with the subconscious mind, we're dealing with an ocean full of rich, invisible life forms swimming underneath the surface. In creative work we're trying to catch one of these fish; but we can't kill the fish, we have to catch it in a way that brings it to life. In a sense we bring it amphibiously to the surface so it can walk around visibly; and people will recognize something familiar because they've got their own fish, who are cousins to your fish. Those fish, the unconscious thoughts, are not passively floating "down there"; they are moving, growing, and changing on their own, and our conscious mind is but an observer or interloper (1990: 158).

With our conscious mind silently letting the creative impulses in us emerge, our associations and imagination can enact and reawaken by themselves. In creating as well as in performing, our "known" body (our intellect) unquestionably needs to yield and surrender to the body in practice and its embodiment.



Illustration 15: Gey Pin Ang rehearsing the segment of 'man-bird' in *Wandering Sounds*, Casa Cares, Reggello, Italy, 2016. Photo: Nickolai D. Nickolov.

4. An associative connection with the traditional theatre

A recurring question has been raised from the audience at different phases of my working on my PaR performances. "Consciously or unconsciously,

how much have I been influenced by and how much am I trained in the Chinese traditional theatre?" I associate "traditional" as what is commonly known as Chinese Street Opera in my home country Singapore or Chinese Opera in China.

The basis of Chinese theatre is a musical form of theatre rooted in 散乐 "*sanyue* (variety music)...which broadly referred to folk music and dance, drama, and other folk arts" (Lee 2009: 6). The street opera that has been transmitted in Singapore "is a multifaceted theatrical genre that acts out a story through singing, speech, movements, instrumental accompaniment, and stage props." (Lee 2009: 5). I have extensive experience in watching Chinese Street Opera as a child. Might it be that this has imprinted in me a cognitive memory where I associate performance as an intermingling of theatre and music? This was manifested in my PaR performance:

When I was little, I would often go to a bamboo stage, at the temple in the village of my grandmother.
(Projection of moving image of an actress of traditional Chinese theatre)
I would stand among the crowds, waiting for my theatre idols to appear in different characters and to fly across the stage.
With a hand gesture,
(Gesture in silence) the actress enters the temple,
(Gesture in silence) with a whip, she is riding on a horse,
(Gesture in silence) or walking in a circle, many days of her journey have passed.
Instead of speaking, she would sing her emotions and thoughts. One word, she would sing for a very long time. Or one phrase, she would go very high or very low pitch.
(Looks at the projected image) What's even more imaginative? With these water sleeves, the actress would become a spirit. These are food for me!
As I wander far away from home, I still eat and breathe in this music, this theatre.
(Sees the screen but the image has disappeared)
If my ancestor were here, what would she think?
Am I a thief to my home spirit?

-- An excerpt of text from *Wandering Sounds*, 2016

My experiences in Chinese street opera in Singapore came mostly through my watching performances in the village of my grandmother during the 1970s, and later watching them on the streets among the high-rise buildings in the 1980 as Lee describes them:

[P]erformed along the streets, in the vicinity of a temple, or in open areas such as a field or parking lot, on a temporary stage constructed out of timber poles and canvases...Performances often take place in a broader context of Chinese religious events and customary celebrations, deities' birthdays, and special anniversaries of Chinese temples (2009: 5).

My embodied experience in watching performances in these different contexts might have been a process of 潜移默化 'qian yi mo hua', "subtly shifting and silently transforming" for and in me. This is an important characteristic of embodied practice, allowing the experience to take its own course in oneself, gradually letting it become a concrete artistic form and shape. Through my researching and performing, this embodiment of the traditional style of Chinese street opera in me may possibly have taken place without my noticing or being aware.

My current PaR with a strong emphasis on music is a path to continue my connection with my tradition, initiated since Theatre OX's research. Bowman proposes "to regard music as a corporeal and cultural fact" (Bowman 2000: 59). In my case, it is a conscious building on a lost culture, reinvented and re-found in my years of being away from my home country. According to Elliott, "[A]ttention, awareness, and memory constitute the human meaning-making system we call consciousness, and another word for human consciousness is self" (Bowman 2000: 56). Perhaps my conscious search through memory is a way for me to understand my "self", as to "who I am". It is, for me, a resourceful and enriching way to find a conscious connection to my past history that has been aborted but re-connected over all these years through my theatre practice.

According to Connerton, tradition is a mode of speaking in the sense that "they (those who receive tradition in the oral verse) receive a tradition bodily, by re-enacting it – re-enacting it with lips and larynx and limbs, and with the whole apparatus of their unconscious nervous system" (2011: 105). Keen witnesses of my work in the past have echoed Connerton's thoughts:

Observing her performance, Grotowski noted that Gey Pin has a rare capacity which he suggested is possessed only by the highest masters of

Asian traditional performance - an ability to infuse precisely codified forms with organic impulse. He described her work, which was highly unnaturalistic in certain moments, as a study in the impulses which precede physical action, the tiny movements beneath the skin that radiate outward through the body (Wolford 1996: 170).

Jerzy Grotowski's observation is on my very early performance work directed by Massoud Saidpour, an Iranian director, within the framework of Objective Drama Research in Irvine, California, 1992. The remark came as a surprising compliment to me as a young actress. I had no idea where and how I had demonstrated this 'capacity' to Grotowski then. I can only imagine that it may have come from my watching Chinese Street Opera since I was young.

The approximate representation of my traditional theatre is not my conscious choice, as it might well be assumed. I strongly believe that it is a gradual influence, my early impressions of childhood that have brought me back to the 'first' theatre in my life, its language, and its music. The connectedness of past and present in Gadamer's study recognises the "temporal distance" where "time...is actually the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted" (1975: 264). He stresses the recognition of "distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding... [and] is filled with a continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us" (1975: 264). This realisation comes from year after year of conversing with the tradition in my creating of performance. One example of this influence is the resemblance the traditional costume with long water sleeves that I wear in *Wandering Sounds* has to the projected image of a traditional Chinese theatre actress.⁷⁹ The ways that I use the costume, and the movements of the traditional actor are associative as I have never trained in this traditional form of theatre. It is associative as I have only received and learned from my perceptions and impressions from watching numerous performances. Even after the village of my grandmother had been demolished⁸⁰, I continued to follow my aunt to various parts of modern Singapore to watch street performances. In my memory, the

⁷⁹ See *Wandering Sounds*, fragment of my performance in the documentation DVD, where I have the long water sleeves with the image of traditional Chinese actress projected on the screen.

⁸⁰ It was yet another example of Singapore' demolishing villages to build highways and roads, like the one on the Ubin Island previously accounted.

audiences were decreasing, and it made these street performances even more special as they were meant for the Taoist gods, usually served in the occasions of special temple ceremonies as Lee describes in his book. Memories have never been only nostalgia but they become concrete and articulated in my performance; as seen in my performance. I, with the long sleeves, converse with the projected image of a traditional actress my far ancestor. My associative links to the tradition are often a musical one, alternating between spoken and sung modes in frequent intervals, even within the same phrase, in split seconds.



Illustration 16: A resemblance of the traditional long-sleeve costume that Gey Pin Ang wears in *Wandering Sounds* and the image of a traditional Chinese theatre actress, projection designed by Nickolov, in The Aphra Theatre, University of Kent, UK, 2016. Still from video of *Sourcing Within*.

IV) An interactive encounter with the audience⁸¹

The life of my performance work finds nourishment via live interaction with the audience in the performance. How might an affective process of music

⁸¹ See *Wandering Sounds*, fragments of Performance in the documentation DVD, on my interaction with the audience with the frying pan.

on the self happen not only in the performer, but also for the audience in a cognitive way? There are different instances in the performance where I purposely go closer to the audience members. It is during those moments that I can clearly see their expressions as I pass by. In one instance I was near to the audience, following the phrase “My memories do not speak English”. The audience usually has some response to this phrase. In another instance I went again near them with a frying pan, this time singing in a high pitch, or while cooking with the pan singing ‘I’m hungry’. I sense that the audience were more silent probably because the pitch was high and the use of voice was resonating and surrounding them. The audience throughout the performance of almost an hour, most of the time, is attentive, silent, or with subtle reactions. There was space and time for the audience member to respond in a silent and private way in a public venue.⁸²

1. Feeding the audiences’ needs

Music through my performance has the potential to guide the attention of the audience deeper into following my associative and animated world. Music, as viewed by Appia, can be “a kind of key that allows the artist to unlock a profound aesthetic experience for the audience, an insight into the human condition as an emotional reality...[and potentially] unlocks the audience’s inner life” (In Roesner 2014: 28). Audience interaction continues to expand and grow beyond my performance, through receiving their feedback. For instance, a few empty seats during the performance in Aberdeen in March 2014 accidentally became a scenic possibility. This came after feedback of an audience member named Zoe whose ancestors are the First Nations in Canada. She asked me during a post-performance discussion, “Do you speak with your ancestors during your performance?” She felt that I was interacting with the empty chair which reminded her of her own relationship with her ancestors. She missed home while being at Aberdeen at that time. Drawing on her impression many months

⁸² Listen to the audio recordings in the documentation CD, which I have conducted with an audience member. I have chosen not to transcribe the recordings, in order to keep the cognitive responses as they were. This demonstrates yet another phenomenological aspect of PaR.

later, I incorporated a chair into the performance when it was presented in a living room of a house in Rome, Italy (November 2014). Here's an account by another observer named Valeria Lembo, Honorary Research Fellow at The School of Social Sciences, The University of Aberdeen, who had watched six versions of the performance:

Everything was more defined: an empty dress had been left on an empty chair and Gey Pin, as far as I can remember now after many months, was interacting with it, singing to it. Through her voice vibrating, that empty dress looked like it was alive and inhabited. Suddenly Zoe was there, with her Canadian ancestors as well (Lembo 2015).⁸³

Engaging through songs, music and actions, I contacted the audience close to me while performing. Engaging in a live exchange, our human responses can flow back and forth, like streams flowing between each other, from the performer to the audience, or the other way round. Lembo again recalled:

Sitting in a row of chairs in that dark theatre, a spoon of wood was being offered to me by Gey Pin, as well as to the other persons of the audience. The pan she was holding and offering to us was the invitation of caring about our hunger, instead of letting it go away. Bringing us back with her chant to her land and her past (2015).

I remember this instance as described by Lembo. I was intentionally extending my thought of hunger, "feeding" the audience members with spoonfuls in an intimate space - a living room - in that particular performance. I entered the reality of a house where the audience was transported metaphorically as well, connecting my world to theirs; and possibly in Lembo's case, I was connecting to her world, which was filled with her own memories, imaginations, dreams, and reality awaiting to be met as well.

⁸³ Lembo's email correspondence with me dated 12 July 2015.



Illustration 17: Gey Pin Ang with a long-sleeve costume and the empty chair in the scene of *Wandering Sounds*, in Espai Blanc, Barcelona, Spain, 2016. Still from video by Garth Williams.

Perhaps it is through near proximity that performance can revive itself as a live experience. Consciously, I constantly adapt to the different performance spaces – my entrance, my exit and searching for ways of executing certain fragments – slightly varied according to the spatial relationship with the audience. Prompt and instant decisions and choices need to be made on how to utilise the space upon arriving in a new performance space; creating a sense of space as “home” (Allain 2009: 26) for an actor, as in the ideology of Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki. Renewing my relationship with the audience in a fictional space has abundant meaning for me as an artist and as a human being. Most of the time, I do not even know who is among the audience. Faced with different new audiences each time, and depending on the persons whom I contact during the performance, I renew my meeting with each in the newly established “home” in each performance space. Music is essentially a means in this connection to reach across to the human beings in my performance. As Clifton puts it, “Music [...] is the actual realization of the possibility of any sound [...] present to some human being a meaning [...] his senses, his will, and his metabolism” (Bowman 1998: 267-268).

Music in my performance has proven to be a potential carrier whereby

the audiences' thoughts are being transported and altered throughout the duration of the performance. It is an active mode of listening, thinking and reflecting on one's memories where each can be in care of one's own self. Our performance has engaged the audience musically such that the movement of me the performer is happening as well inside the audience. To put it in musical terms, it might be described as an anamnesis effect, where

[A]n evocation of the past, refers to situations in which a sound or sonic context revives a situation or an atmosphere of the past. This effect can span very different periods of time while retaining its intrinsic nature...[such as] a song that evokes a childhood memory...[or] a sound element previously heard...[T]he more distant and unexpected the reference, the more the emotion may overwhelm the listener (Augoyard and Torgue 2005: 21).

Perhaps in an age of fast living where some people might claim to have no time music is a more effective means than a formal silent meditative mode to achieve care of oneself. Bowman believes that David Elliott pointed towards a path where music and self can be "more fluid, more transient, more constructed" (Bowman 2000: 46); more contingent than what our traditional theorizing has allowed.

Bowman further suggests that "the cognitive skills and bodily know-how...comprise both fluent musicianship and "listenership" (2000: 55). I would argue that "listenership" is what my PaR performance has "silently" invited the audience to participate in, through Nickolov's music and my singing. Bowman also called for a music-making process that not only concerns knowing, but an experiential mode alongside "doing and being" (2000: 59). Music as in our performance puts each audience member in an active mode of "being". This, in a similar way, taps into the "second person" approach (Varela and Shear 1999: 8) mentioned in my Introductory chapter: an empathic mode of observing that enables participation in the other's experience. This, I would claim, is clearly the phenomenological aspect of the audience's experience in my PaR performance.



Illustration 18 & 19 (above) and (below): Gey Pin Ang passing the audience in two different moments of *Wandering Sounds*, Jarman Studio 1, University of Kent, UK, 2015. Still from video by Garth Williams.



V) Transformative experience: from the self tuning into the source

Theatre...is an ancient and basic instrument
that helps us with one drama only,
the drama of our existence,
and helps us to find our way towards
the source of what we are.
(Jerzy Grotowski in Godmilow 2008)

Performance, when it is not geared towards being a commodity but rather a laboratory process, gives ample time and space for work on the 'self', as in Konstantin Stanislavski's practice:

From the inability to find a conscious path to unconscious creativeness, actors reached destructive prejudices which denied spiritual technique; they grew cold in surface layers of scenic craft and accepted empty theatrical self-consciousness for true inspiration. I know only one method of combating this so dangerous circumstance for the actor... [that is] by way of work over oneself and over the material of the role (Stanislavski 2008: 571).

Wandering Sounds, with the search for my cultural sources, demands me to open a dialogue with my home culture; a merging of my inner dialogue with myself via a performance act. This process centred in my PaR cultivates, transports and engages me wholeheartedly and unresistingly uplifts my younger and lighter self. "Self" resembles for me a return to 无为 'wu wei', in the context of Chinese Taoism. The Taoist texts of Lao Tze and Chuang Tze were introduced to me in high school, but it was not until working with Liu Ruo-Yu that I became engrossed in these ancient texts. Liu made these words of wisdom manifest through her embodied action in a mode of silent and nonverbal teaching. Just as Pierre Hadot has claimed that ancient "philosophy was a way of life" (1995: 265), my learning experience via Liu has effectively guided me towards a way of life where work on the self is always an equal to work on the craft. It is a quality stemming from training and to be continued on into performance for which one should constantly strive. There needs to be persistent attention paid to "fine tuning" in totality of the bodymind, as in Varela's notion:

The tradition of mindfulness/awareness meditation [that] talks about effortless efforts and why it uses the analogy for meditation of tuning, rather than playing, a stringed instrument – the instrument must be tuned neither too tightly nor too loosely (1993: 29).

"Tuning" as Varela has put it, resonates in me in the process prior to and during the act of performing. It takes my attention in a process of "preparation" and

“de-preparation”: I should memorise my performance score yet always leave some space to improvise within the structure, following each minute moment of my thoughts and actions while performing. Anticipation of my score might lead to mechanical repetition and execution, and thus a dead, unanimated performance. I also find it more fulfilling if I am receptive, if I let myself play within the structure and am ready to respond to any live situation of performing. It is through experience again and again that I find different modes to engage the bodymind each time while performing. Here we are back to *wu wei*. Or perhaps, for non-Eastern readers, a theatrical equivalent term might be Grotowski’s “via negativa – not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks” (Grotowski 2002: 17). This term was not easy for me to grasp in practice when I first learned from Liu. Experience has taught me to see this as an act simply of moment-to-moment doing, practice after practice, as Varela describes it:

Practice is...rather as the letting go of habits of mindfulness, as an *unlearning* rather than a learning. This unlearning may take training and effort, but it is a different sense of effort from the acquiring of something new. It is precisely when the meditator approaches the development of mindfulness with the greatest ambitions – the ambition to acquire a new skill through determination and effort – that his mind fixates and races, and mindfulness/awareness is most elusive (1993: 29).

Performance with an embodied approach suggests as well an unlearning and effortless process to be experienced again and again. Through a performance structure, the life in a performer’s scores can be renewed and refreshed if unlearning what is already known. *Wandering Sounds* allows me a refined and active mode of conversing and reflecting upon my deeper thoughts and questions. Performance is an intermediate space for me between my daily life and my inner streams of thoughts and associations. It is manifesting and concretizing my thoughts in action. It is precisely during the act of performing face to face with people in that instant that I am not able to stop or rehearse again. The act has to happen *now* and there is no way to repeat or restart the performance. It is a “wisdom [that] does not merely cause us to know: it makes us “be” in a different way” (Hadot 1995: 265). Instead, I need to be *hic et nunc*, do it, live it to the fullest, as if for the first time and as if never again. It requires

me to be unmistakably attentive throughout the interactive process of performing.

When one can “be”, there is no disguise; only the self, transparent and transformed. In this transformative experience, the self tunes in closer to the source, as in Taoism, a part of my family culture. I am home, in this sense, each time when I “am”, when I perform. “Being”, or in other words “via negativa”, means an act for me in performing and beyond. At the same time, there is a third area, “play”, that is separated from our actual living and inner psychic spaces as claimed by Donald Winnicott (1971: 54). I would argue that this third area is where I find myself residing in conjunction with and projected onto the “play” as I perform. “It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (Winnicott 1971: 54). This third area allows an absolute freedom for me to converse with that which is not a ‘character’ in me, but with my thoughts, my responses, my breath (or *chi* as in Taijiquan), all of which is my self.

As I reflexively contemplate and articulate my performance, my mind flies back to when I was about 3-5 years old, which I recounted earlier (reference 2.3). Every day I would go to my neighbour next door. In this big house, while this lady whom I called aunt was busy with her daily chores, I was free to run around, play and enact all my impressions from watching the adults, snapshots of their lives. During this I was able to experience and become everything from my “drama” through my thoughts and letting my imagination run wild. In *Wandering Sounds*, reminiscence about the past lifted my veil and opened my door in a mode which Nachmanovitch describes thus; “Full-blown artistic creativity takes place when a trained and skilled grown-up is able to tap the source of clear, unbroken play-consciousness of the small child within” (1990: 48).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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Iterative practice

Over the course of the three years of my PaR journey, I was able to consolidate and further investigate my work via *Sourcing Within* project. By drawing upon useful references, I further supported my practice as a performer of some two decades. At the same time, my practical research has significantly extended to wider communities of intercultural performers in UK and Scotland, other than previously in Europe.

In the Introductory chapter, I have linked my own practice to the diverse theoretical discussions on “practice” and “self”, which are my doctoral research’s main concerns. Among the existing references are the heuristic inquiry, the receptive mode of “second person” approach, and the “care of self” in parallel to the “care of craft”. In Chapter 2, I have emphasized the importance of experience, the coherent relation of body and mind as in a performer. Then, I examined the modes as to how I have introduced Taijiquan in a playful way and have used it in my pedagogical work with other performers. Through my own practical examples and testimonies of my co-researchers (primarily from my *Sourcing Within* project), I further demonstrated how Taijiquan not only connects me to my cultural roots, but also benefits others in their crafts. The relationship one has with a source technique is a matter of one’s capacity to grasp it through practice. The work of the performer is indubitably in those moments in which one is present alone during the performance act. The secret of craft lies in self-realising and self-accomplishing, and no one can replace one another. Hearing one’s body, one delves into and yields to the creative source within. In this process of returning back to the source, the endpoint is a creative one. The constant practice via a performance act is crucial. Many performers, who constantly return to our practical sessions of *Sourcing Within* workshop, find the value and nourishment for their artistic works as well as their personal lives. Further testimonies can be found in Appendix B as well as in the documentations accompanied in this thesis writing.

I further developed the idea of “care of oneself” in the practice of voice work in Chapter 3. Through concrete examples of my work with different practitioners, I demonstrated the beneficial tools and modes in which I drew out the most efficient potentials in each participant of my *Sourcing Within* workshops. A parallel between work on oneself and work as an actor can be traced back to what Stanislavski had already established a century ago; but often can be forgotten in our industrial and vocational concern for actor training nowadays. I continue to stress the importance in theatre training, be it institutional or professional levels, that work on the self is equally necessary in each actor. Without either aspect of the work on oneself or the work on craft, an actor’s professional life would not be complete and fulfilling. I call for an embodied actor training despite the cultural and disciplinary differences, via my *Sourcing Within* workshops around the world.

In Chapter 4, via my own performance work, I shared with others my process of creating materials and my practical examples while preparing my performances. I extended the fruition of my PaR performance by sharing with intercultural groups of audiences. The use of music as a heuristic approach, in close collaboration with Nickolov, also bridged affectively to the audiences. Throughout my PhD research, I was able to develop and present my performance in very diverse spaces ranged from: warehouse space, living room, chapel theatre, black box space, studio, and factory converted theatre space. In the environment of my PaR with receptive and encouraging advice from my supervisor(s), I was able to perform publicly yet not stop developing my work. This is extremely important in our professional theatre context where often a public performance means stopping the freshness and aliveness of any creative work. This is often jeopardised from the perspectives of funding party or monetary value of a paid performance. Instead, I was able to carry on the intrinsic and subtle possibilities of my live performance and a close interactive relationship with the audience of my PaR performance.

Future research – interdisciplinary research

Other than the emphasis on the work on oneself, my practice-based research flourishes the most under circumstances that challenge and demand integration between theory and practice. The multi-faceted conversations that my PaR has begun and will continue to undertake, aim to narrow the gaps between different fields of studies. The renewing of evidently different methodologies and approaches has proven to be valuable and refreshing for academic research. This has also prompted new strategies and techniques for my interdisciplinary research concern that manifested itself through my long-established collaboration with Nickolov on theatrical and musical integration. Over the past three years, our joint research has led to multiple work-in-progresses and presentations of the performance *Wandering Sounds*. It also extended into a concert as part of *Question of Space*, A Festival of Ideas, a public engagement project of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Kent with Canterbury Cathedral.⁸⁴ With this project pushing the diverse boundaries and differences to the fore, our concert explored the resonances of Chinese folk songs and blues melodies in the centuries-old architecture.

I have also explored the theatrical/anthropological context of my research with Dr Caroline Gatt, a Research Fellow at Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen.⁸⁵ The focus of our joint research continues to be the “care of the self”. The nature of our research is one of “an affinitive or associative relations...without necessarily threatening the discipline, rigorous character of [our respective field], mak[ing] space for a genuine collaboration...[and] *mutual* learning” (Gatt 2016: 3). It aims to be “an anthropology otherwise...experimenting with performance anthropology...in which to converse with subaltern knowledges” (Gatt 2015: 2-3). This research is ongoing and will continue even after my doctoral study terminates, looking for opportunities to present as praxis sessions at various conferences and

⁸⁴ Questions of Space: a Festival of Ideas. Available from: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/publicengagement/questions-of-space.html> [Accessed 26 August 2016].

⁸⁵ Caroline Gatt, University of Aberdeen. Available from: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/people/profiles/c.gatt> [Accessed 26 August 2016].

symposiums⁸⁶.

Other than presentations of my performance, my PaR has led to my various written publications. First was a commentary for an anthropological online journal, *The Unfamiliar*⁸⁷, relating to an anthropological/ performative initiative, *Walking Thread*, born out of my *Sourcing Within* workshop at the University of Aberdeen in 2014. As part of the *Knowing from the Inside* project where Gatt has a sub project, I am contributing a piece of writing on “chi” (breath as in Taijiquan). A book chapter co-authored with Gatt named “*Crafting anthropology otherwise: Alterity and performance*” is also currently under review.

For my *Sourcing Within* project, in August 2016 I have organised a concluding session with some 25 participants, comprising practitioners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, UK, and USA. Other than my *Sourcing Within* work sessions (on Taijiquan, physical, voice and solo work), participants were asked to propose and lead different cross-disciplinary topics in Pilates, Feldenkrais, Anthropology, Multimedia, Drama Therapy, Theatre and Dance. The formats ranged from workshops, to work-demonstrations, performances, concerts, talks, presentations of work-in-progress and roundtables. Such cross-disciplinary exchanges invite open dialogues and discussions among participants. This, in turn, will stimulate more interdisciplinary and intercultural exchanges.

Effective PaR can be open to shared concerns across different disciplines of researchers. The articulation and consolidation of my practice has been accomplished and transformed into both written and documentary formats. It is my sincere hope that these traces will not be kept solely as part of an institutional archive but can become living words and practices to support and provide care for more Practice-as-Researchers as stated as the aim of my PaR research in the Introduction of my thesis writing.

⁸⁶ Our joint praxis sessions conducted during conferences include: *The Mindfulness Turn in Martial, Healing and Performing Arts* held at University of Huddersfield, UK, on November 19th, 2016, and *A Body of Knowledge: Embodied Cognition and the Arts*, held at The Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine, on December 8-10th, 2016.

⁸⁷ *The Unfamiliar*, an anthropological journal. Available from: <http://journals.ed.ac.uk/unfamiliar/issue/current/showToc> [Accessed 26 August 2016].



Illustration 20: Gey Pin Ang and Nickolai D. Nickolov in a concert as part of *Questions of Space, A Festival of Ideas*, a public engagement project of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Kent with Canterbury Cathedral, in Canterbury Cathedral, 2016. Still from video of *Sourcing Within*.



Illustration 21: Concluding session of *Sourcing Within* held at Casa Cares, Reggello (Tuscany), Italy, 2016. Still from video by Nickolai D. Nickolov.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Sourcing Within work session content

SOURCING WITHIN

- A work session conducted by **Gey Pin ANG**



Sourcing Within work session, photo credit: Marc Naya

Since the beginning of *Sourcing Within* in 2006, Taijiquan has been a main source of our work session. Taijiquan is an ancient Chinese bodymind discipline; potentially a vital reservoir within us. Based on Gey Pin's long practice and research, the work session intends to introduce to the participants the key principles and potentialities of this source technique within the creative process of an actor and dancer. Participants will be guided through a mode of embodied search, practice, playing and knowing through their spontaneous responses; naturally developing their awareness and integrating it into their physical/vocal presence as performers. The practical sessions of investigation involve:

- **Physical work** that emphasises in the search of flow, intention, rootedness, aliveness, non-effort, clarity, details and intuitive contacts within oneself, with others and in the space.
- **Voice work** that centres on a care of the self via an active search, with constant sharpening of our hearings and intuitive responses, attuning to our deeper needs and associations.
- **Individual and Ensemble work** created in relation to the various elements learned in this work session. The aim is for each to explore on how one can engage, flow and live within one's vital life, in a liberating and nourishing way; and in turn, building this freedom onto a performative context.

Gey Pin ANG (Pedagogue/Performer/Director)

A Singaporean based in Europe, Ang was a member of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Italy (1994 & 1998-2006), performing lead roles and touring with the Workcenter's *One breath left* (UBU Special Award, Italy) and *Dies Irae: My Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show*, across Europe and Asia. She teaches, directs and performs in Europe, North & South America and Asia. Her works are featured in scholarly journals and books of intercultural theatre. She holds a degree in Bachelor of Arts in Theatre, with distinction, from the University of Hawaii (U.S.A.) and is a recipient of theatre awards granted by the Singapore National Arts Council. Ang holds a PhD in Drama: Practice-as-Research and was an Associate Lecturer at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.

Sourcing Within

Since 2006, Ang has initiated *Sourcing Within* comprising of collaborations and work sessions for performing artists and beyond. Up to this day, it has created and inter-connected a network of interdisciplinary practitioners and researchers. These practitioners are of multi-lingual and multi-cultural backgrounds. Many of them have sought regular work session experiences in order to refresh and further their embodied knowledge.



Sourcing Within

<http://sourcingwithin.org/>

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Testimonies⁸⁸ (on a *Sourcing Within* work session)

Here are some selected testimonies from my *Sourcing Within* workshop held in varied locations and years, of students and practitioners of interdisciplinary backgrounds.

1. Garth Williams, Actor /Director /Theatre & Film Producer (Manchester, U.K.) (2008-2016)

Since training at Drama School, where Tai Chi was part of the syllabus, I have continued in my search to combine the training in Tai Chi with the art of the actor. It has to do with flow, with continuous movement, with interlinking intentions, attention to detail, and the moment, without becoming static or stuck. It concerns the training of the body and the mind, with empty and full, renewal of attention, and the opening of the internal channels – to the flow.

Gey Pin Ang's work has to do with this flow, and yet she also has the experience of having worked intensively at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards. And therefore has a thorough and comprehensive background in working on Stanislavski's Physical Action and on the actor's craft and technique. There is a possibility of flow in action and text, which can reach depths of resonance, and transcendence not normally possible within the confines of the commercial model of theatre. Text and song are in essence tools on yourself as an actor in action. Song is but a form of meditative prayer in and of itself, used to summon deeper elements in our bodies and souls.

⁸⁸ *Sourcing Within* testimonies. (2016) [online]. 5 July 2016. Available from:

<http://sourcingwithin.org/testimonial/> [Accessed 5 July 2016]

Gey Pin Ang was able to cut through knots rather than become tangled up in them, herself doubtlessly capable of the heights of inspiration and expression she brought out in others. Her manner of working was incredibly direct and yet nurturing.

It is Gey Pin Ang's own heritage and cultural and physical understanding, as well as her undoubtable prowess as a performer which informs the work.

2. Chiara Orefice, *Dancer/Choreographer* (Naples, Italy)

I have attended several seminars with Gey Pin and what strikes me every time is her way of guiding the work, a mode that pushes the body to follow the flow of movement and to satisfy the impulses and forces that arise. "Follow, follow ... do not stop" are the words that often return (to me) , as an impetus to follow the directions that the body opens and the associations that arise, to come in contact with your centre (heart) and feel the life that passes through us.

In her work, there is a very strong sense of the group, an active participation in the creative process of each one, a continuous involvement, a game of sensitive relation with the others that dampens the resistance and awakens the attention to the present.

3. Gedney Barclay, *Director /Actress* (Philadelphia, U.S.A.)

What is "sourcing within"? For me, It's an artistic process that fosters two phenomena: surprising one's self, and artistic autonomy—artistic autonomy in the sense that we learn to look to our own bodes for inspiration. Within each of us flow images / sounds / dreams / memories / fears / impulses / desires that we have yet to (re)discover, so often constrained by day-to-day hesitations, obligations, learned compartments. When through physical exercises, song, text, or play you

seek and stumble upon your own unknowns, you surprise yourself, your body demonstrating capacities you never knew it had. But for me the true import of sourcing within doesn't come solely from this personal search: it's in the collaboration between the members of the workshop and the discoveries we share as we play, listen, and propose together. During my six days at Vallenera, we nine wild creatures sourced within together, and collectively found a way to redirect our discoveries outward, and manifest them for each other. And that is the actor's work.

4. Nina Jereb, *Physicist* (Slovenia)

Sometimes it is needed, a week somewhere between the hills, embraced by the olive trees, grass, and birds singing, sometimes it is simply needed to rediscover the wild animal within you, to make it emerge and push you into the unknown. Again. For the first time.

Beholding the work space, so warm and full of life, yet distant as a dream, you ask yourself: what is it that makes it so alive ... what makes it your Home, the kind of Home that enters you and stays within you, wherever you are. People. Nature. The work.

You realize that there is no place where you can hide. Not from yourself. Not from your fears, your longings. Not from what is important to you. And you wish you would never lose it, that *something* that you can never really *have*. This is what makes you tremble a bit while you are walking on the edge between totally crazy and fully alive.

5. Tabitha Loh (BA (Hons) Theatre + Performance at LASALLE College of the Arts, Level 1, Singapore, 2011)

5 October 2011

In vocal work, I was encouraged to jump into the river and follow where the water carried me. Sometimes, I lose that thread but I am starting to

recognize that the river is very long and the journey has many paths, I should not be passive and naive to just assume that there is one path but find life in any direction.

10 October 2011

There are moments in which I have to awaken my body to re-connect with what was happening in that moment. When that moment is past to let it go and not stay stuck or blocked but instead always search for that thread and contact. It seemed as though I had to sense the “wave”, to follow, carry and change with it.....

.....The renewal of interest is also essential in keeping the work alive. There is an inner laziness by which I sometimes find myself lapsing into. I get tired of searching, my breath deepens, I lose my associations and contact with people. The action thus becomes without intention and drive.

31 October 2011

I finally found the life in what I do. This time, I refused to get stuck on what I was doing previously, but to flow with this new river, this new scenario and circumstance given. Once I engaged it, I had not to rush and just flow with it, always searching, almost playing. The drive and intention of the text started to flow almost naturally as the body became free to play and search.

6. Melissa Chiew (BA (Hons) Theatre + Performance at LASALLE College of the Arts, Level 3, Singapore, 2011)

3 October 2011

I appreciate what takes into an account a more embodied understanding and treatment of the performing body. This is the approach and principle that I wish to bring into developing my future works as an artist. I feel that this is what Theatre needs to be kept alive, a truthfulness of the body, a bigger meaning beyond the superficial, and an experience of realness for the audience...

...Many times when dancers learn new movements from a choreographer, they can master the steps over time, but bringing out the inner life of the movements is the most challenging aspect, as every performer's body is different in physicality and inclinations. In many dance classes, or even in traditional theatre training sessions too, we often participate by first imitating the forms presented by the teachers. However, the form is just an empty shell, it only comes 'alive' when there is constant 'search' and 'play' involved. It needs to go beyond a superficial level to reach something that is poignant to all human beings – the sense of life.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

Documentation

There are 4 DVDs and 1 audio CD (consisting of 3 parts) attached to the inside of the back cover. They serve as a visual and aural understanding of my practice mentioned and discussed in different segments in this thesis.

1. The Practice of Physical Work

2. The Practice of Voice Work

3. Sourcing Within – traces

4. *Wandering Sounds*, fragments of the performance from the final version at Aphra Theatre, University of Kent, June 10th, 2016

5. Audio CD – Audience's response

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

Performance programme



Wandering Sounds

The final version of Gey Pin Ang's Practice-as-Research PhD performance in collaboration with Nickolai D. Nickolov

<i>Idea/ Text/ Songs</i>	Gey Pin Ang
<i>Music/ Sound/ Visuals</i>	Nickolai D. Nickolov
<i>Stage Lighting</i>	Eoin Furbank

****The performance is in English and Chinese languages***

Wandering Sounds is created and performed by Gey Pin Ang with the collaboration of Nickolai D. Nickolov, Electronic Music program, the Conservatory of Music "Luigi Cherubini" (Florence, Italy). The performance has undergone its development over the three years of Ang's Practice-as-Research PhD. It interweaves theatre and music, voice and instruments, live performance and visuals. The research is a reflexive investigation of what one's cultural source might be. Through the performer's corporeal and vocal embodiment, "speaking-singing" resonates throughout the performance.

**Special thanks to Dr Judita Vivas (School of Arts) for her creative feedback to the piece at different phases of its rehearsals in Kent, Dr Carolina Vasilikou (Kent School of Architecture) for her scenic/spatial advice, Prof. Riccardo Brunetti for his voice-over for the performance, Garth Williams for his film documentation, Nickolai D. Nickolov for all phases of documentation for this PaR, and Angela Whiffen for all her support and assistance.*

Gey Pin Ang (Singapore)

A performer and pedagogue, Ang is recipient of a Theatre Artist Award from Singapore and graduate from the University of Hawaii (BA in Theatre, distinction). Her research draws from an associative connection to her Chinese roots through song search and Taijiquan practice. Ang performed lead roles within Project *The Bridge: developing theatre arts*, of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Italy. She teaches internationally via *Sourcing Within* workshops and collaborates with intercultural and interdisciplinary artists. She is currently a Practice-as-Research PhD candidate and associate lecturer in the School of Arts, University of Kent, UK.

Nickolai D. Nickolov (Bulgaria)

A musician and composer currently based in the Electronic Music program at the Conservatory of Music “Luigi Cherubini”, Florence, Italy, Nickolov explores the intersection of improvised, jazz, ethnic and electronic music, as well as sound installation and multi-media. He has collaborated with Ang via the *Sourcing Within project* for all its performances in Europe, South America and Asia. Composer and sound designer with Limitrophy Theatre (1999-2011), a performative experimental group, Nickolov has presented his works at Santarcangelo Theatre Festival, Fabrica Europa Festival, Festival delle Colline Torinesi. He has performed in diverse musical contexts with musicians from Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, Singapore, UK, and the USA.

Sourcing Within

Initiated by Gey Pin Ang in 2006, *Sourcing Within* has created and interconnected a network of multi-cultural artists with extensive international collaborations. These sessions aim to unearth one’s innate capacities that will in turn flourish onto one’s creative path. This year marks the 10th anniversary of *Sourcing Within*; with a special work session/festival event in Tuscany in August 2016. For details, please write to sourcingwithin@gmail.com

Selected texts from *Wandering Sounds*

Chapter 1 *Song is my way*

Song is my way. All land, music.

I've walked past where my ancestors had walked, and I have been welcomed home!

I would wander after music, far into the inner stream of my thoughts, that someone may think that I am a foolish soul.

Do they think that I would stop them and beg for sympathy for my wandering?

Tired bird once gone, never it comes back.

The sun sets down the mountain, tomorrow, it'll rise again.

Chapter 2 *Music brings me hunger*

From house to house, place-to-place, my hunger forever wanders with me.

Whenever I am hungry, I would cook, not only food, but a feast filled with music and theatre of my ancestors.

Chapter 3 *Theatre is music*

As I wander far away from home, I still eat and breathe in this music, this theatre.

If my ancestors were here, what would they think? Am I a thief to my home spirits?

Chapter 4 *The return of a hunger artist*

Pick me up
Turn me around
Feet on the ground
Head to the sky

Sometimes, as my journey goes on, home is so far away; whereas wandering is way ahead of me.

Chapter 5 *Wandering with man-birds*

At times, during my wandering, I find myself among some man-birds, looking and waving to me.

These man-birds seemed to be the parts of me that I have lost during my wandering.

I went in the direction of these man-birds. My body remembered without effort, and wings grew out from my shoulders.

My wings, until arriving home, we shall go on wandering.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

Performance Timelines

Wandering Sounds (2012-present)

2012	<i>Wandering Sounds (an etude of 20 minutes)</i>
February	S. Pietro Spazio Teatro, Turin, ITALY
July	Festival Collinarea, Lari, Tuscany, ITALY
2013	<i>Hunger Songs (an intermediate phase before the full development of <i>Wandering Sounds</i>)</i>
July	Teatromania festival, Rome, ITALY
2014	<i>Wandering Sounds</i>
January	La Viella, Barcelona, SPAIN
March	University of Kent, Jarman Studio 1, UK University of Aberdeen, Scotland
April	Reggello (Tuscany), ITALY
November	University of Huddersfield, UK - Work demo (Performance fragments)
November	Living room of friends, Rome, ITALY
December	Cavallerizza Reale Occupied Theatre (now Cavallerizza Irreale), Turin, ITALY
2015	<i>Wandering Sounds</i>
February	CPR conference, Wales - Work demo (Performance fragments)
June	Teatr NN, Lublin, POLAND
November	University of Kent, Jarman Studio 1, UK

2016	<i>Wandering Sounds</i>
January	Espai Blanc (now La Blanca), Barcelona, SPAIN
June	University of Kent, Aphra Theatre, UK
August	<i>Sourcing Within 10</i> concluding session, Casa Cares, Reggello, ITALY

Gey Pin Ang's other collaboration with Nickolai D. Nickolov (music)

1. *By the Way* (2006)

Singapore theatre festival, SINGAPORE

With other actresses – Emanuelle de Gasquet, Serena Gatti, Letteria Guiffre

Wesleyan University, USA

Solo version

2. *Winter Never Come Spring Already Arrived* (2007)

Barbagiana Casa Culturale, Pontassieve (Tuscany), ITALY

Grotowski Institute, Wroclaw, POLAND

3. *Feast of You Shen* (2008-09)

Grotowski Institute - Brzezinka space, POLAND / Terni (Umbria), ITALY

Solo version

Teatro Varasanta, Bogota, COLOMBIA

With other actor - Dario Valtancoli

4. *Wandering.Birds* (2010-11)

With other actors – Marian Araujo, Riccardo Brunetti, Sonia Pastrovicchio

5. *Chapter with the Missing Ones* (2012)

Casa Laboratorio Vallenera (Umbria), ITALY (2011)

With other actors - Riccardo Brunetti, Sonia Pastrovicchio

Dublin, IRELAND (2012)

With other actresses - Marian Araujo, Sonia Pastrovicchio

Casa Laboratorio, Sao Paolo, BRAZIL (2012)

Solo version

6. Hunger Songs (2013)

Teatromania festival, Rome, ITALY

With other actress – Francesca Netto

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