

Chant: Creating a Sacred Place Through Drawing

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Introduction

Places exist within us or rather they penetrate and embrace us, even as they constitute our physical surroundings. When the markers of a special site disappear, when rain dissolves the sacred sand circle, or time disintegrates an ancient temple, the place will remain as the 'scene of experience and reflection and memory' (Casey 1993, p. xiii). Our capacity for memory permeates our being and true places reside in the visceral, emotional and spiritual fibres that attach us to a physical site and give it meaning. Places help to anchor our identities, and our relationships with them give us a sense of who we are, where we came from and where we belong. As Edward Casey (1993, p. 31) proposed: 'We partake of places in common — and reshape them in common. The culture that characterises and shapes a given place is a shared culture, not merely superimposed upon that place but part of its very facticity'. The collective role we play in creating places helps us distinguish a particular site from the myriad through which we journey in our lives. In order to establish ties to a place, we should experience it with our minds and our hearts. We should understand its history, its value to others and find out why it continues to hold significance for us.

As an artist, my research into cultural attachment to place is motivated by my personal experiences as a Malaysian-born Chinese who grew up in Australia. My background as a migrant produced in me a fractured sense of belonging and identity. This has led to my fascination for trying to understand what seems to be an innate human need to establish a connection to one's roots and place of origin. In particular, I became interested in how 'pre-modern or "traditional" societies' (Eliade 1971, p. 3) created places which evoked a connection to something beyond the empirical or profane, a connection to 'the centre ... [which] is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred' and 'the point at which the Creation began' (Eliade 1971, pp. 16-17). In religious practice, for instance, it is through certain rituals that we distinguish a place as sacred. Our collective, cultural memory plays a vital role in shaping and perpetuating the existence of a sacred place. Upon seeing images of Tibetan Buddhist Chant notation (Image 1), and listening to recorded chanting from various cultures, I began examining the possibility of drawing sound as a means of depicting place. The process has led me to explore the way chanting and sound was used in religious practices as a form of ritual to establish a sacred place distinct from that of the secular. The focus of this paper thus concerns the relationships between the three major aspects of my research journey: sacred places, religious chant and drawing.

This paper consists of three parts. In the first I begin by providing a brief personal account of my own sense of displacement that occurred as the result of migration. I am divided between feeling attachment to Australia as my current home and a desire to rediscover my Chinese cultural and spiritual roots. This leads to a discussion of what constitutes a sacred place in the context of the construction of a 'spiritual past in the present'. Focusing on the notion of the origin, I explore how it may, or may not, relate to us now in a contemporary context. Because the idea of a sacred place is thought to be linked to cultural memory and spiritual continuity, it is imperative that I examine contemporary perceptions of sacred or spiritual attachment to place in this era of rapid social change and global movement, a time when cultural identity is so fluid. In particular I will address the following question: Does the notion of sacredness play a role in a contemporary person's cultural experience of place?

From this background and with reference to the role sound plays in demarcating spaces and territorial places, in the second part I move on to explore how a sense of spiritual affiliation may be established through the repetitious ritual of chanting, of 'sounding space into place'. To distinguish between the terms space and place, I take as a point of reference Theirry de Duve's (1993, p. 25)

idea that 'space [is] the cultural consensus on the perceptive grid of reference' and 'place [as] the cultural tie to the ground, territory and identity'. For some societies, the daily affirmation of belief through rituals and chanting play an important role in a person's sense of identity, tying them to the community, place or culture from which both the ritual and the person originated. By drawing correlations between the role chanting as a ritual plays in creating a sacred place and inherited cultural experience, I will suggest that the memory of occupying and activating a physical space may make it a place of personal significance.

Linking my personal background with the ritual of chant as a means of creating a sacred place, the final part of this paper traces the progress and problems in my search for 'finding lines of significance' that may visually express the vibrational qualities of sound and chanting. With reference to my current drawings, I elucidate the relationship between the visual properties of my drawing marks and the aural qualities of chant. I also explain the aesthetic and personal influences of calligraphy and Chinese ink painting in my work. Artistically, I was attracted to the irreversible nature of the ink and brush medium, its sensitivity to my touch, and the immediacy of emotion it conveyed through the countless tones of ink. To me, these aspects have their equivalents in the practice of music. 'Music can be used to assert differences ... a means to be used in negotiating identities. Music is a part of culture, with which people can identify themselves' (Swart 2004, p. 11). In that the discipline of calligraphy and Chinese painting form a part of my cultural background, I am now attempting to rediscover my identity by integrating them into my artistic practice. In this sense I hope to draw a link between the cultural and personal significance of my drawings and the importance of spiritual meaning in chanting in the process of 'sounding space' into a sacred place.

My personal journey

The topic of place is of particular interest to me because I have rarely felt a strong connection to a place of spiritual or cultural significance. As a Chinese person born in Malaysia, who grew up in Australia, my land of cultural origin, China, is a place to which I have yet to return. It remains far removed from my personal sense of identity. For me, arriving 'home' is first experienced touching down on an aeroplane at Sydney Airport. On a ferry admiring the sparkling water of Sydney Harbour, I feel that 'this is home'. Traveling through the Australian bush excites more feelings of affection and nostalgia than revisiting our first family home in Penang, Malaysia. Breathing the thick, pungent air of Penang city, with its curious juxtaposition of Asian culture and British colonial architecture, I think 'this is where I came from'. Like many contemporary people, I return to my country of birth as a cultural tourist.

I am sometimes asked whether I am Australian or Malaysian Chinese. Technically, I am an Australian; I had no qualms giving up my Malaysian citizenship or passport. I personally believe I am Australian, because my understanding of the term Australian is multicultural. However, my understanding may not be fully justified, as Australia's identity as a multicultural nation is still evolving and 'possible meanings of Australian identity must be seen in the context of a rapidly changing society' (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope & Morrissey 1988, p. 101). Australia is multicultural, just as England, America or France, for example, are multicultural countries comprised of many migrant ethnic groups. But as Castles *et al.* (1988, p. 3) critically observed twenty years ago: 'Multiculturalism will have real meaning in Australia when the English are seen as one group of ethnics among others and when Queen Elizabeth will be welcomed as a representative of one of Australia's honoured ethnic communities'. When observed in the context of Australia's British-colonial history, the term 'Australian' may not conclusively be said to represent multiculturalism.

Whilst growing up in Australia in the mid-1990's, my parents placed much importance on my retaining our Chinese culture and Buddhist beliefs. They insisted that we continue to speak

Mandarin at home. My father was only happy if we ate at Chinese restaurants and we regularly attended the Buddhism discussions my father would conduct in Mandarin at the local university's Buddhist Society. We occasionally visited Malaysia, sometimes to celebrate Chinese New Year and sometimes to pay respect to my late grandfather and ancestors. On the latter occasion we would burn paper clothes, shoes and money in what was to me, a bizarre form of Chinese ancestor worship that at the time I confused with Buddhist beliefs.

However, I acutely remember being uncomfortable with my heritage, as though being Chinese was somehow 'uncool'. There were no Chinese characters in the Enid Blyton books I read, nor in the Disney cartoons I watched and Barbie, for some reason, did not look Chinese at all. As a child growing up in a predominantly Western culture, I was exposed to what Lucille Ngan (2008, p. 81) refers to as 'the stereotypical images imposed by the broader social spectrum' and I was subconsciously aware of the 'otherness differentiating [me] from 'white' Australians'. Even now, when my young cousin is questioned about his cultural heritage, he replies: 'I am Australian, one quarter Italian'. To him, the European part of him has more kudos than the Chinese part, his Chinese heritage somehow being assimilated into the 'multicultural' aspect of him.

The above point of differentiation was also forthcoming from the culture to which, as a child, I reluctantly belonged. Returning to Malaysia after long intervals, my cousins would pinch my nose, examining whether I had somehow, impossibly, integrated Anglo-Celtic features into my face by simply residing in Australia. My extended family's emphasis on my upbringing in Australia and the subsequent 'otherness' of me became an underlying, fundamental component of my identity. I am what my parents' and grandparents' generation call the 'banana'; yellow on the outside and (to them) white on the inside. I had assumed this term was exclusively used by Chinese people. However American scholar, Elaine Chang (1994, p. 260), with regard to her own Korean descent, says that: 'within the North American Asian community, I am sometimes called a banana ... I am considered ashamed of my yellowness, insofar as I supposedly aspire to master the language, culture and ideology of white people'.

For my parents, the Mandarin language was fundamental to our cultural heritage and identity. As children, my brother and I attended interminable three-hour-long Chinese lessons each Saturday. Our homework involved mindlessly copying characters in preparation for the dictation test we would be given the following week. As a child accustomed to the creative and active Western style of education in my primary school, this traditional form of rote learning bored me to tears. Learning Chinese characters became a much abhorred chore and as a result, by the age of seven, the Chinese language became secondary to English in my life; I didn't speak Chinese at school to my friends, so why did I need to learn to write it? The language my parents spoke to me at home became irrelevant to my daily experiences, and subsequently, inaccessible for my self expression and personal identity. I now think and dream almost exclusively in English. There is an irony in that Chinese heritage and customs, with which I was uncomfortable having as a part of my identity as a child, have become a key aspect of my art practice and the motivation to learn calligraphy and incorporate it into my drawings.

As I gained maturity, I became more appreciative of my heritage and more willing to accept the indelible mark it left on my personal cultural history; I finally realised its invaluable contribution to my current identity. Not quite Chinese, and not completely Australian, I am an awkward combination of both. I am 'a synthesis or hybrid, an uneasy coalition of cultures, languages, and communities' (Chang 1994, p. 260). As with many migrants, I oscillate in this deep divide between my place of cultural origin, and the place I now call home. My understanding of my place of origin is what Davidson and Eng (2008, p. 8) describe as 'an origin filtered through the lens of the present home such that [I have] a double consciousness of belonging'. My identity is intimately shaped by

both places, a hybrid of two cultures and in a state of constant flux. One important aspect of this 'double consciousness' concerns the vague memories of spiritual and personal attachment to places which contribute to the complexities of my sense of identity as a migrant.

Spiritual past in the present

Insofar as I am trying to identify a spiritual orientation of belonging to a place, of locating my place of cultural attachment to attain a better sense of my own identity, the quote below seems to encapsulate some of my own dilemmas:

We rarely pause to consider how frequently people refer back to a certain place of origin as to an exemplar against which all subsequent places are implicitly to be measured ... To lack a primal place is to be 'homeless' indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanently sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world. (Casey 1993, p. xv)

In the account of my personal journey, I briefly introduced the notion of a place of cultural origin as an integral part of my sense of identity. In this section, I will discuss the notion of the origin in the context of the construction of sacred places by traditional societies. Of the term 'traditional societies', my point of reference is Mircea Eliade's (1971, p. 3) definition: 'The premodern or 'traditional' societies include both the world usually known as 'primitive' and the ancient cultures of Asia, Europe, and America'. By exploring the fundamental concept of the origin, I hope I may reach a better understanding of the sacredness of place as it relates to us now in a contemporary society characterised by migration, technology and travel.

Throughout history our ancestors dedicated generations to creating sacred sites. Traditional societies built from the centre out, and movement of life emanated from, circumambulated, and returned to this origin. Eliade (1959, p. 21) observed that to the pre-modern man, the sacred 'allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation'. This spiritual origin often had a physical manifestation in sacred sites, which were the locus of shared memory and experience and became the source of individual and collective identity. In the view of Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1994, p. 305) 'no race is without its holy mountain which it regards as the centre of the world'. The place of origin was the means by which a person would orientate himself/herself in the world. It was the constant polestar that seemingly guided him/her through the vast expanse of unfamiliar, uncharted spaces.

However, it was not only great sites or buildings like Britain's Stonehenge, Java's Borobudur or France's Chartres Cathedral that were symbolically representative of spiritual belief. 'The symbolism of the centre is the formative principle not only of countries, cities, temples and palaces, but also of the humblest human dwelling' (Eliade 1959, p. 57). For pre-modern people, sacredness manifested in every aspect of life: in the shape and structure of their homes, in the ritual of meals, in the turning of the seasons and in their dance and music.

The notion of the 'sacred place' or 'place of power' has come down to us from indigenous cultures but for us it is usually somewhere distant. For land-based people such as the Navajo, on the other hand, sacred places are interwoven with daily life, land use, ceremonialism, and stories. One place cannot be isolated from its network of other places and meanings ... The sacred space ... is also home. (Lippard 1997, p. 17)

For traditional people such as the Navajo, the connection to a sacred place or place of origin played

a critical role in the formation of personal identities, and to their understanding of a place of belonging (Ashcroft, Gareth, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2006, p. 518) as well as to their sense of home. Sacred places were the way many people expressed their spiritual and empirical emplacement within the landscape. It was through sacred places that people found their bearings in the macrocosm.

Migrating from our origins

With technological development such as the internet, and the ease with which people may now move around the world, some contemporary people may be less inclined to build their lives around an established origin as many in the past have done. In our hectic, modern culture, there is a seeming correlation between migration and the loss of a traditional connection to places. For previous generations, place was indissolubly linked to physical emplacement, a 'lived experience grounded in nature, culture and history' (Lippard 1997, p. 5). The relationships between people and places were nurtured over years and decades, even centuries; in the case of Indigenous Australians, over eons. For nomadic people, the experience of place was deeply rooted in time, and the seasonal revisiting of sites was symbolic of the eternal, cyclic relationship with the land. In an Asian context such as that of Mongolia, for example, the seasonal movement between sites was determined by the herders and 'place as landscape [remains] an inalienable possession belonging to an ancestor either real or imagined' (Reid 2009, p. 231). The attachment to place by younger generations of Mongolian people is known but less often talked about. In the case of Nyamdorj, who travelled far from his homeland and now studies in Australia, he is able to 'proudly claim' a site in the Mongolian countryside as his homeland because although he 'has never lived there' his 'ancestors lived there for generations' (Nyamdorj cited in Reid 2009, p. 246, n. 75).

Many of us have removed ourselves from the rhythms that allowed our ancestors to establish harmonious, mutual ties to the land. The famous Cartesian principle 'I think, therefore I am' implies that 'human beings are the things that think ... and the rest of the world is made up of things that can be measured' (Suzuki 2007, p. 276). This concept perhaps falsely liberated us from the traditional understanding that human beings are a part of the interdependent network of nature, community as well as a connection to the spiritual. In part, I concur with Eliade's (1959 p. 13) statement: 'It should be said that the *completely* profane world, the wholly desacralised cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit ... desacralisation pervades the entire experience of the non-religious man of modern societies'.

There are complex distinctions between people's ideas of the spiritual and sacred in relation to their identity and day-to-day life. In this era of migration, a person's spiritual centre or place of origin may be on the other side of the earth, both psychologically and physically. For some contemporary people, the concept of sacredness may be removed from the mundane activities of everyday life. Sacred places or places of cultural origin are usually seen as somewhere one must make an epic trek or pilgrimage to. In the following statement, Lucy Lippard (2003, p. 12) recognises a correlation between the loss of a sense of place, and a loss of identity: 'In the case of a restless, multicentered, and multitrade people (us, that is), even as power of place is diminished and often lost in modern life, it continues as an absence to define culture and identity'. In the case of Nyamdorj's ancestral attachment to place mentioned earlier, we can see that although his place of origin no longer plays a role in his day-to-day life, it continues in *absentia* to form an important part of his personal cultural identity.

Modern people are international nomads, many of whom spend parts of their lives in different cities across the globe. As a result, for some it may be difficult to possess the deep understanding and connection to a place which can only come from a lifelong relationship: 'Rushing from place to place, we rarely linger long enough in one particular place to savour its unique qualities and its local

history' (Casey 1993, p. xiii). For my part, I consider it worthwhile to look to my past before it has been completely forgotten. Similar to Marc Augé's (1995, p. 79) idea of 'non places', Doreen Massey (1994, p. 111) observes that: "'Communities" are not necessarily place-bound. Religious groupings may maintain a notion of community that is international, and political affiliations may likewise engender feelings of commonality, of shared heritage, vision, and commitments, which do not depend on place'. Contemporary people are living in the anonymous haven of suburbia, where the community a person truly belongs to does not necessarily consist of those who live in their immediate neighbourhood. Community and place in the twenty-first century no longer necessitates a direct connection between physical emplacement and personal relations.

In modern life, we value exploration, migration, travel and expansion, often losing sight of our beginnings. I am not deploring the modern state, but rather, acknowledging that something is missing from it, and I am attempting to find an alternative of my own by exploring past traditions. Mike Featherstone points out that 'it would be better to speak of the dissipation of the sacred, that it operates in a variety of ways amongst a wide range of groups of people' (Featherstone 1993, p. 177). I believe that the concept of a local, emplaced culture, in which a shared experience of the past and values attached to it are associated with a fixed place of origin, is no longer applicable to those of us living in a developed, multicultural nation with active global relationships. Instead we must acknowledge the loss of a sense of wholeness or connectedness even as we seek to create our own sacred places. In what follows, I discuss the artistic, calligraphic reinterpretation of chant in my art practice as a personal reaction to the loss of a sense of belonging and emplacement in the world. I then analyse how this has influenced my art practice as a means of creating a sacred place.

Chant

Chanting occurs in the religious practice of many traditions. It is usually a short musical passage incorporating religious text or teachings, such as canticles in the Christian tradition (New Oxford American Dictionary 2005). The purpose and spiritual significance of chanting may differ from one religion to another. In Buddhism, for example, chanting the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), is not seen as a form of prayer or worship, but rather, 'through chanting [the practitioner] may be learning, teaching, philosophising or re-memorising the discourse' (Dhammasami 1999). In this section, I will take two approaches when examining the role of chanting in the creation of sacred places. Firstly, I observe that chanting is an aspect of religious ritual. It is one element in the ordered series of prescribed actions which constitute a religious ceremony. I explore ritual as a cultural practice that may shape or create sacred places and the role of individual and collective experience in perpetuating cultural memory. As a ritual, chanting was one of the means of establishing a place of spiritual origin. Secondly, I examine chanting as a sonic phenomenon that has the power to affect us physically and emotionally. Sound plays a vital role in physically orientating our bodies in surrounding space. Sounds with personal and cultural significance have the power to affect and effect our emotions and create particular memories for place creation.

A good example of the importance of chanting as a repeated affirmation of cultural memory is 'the supreme Islamic rite of the daily prayers' and the site of 'Mecca, toward which worshippers turn five times a day in the daily prayers' (Nasr 1973, p. xv). Wherever devotees are in the world, the practice of daily prayers and worship by millions of Muslims sustains the supremacy of Mecca as the sacred centre of the Islamic faith. It can be said that Mecca not only manifests as a physical site, but as a powerful place of spiritual origin which exists in the minds and hearts of the faithful. As a part of ritual and ceremony, chanting is one of the methods to recreate a sacred cosmos. Through these rituals, 'every religious man places himself at the Centre of the World' (Eliade 1959, p. 57).

An individual's perception and understanding of a given place is not only shaped by the sensual, mental and spiritual experiences they may have had within it. Places are created and endowed with significance by human society's ability for continuous, collective memory. It is through ritual, art and storytelling that a place's significance may be preserved and regenerated and, according to Casey: 'It is by the mediation of culture that places gain historical depth' (Casey 1993, p. 32). Prior to written culture, applying melody and music to stories and events were important mnemonic devices, essential to the continuation of a group's cultural memory and identity. Chanting and sung prayers are a good example of this mnemonic method. They were a form of communal religious documentation — history written on memory. In another context, James Clifford (1997, p. 189) tells us of the prayers sung by Alaskan Tlingit elder, Amy Marvin, as a form of 'balance' for her storytelling. That is, the prayers provide stability and give form to the stories which in turn, carry the origins and the history of the tribe within them.

In the Buddhist tradition which is part of my own cultural background, devotional practices or *pūjā* 'help strengthen and give expression to our faith and to remind us daily of our commitment' (Dhammika 1990, p. 124). *Pūjā* is usually done in front of a shrine and sometimes involves burning incense to remind one of virtue, and the offering of flowers to remind one of impermanence. My mother maintains this devotional practice at home. Every morning after having her shower, she fills a small cup with fresh water and places it at the shrine in our living room. She then burns a stick of incense as she prays. Although I am uncertain whether my mother recites the *Tisarana* each day, we always recite this verse following the presiding monk's lead whenever we attend a Buddhist temple for a special service, such as praying for the peace of my grandmother who recently passed away. The *Tisarana* or Three Refuges, a verse recited when one becomes a Buddhist, is repeated three times each day by devoted practitioners so that they are 'sure, very sure, absolutely sure of what [they] are doing' (Dhammika 1990, p. 125). From my personal experience, I now realise that the prescribed order of ritualistic action and daily repetition assists in endowing an article of faith or teaching with significance, establishing it firmly in an adherent's memory. Furthermore, Pals (2006, p. 107) argues that rituals 'enable people to express the deep emotions which anchor them to their community'. It is through performing rituals and chants that we are able to construct a space in which the act of hearing sound gathers people together into a communal sense of place.

Sounding space into place

Hearing is one of the essential means by which humans orientate themselves in space. Sound is one of the most spatially penetrative forces in nature. It activates space by rebounding off objects and surfaces to express the nature of the surrounding environment. Our 'auditory spatial awareness ... allows us to orient in, and navigate through, a space' (Blessner & Salter 2007, p. 11). Our ability to make and detect sound is more valuable in helping us find our way than the limited reach of our arms and the sense of touch at the end of our fingertips. However, sound also has the power to affect us emotionally and psychologically. According to Blessner and Salter (2007, p. 11), sound 'is an aural stimulus with social, cultural, and personal meaning'. When sound acquires cultural and personal significance to the listener, it has the power to transform a space into a place, which is 'the cultural tie to the ground, territory and identity' (de Duve 1993, p. 25). As a part of religious ritual chanting, sound is imbued with cultural significance and has the potential to give places a sacred meaning.

Although we cannot physically touch sound, our ability to create and respond to it is a powerful resource for demarcating personal space. The primal need of birds to sing, for instance, is to establish their territory. Humans do a similar thing in modern homes. 'Sonorous or vocal components are very important: a wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it ... Radios and television sets are like sound walls around every household and mark territories'

(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 311). We are creatures of habit. We have an instinctive need to create our own habitats. In our individual ways we mark spaces, delineate boundaries and make our homes our 'territories'. 'What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression ... [a] territorialising mark' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 315). The familiar sounds with which we surround ourselves extend beyond our skin into the very space we occupy. By filling a space with memory and significance, whether personal or collective, we engender a sense of place. "Place" refers to physical settings with physical boundaries, but it can also refer to the memories and experiences in the past and the present, which for instance can be evoked by music' (Swart 2004, p. 7). When the act of hearing and performing religious chanting evokes the memory of an article of faith in a devotee, the sound of chanting can be said to have attained personal and spiritual significance. The site in which it is performed or directed at (as in the case of Islamic Mecca) also acquires spiritual meaning.

In chanting, the vibrations of sound penetrate our flesh to carry the message into the very core of our being. If 'voice and music are some of the most powerful sounds' (Blessner & Salter 2007, p. 72), then through the acts of chanting and listening, religious or spiritual tenets can be conveyed directly to the heart of a devotee. For instance, scholar of the musical culture of the native people of Bosavi in Papua New Guinea, Steven Feld (1996, p. 97) discovered the power of sound and voice to affect and effect our physical and emotional experience:

Sound, hearing and voice mark a special bodily nexus for sensation and emotion because of their coordination of brain, nervous system, head, ear, chest, muscles, respiration and breathing.... moreover hearing and voice are connected by auditory feedback and by physical resonance, the immediate experience of one's presence ... This is why hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence.

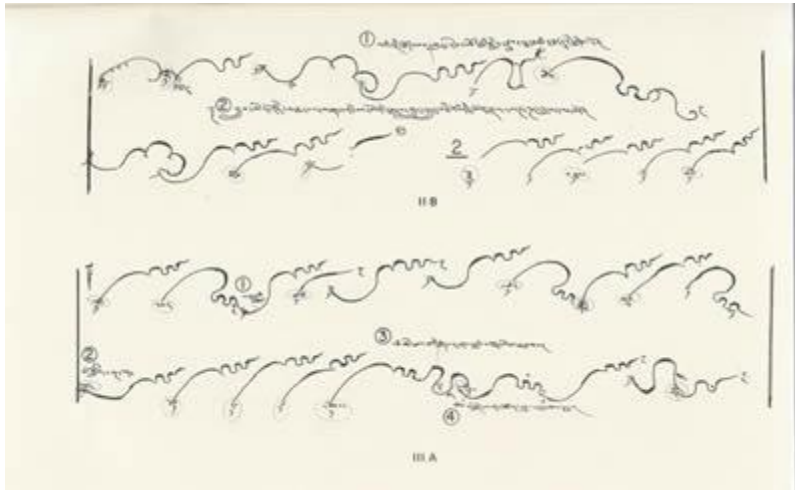
In our ability to vocalise our thoughts, emotions and experience, we are able to affirm our presence in a space. By filling this space with our voices and music to convey personal and cultural meaning, we create places that are important to us, not only as individuals, but also for the community to which we belong.

Sacred sites provide the context in which to enact the ritual of chanting. However it is the ritual which affectively creates the place. The sound of ritual chanting gives emotional shape to a physical environment. It may last only as long as the notes resonate in the air, but the traces last forever in memories. As a ritual, chanting is an emotional and bodily expression of the practitioner's devotion to the divine. It is an articulated affirmation or tribute to religious belief, giving spiritual orientation to the devotee in the creation of a sacred place. Chanting uses the voice as a mentally ordered, physical manifestation, of something which is intuitively understood, and 'as with all sensory aspects ... cultural values and social functions determine the experiential consequences of spatial attributes' (Blessner & Salter 2007, p. 3). In my reinterpretations of chant through calligraphic brush strokes, I intuitively recreate a sacred place through drawing. The final part of this paper details my personal, artistic endeavour to find marks which convey my perception and interpretation of the qualities of religious chants. These marks are not a scientifically or musically correct form of notation. Rather, they convey my sensibility as I respond to the chanting. The process of finding marks is ongoing in my studio practice and will continue to evolve according to new developments in my research. Therefore, the following section is an account of the artistic processes up to the time of writing.

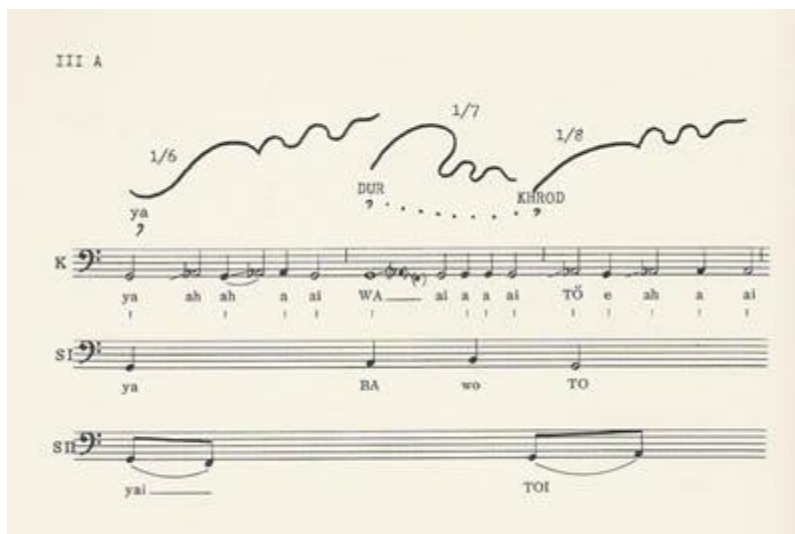
Drawing chants

Tibetan Buddhist chant notation influenced my research into gestural abstract drawing as a means of expressing the qualities of sound. In particular, my research into the emotional power of sound

prompted in me a need to convey my subjective experience and perception of religious chanting. As a starting point, I listened to *The prayer of forgiveness* performed by the exiled Tibetan monks of Dip Tse Chok Ling Monastery in Dharamsala, Northern India. Clearer insights into the importance of cultural and personal meaning in place creation have provided me with a new perspective in my choice of Chinese brush calligraphy as a way of reconnecting with my Chinese heritage.



Tibetan Buddhist chant notation (image from Kaufmann, 1975, p. 36)



Tibetan Buddhist chant notation with transposition of the performance of the chant (image from Kaufmann, 1975, p. 48)

My ultimate intention is to use these purely abstract drawings to create a three-dimensional installation as my own 'sacred place' within a gallery context. The visual properties of mark-making in my current drawings are the outcome of my interest in the relationship between space, place, and the visual representation of sound. When I first saw Tibetan Buddhist chant notation (Image one), I found that the calligraphic marks and delicate curves of the notation indicated the swell and pitch of the voice as well as the quality of the singer's breathing (Kaufmann 1975). Visually and conceptually, I was inspired. Image two shows a comparison between the traditional calligraphic notation and a transposition of an actual performance of the piece. When the transposition was superimposed onto the traditional notation it became obvious that while some curves corresponded to the intervals

between the notes, others departed completely from the actual sung melody. Walter Kaufmann (1975, p. 6), a seminal scholar of the subject noted that:

Some of the curves or curve-complexes clearly reflect the up-and-down movements of the melody while others appear to denote less melodic movements than brief rhythmical features ... some other annotations characterize the melody by stating that it should move like a flowing river, or that it should resemble the calls of birds, that it should be chanted like the sound of the wind, like the gurgling of flowing water.

Kaufmann's translation of the annotations indicates that the Tibetan monks associated sounds with various natural phenomena. These sounds appear to have qualitative aspects which originated from the experience and memory of the monks' surrounding natural environment. Thus these sung expressions have a significance rooted in a people's collective environmental experience, to reach a consensus as to which vocal technique best expressed the quality of each natural sonic phenomenon. The quality of voice the annotations indicate provide a good example of what Blesser and Salter refer to as 'earcons', the aural equivalent of visual icons. Earcons create 'an associating linkage between the sound and its context. Subsequently, even without the original context, such sounds trigger thoughts, emotions, and memory associated with that context' (Blesser & Salter 2007, p. 82). We can possibly observe that by imitating the sounds of natural phenomena from their home environment, the exiled Tibetan monks are invoking the context from which they and the chanting originated.

In contrast to the above, an inverse situation occurred in my attempt to draw the sound quality of Tibetan Buddhist chanting. While listening to the chanting, I could only draw upon my own personal experiences, which are of course vastly different from those of the Tibetan Buddhist monks. In addition to cultural differences I am a migrant, not an exile. My artistic sensibility is informed by my life experiences in Australia and Malaysia, as well as my Chinese cultural heritage. I can only interpret the Tibetan chanting with a superficial understanding of its originating context, and therefore the chanting will 'trigger thoughts, emotions and memory' (Blesser & Salter p. 82) associated with my own personal understanding and context. It became important for me to focus on my emotional responses to the chanting and draw the images which formed in my own imagination.

Finding lines of significance

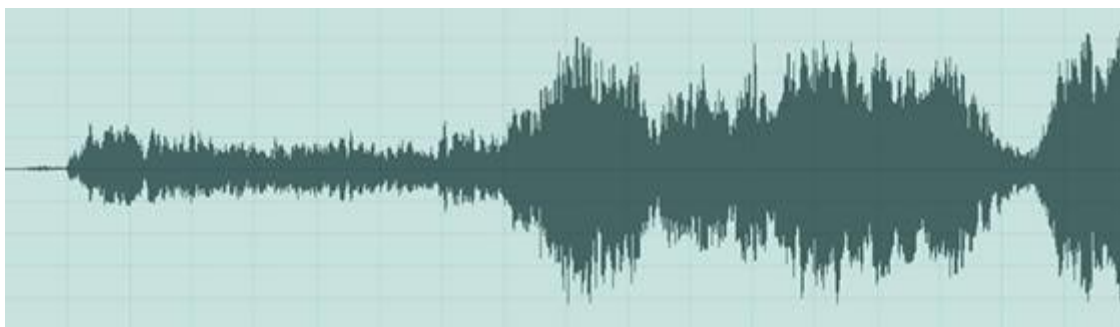


Image 3: The prayers of forgiveness performed by the monks of Dip Tse Chok Ling Monastery in Dharamsala. Screen shot of first ten seconds processed in Soundtrack Pro (Apple Inc.) Sample obtained from Monks of the Dip Tse Chok Ling Monastery Dharamsala, North India, 1990, Sacred ceremonies: Ritual music of Tibetan Buddhism - track four, Fortuna Records, Arizona.

In my drawing I am analysing the aural characteristics of the chanting. In order to have an initial shape to work from, I had *The prayer of forgiveness* processed through the sound editing program Soundtrack Pro. This program allowed me to view the track as electronic, visualised sound waves (Image three), which I printed and used as a drawing template. However, this shape had the disadvantage of restricting compositional possibilities and I realised that simply using the electronic transcription was not sufficient in expressing the unique characteristics of the sound. Although it could quantify the relative volume and frequency of the sound, it was incapable of analysing the timbre or quality of the monks' voices. For example, the sound of a person speaking may produce an image relatively similar in appearance to some birdsongs. To illustrate this comparison, I have recorded my voice reading a random text and sampled the sound of an Australian turquoise parrot. These sounds were then processed using Soundtrack Pro (Image four and five). The resulting images of the wavelength frequencies differ in the pattern of the sound waves, as birdsong is more rhythmical than my spoken voice. However, it provides little additional information and to a person, the two sounds would produce completely different emotional and mental responses, as each has their individual textures, colour, tone and resonance which give them distinct characteristics. It is my aim to find a way to express these unique qualities of sound in my drawings.



Image 4: Cindy Chen reading text chosen at random, processed in Soundtrack Pro (Apple Inc.)

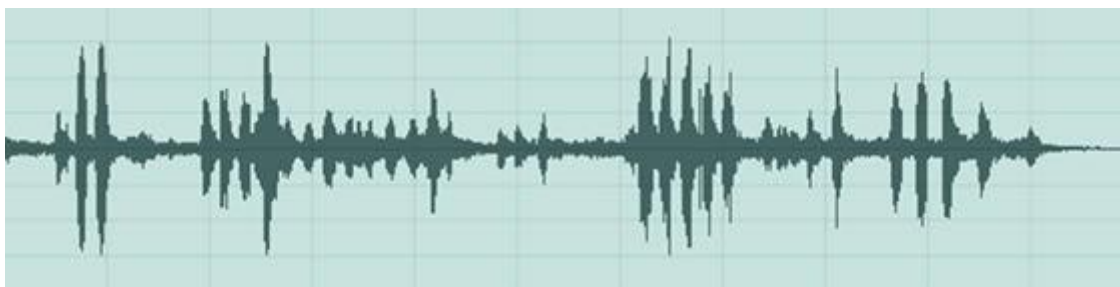


Image 5: Captive Australian turquoise parrot call processed in Soundtrack Pro (Apple Inc.)
Sample obtained from David Stewart 2002, *Australian bird calls: Subtropical east - track seventeen*, Nature Sound, Mullumbimby NSW.

Images six and seven are studies which show the progress of my current work. These drawings visually express my emotional and imaginative response to the first thirty seconds of *The prayer of forgiveness*. As a drawer, rather than using paint and colour, I have taken tone and line to be my method of expressing the timbre and shape of music. I feel that the combination of ink and brush on smooth and absorbent Wen Zhou paper in Chinese brush calligraphy, is extremely responsive to my body's movements and moods: 'A piece of calligraphy is a fluid run of lines ... Practicing and performing the piece has been likened to dancing and music. In these two arts the movements, the gestures, relate from one to the next and find meaning in their interrelation and expressiveness'

(Flint Sato 1999, p. 7). Much like music, calligraphy appealed to me because of its immediacy and irreversible nature. Once the mark is made, much like the performance of a piece of music where the note is sung, it cannot be erased. The action, movement and order of strokes must be intensively and repetitively practiced before a skilled, expert execution can be achieved (Flint Sato 1999). The artist must be completely present within the moment with no thought beyond the mark to be made.

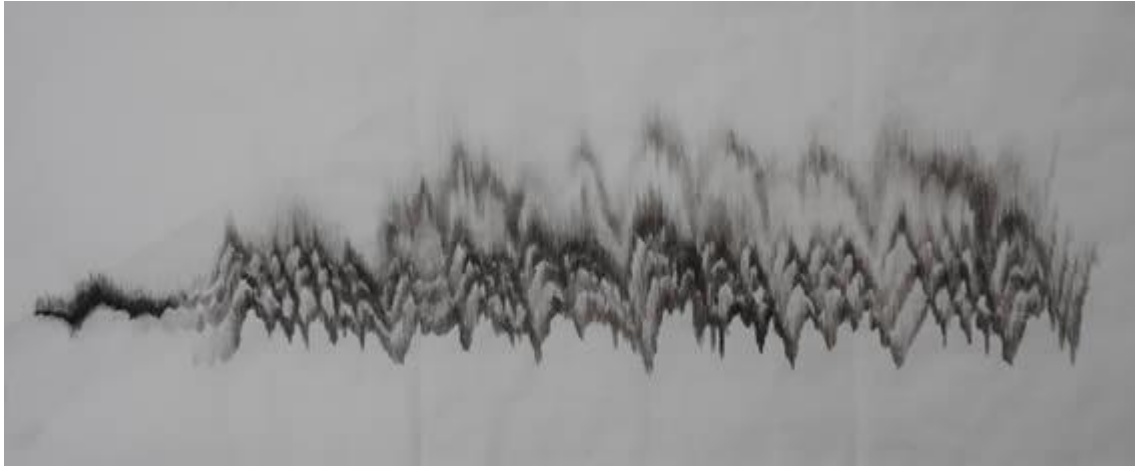


Image 6: Sound study (2009) Chinese ink on Wen Zhou paper.

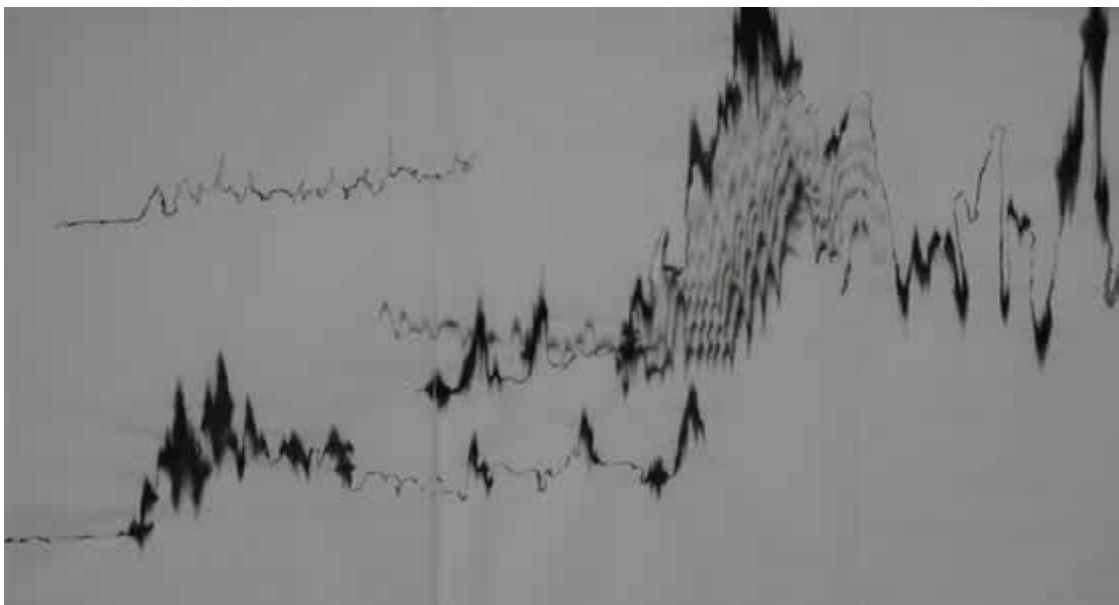


Image 7: Work in progress (2009) Chinese ink on Wen Zhou paper

Chou Wen-Chung is a contemporary calligrapher and composer whose brushwork reflects the 'correlation between calligraphic principles and the shaping of musical gestures' (Everett 2007, p. 569). As a master in this tradition, he states that 'in calligraphy, the goal is to internalise momentous events and emotions into a distilled artistic expression' (Chou cited in Kwan 1996, p. 276). I previously discussed the notion that when sound acquires cultural or personal significance it has the power to create places of meaning. I believe that this notion can apply to drawings as well. The marks that I make are artistic expressions of the internal, emotional response I have to the chanting. Image six shows my attempt to represent the many layers of voices characteristic of Tibetan Buddhist chanting (Kaufmann 1975). As I layered each line of sound, I staggered the placement slightly in order to convey the sense of fragmentation in my perception of the music and also the imperfect unison of the multiple voices of the monks.

As I continued my practice of drawing and listening, I came to realise that my understanding of the music was not linear. Since I was not performing as a part of the group and did not have the piece memorised and internalised, my understanding of the chant was incomplete. I had to constantly rewind the music to revisit sections. I could not apply 'the traditional 'western' epistemological sequence in which time is defined as a line' (Bandt 2001, p. 13). I found that to honestly convey my experience of the piece, the line of sound had to be 'broken, fragmented [and that] particles float at their own speeds' (Bandt 2001, p. 13). Image seven shows this development in my drawing practice, whereby changing the ratio of the template to achieve various sizes of the sound line, I have further fragmented the picture plane to better convey my disjointed experience of the chanting.

My research on religious chanting and sacred place has impacted on my studio practice and development. Whilst I am not a master calligrapher, my awkward, amateurish calligraphic brushstrokes are nonetheless imbued with meaning and in turn, give the drawing itself meaning. The medium and tradition I am working in are significant to my cultural heritage because: 'Calligraphy is regarded as a symbol of traditional Chinese culture' (Hue 2009, p. 66). These drawn marks translating the aural characteristics of Buddhist chanting embody not only my interpretation of the sound characteristics but also my disjointed relationship with my cultural background. Peter Wollen (1994, p. 189) speaks of 'the concept of exile and a subsequent sense of loss of origin, leading to the need to recover a homeland or an identity'. As a migrant citizen of Australia I am attempting to recover a sense of identity through engaging with my Chinese heritage in my art practice. In reaction to my sense of disconnection from my land of cultural origin, I seek to create my own piece of 'sacred place' in a gallery. Through my emotional and creative responses to religious chanting, by investing my drawings with cultural and personal significance I hope I can find a sense of belonging and clarify my own sense of identity.

Conclusion

Nowadays, even as 'implacement is an ongoing cultural process' (Casey 1993, p. 31) some of us may be adrift in a sea of meaningless places. In public places we withhold our emotions, erecting a barrier between ourselves and the hundreds of anonymous faces we see each day. We cannot build relationships with all the places through which we pass. Many people like myself have been brought up far away from their place of cultural origin, their experience and understanding of a homeland fractured and removed from daily life. For some, sacredness may be an intimate part of their lives because of religious or traditional beliefs. For others, this is not the case. Their experience of cultural narratives may be 'stunted, truncated, painful' (Suzuki, 2008, p. 285). Drawing religious chanting or sound as psychological and emotional phenomena, replete with ritual, spiritual belief, emotions and memories may be one way to transform place into a presence in our minds and hearts.

In this paper I use the terms 'spiritual' and 'sacred' interchangeably, in that both terms may refer to the divine or 'an understanding or experience of the human self as related in a vital way to an other ...Whether it is one's God or the ethical encounter of another human being ... bringing with it a new sense of personal identity' (Morgan 1996, p. 34).

Pūjā is a Pali term which translates to 'devotional practices'. The term is generally shared by both Buddhism and Hinduism. However, the nature of the practice changes depending upon the religion. In Buddhism the aim of devotional practice and the objects associated with the daily ritual is to aid in the contemplation of the teachings and virtues of the Buddha. Although many find it helpful to practice, it is not deemed mandatory (Dhammika 1990).

Although the piece Prayer of forgiveness by the exiled monks of Dip Tse Chok Ling Monastery in Dharamsala, Northern India has been my primary focus so far, I intend to explore chants from other traditions later on in my research.

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