A Sense of the Essence –
Experiencing the whole self through vocal sound.

An examination of contemporary Western voice healing.

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INTRODUCTION

I examined a range of techniques where the voice was the principal tool in healing[1] during the summer of 2000. This field attracts a diverse mix of a mainly middle-aged clientele for a range of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual reasons. Voice healing is closely related to sound healing,[2] and shares many of the tenets upon which that is based. I examine voice healing with a view to discovering:

a) What is meant by healing in this context. Healing here is held to mean wholeness, that is, the integrity of the self on all levels (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual) and an experience of interconnectedness with others, the universe and the divine. Integrity with oneself also means being 'true' and 'natural', that is, finding and expressing one's true emotions and personality regardless of cultural norms and conditioning.

b) Why vocal sound is seen as a route to healing. An unorthodox concept in the West, it is nevertheless a common element in healing in many other areas of the world, as Western voice healers constantly reiterate. However, as Friedson comments, ethnographers have not given music or sound prominence in accounts of therapeutic processes despite the fact that the presence of music in healing ritual is repeatedly mentioned in the literature (1996). Because musical sound is not part of accepted medical practice in the West, it is often not viewed by ethnographers as a medicinal element worthy of detailed discussion. In *Experiencing Ritual*, Edith Turner notes how Victor Turner was criticised for treating African tribal healing in a Eurocentric manner, as a clever ritual of psychology and symbolism devoid of scientific medical basis (1992:8).[3]

c) How vocal sound is used. I do not intend to critique the movement itself, to place or categorise this phenomenon in relation to wider societal movements or to examine at length the dynamics between healer and client in this field.

The role of music in trance (shaman and possession) has been examined at length by Rouget (1985), who concludes that cultural factors (expectation, learned behaviour etc) are more determinant than musical sound in trance. An emphasis has thus been placed by social scientists on examining how the healer acts in accordance with the worldview and social reality of the patient in healing settings world-wide (e.g. Larco 1997). In addressing the role of music and healing, Baumann states that 'in order to be healed, one must believe in the corresponding form of therapy' (1997:7). Those theorists and ethnographers who devote time to musical sound in healing emphasise the social-psychological factors at play in order to explain positive results obtained.

Voice healers do not work on the premise that their clients have already adopted an alternative worldview and believe in the form of therapy before attending workshops, but consider the workshop activities alone sufficient to bring about healing results. Moreover the sounds which are used to heal, and the ideas about their power, are not drawn from their own milieu but are borrowed from various different world cultures. The

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[1] Defined here as any kind of therapeutic, transformative or life enhancing activity
[2] Sound healing is therapy which involves the use of the physical or vibrational energy of sound
[3] The critic was a member of a non-academic group interested in healing

argument that healing involves restoring contiguity with one's worldview cannot be implied.

In *Sensuous Scholarship* (1997), Paul Stoller details how Western scholars have, in their preoccupation with the pursuit of empirical and rational knowledge (Foucault's 'Western gaze'), neglected sensory experience despite the centrality of this way of knowing the world in the contexts they have studied. Similarly, Friedson, informed by his own experience with the Tumbuka in Malawi who liken sound energy to that found in batteries, argues that it is only through a radical phenomenological approach that the importance of the physical presence and energy of sound can be comprehended (1996).

An emphasis on emotional and physical responses to sound however should not ignore the fact that such sounds are 'humanly organised' (Blacking 1976). Even if Tibetan singing bowls or Sanskrit chants seem 'out of context' and incongruous in a meeting room in London, these sounds have been chosen for their symbolic and, I would argue, physiological effects. The non-arbitrary nature of the organisation of sound is a central premise of ethnomusicology, even when foreign sounds are 'articulated' (Middleton 1990) or selectively combined by another group, giving them a new meaning and expression. Roseman (1991) and Feld (1982) have both highlighted the close semiotic links between the physical environment and cosmology of the Temiar and Kaluli respectively, and the sounds they use as symbols in healing rituals. Roseman states that

> 'to study that moment of articulation between medical and musical domains exemplified by healing ceremonies, I traced the fabric of meanings leading through settlement and jungle, person and cosmos, dreams and performance, ritual and everyday life' (1991:10).

It is therefore important to examine how sound, in this case predominantly vocal, is used symbolically by voice healers in the UK in creating a forum where individuals can experience a sought after sense of wholeness.

Among the most recent concerns in ethnomusicology is the study of music in identity and ethnicity. According to Stokes, one of the reasons that music is so often used as a means of forging and expressing an ethnic or national identity is that it is an emotive experience (1994). Stokes describes how when a group comes together in music making, a desirable atmosphere may be achieved, known for example as *craic* among the Irish. This feeling is about the essence of being for that particular group, the essence which distinguishes them from other nations or ethnies. It is often a feeling of belongingness and camaraderie (Stokes 1994). I would argue that voice healing can be seen analogously, in the construction of an identity which transcends ethnic or cultural boundaries and celebrates the uniqueness of the individual.

My interest lies in exploring the beliefs about sound and the voice and how they relate to the stated intentions of healers. I believe one must examine sound phenomenologically and acknowledge the experience of sound, (a physiological and emotional catalyst), in the 'mindful body' (Williams and Bendelow 1996:28). As an ethnomusicologist, however, one must question why particular sounds are used for specific aims - as Roseman highlights in her study, the semiotic significance of certain sounds to a particular cultural group is crucial (1991). My central aim is to show how vocal sound is employed as symbol and active ingredient in the voice healing context, in a manner which seeks to transcend the potentially divisive notion of culture and provides a way of experiencing and promoting an alternative human identity based on the idea of oneness and wholeness, the commonness in humanity and the sacredness of the universe.

1. WHAT IS HEALING?

According to voice healers and their clients, healing means 'restoring physical, mental, emotional, spiritual balance i.e. health', 'spirit calling to spirit', 'simply making whole, to remove conflict, to bring the condition of a body into harmony'. Many emphasise that the word 'to heal' comes from the Old English 'aAl', meaning whole. Interviewees tended not to separate emotional, physical, spiritual or psychological healing, employing a wider or more holistic view of health than that used by practitioners of allopathic medicine. Healing in this context could be loosely defined as the restoration and promotion of wholeness or harmony in all areas. Healing can start at an individual

level but in its widest interpretation, healing or wholeness relates to a person's ability to find oneness with fellow human beings, the natural order and with the divine. Echoing this, Heelas states that the New Age, of which voice healing may be considered a part, 'is all about a highly optimistic, celebratory and radically expressivistic humanism, more holistic renderings emphasising the spirituality of the natural order *in toto'*. (1996:67)

Emotions are considered especially powerful in causing and preventing disease. In their analysis of the links between emotions, health and illness, Williams and Bendelow (1996) discuss how human emotions can be perceived as the 'missing link' between various dichotomous ways of thinking. As Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue, emotions form the mediatrix between the individual, social and political body, unified through the concept of the 'mindful body'. This thread from the individual to the wider social sphere echoes the levels on which voice healers work, as they seek to connect individuals to themselves, to the world around them and to the divine.

The focus on the body, experience and the senses perhaps points to a divergence from Cartesian dualism and positivism, also apparent in anthropological and ethnomusicological theory. However, Sharma (1992) has demonstrated that British individuals compartmentalise belief systems and avail of apparently contradictory health care options simultaneously.

Human ætiology and self

Holistic, 'alternative' or New Age doctrine presents a significantly different view of human ætiology and human life to that characteristic of Euro-Christian thought. Firstly, the human being is believed to be composed of various different types and levels of energy. The aura, also called the subtle or energetic body, surrounds the physical body and is composed of an energy field with various colours. Various centres, lines and points of energy (e.g. chakras and meridians) are also recognised (See chapter three). In sound and voice healing, the body is perceived as 'sounding'. We are composed of minute cells, each in constant motion, each producing a vibration and therefore an inaudible sound. Each of us has our 'own note' as an individual.

At a spiritual level the concept of an immortal core or soul, which Baumann (1997) relates to metaphysics or the laws of the cosmos, is generally recognised. Many believe that the soul journeys throughout many eras learning fundamental lessons in each life. The concept that each soul has a mission, a gift or talent to use to contribute to the higher good of humanity, is also prevalent. Some believe that the soul forgets its mission as a result of the conditioning and repression most people are subjected to in life. The term spirit, which according to Baumann relates to psyche and transcendence, is also widely used. In my experience all voice healing work is fundamentally 'spiritual' work in that it is at the level of the soul or spirit that the facilitators are working.

According to Heelas, the New Age sacralises the 'self'. He states that 'authority lies within the self, or more broadly the natural' in this movement, and that the most valued form of wisdom is not via an external authority or general belief but is experiential (1996:68) Heelas also states that 'the rejection of external voices of authority entails reliance on what is taken to be the only reliable *authentic voice*, that provided by the inner spiritual realm' (1996:68, my emphasis). One's authentic or true self thus lies beyond inhibition and conditioning and other forms of external authority. The concepts of 'finding oneself' and 'one's voice' are therefore central to this philosophy.

What causes illness and disease?

While some scholars have attempted to find non ethno-centric physiological definitions of illness and disease, anthropologists, especially medical anthropologists, seem to view illness not as empirical but as cultural, closely related to worldview and ¾tiology (Roseman 1991, Larco 1997). Capra defines 'dis-ease' as 'a lack of synchronisation with oneself, immediate others, and the surrounding world' (Bunt 1997:254). This interpretation of 'dis-ease' is exactly the same in holistic healing.

The general belief in this field is that most physical illness or disease has origins in emotional and psychological issues, as body and mind are intricately interlinked. Sound healers believe that 'everything that happens to a child emotionally and mentally resonates through the body' (Roden 1999:21) leaving an imprint at a cellular level. The cells are thus distorted with unreleased negative experience and this subconsciously influences behaviour, manifesting as a physical 'block', or causing illness or 'dis-ease'.

Cancer is cited as a classic example. Diseased cells have a different cellular structure to healthy ones and therefore vibrate at a different pitch. The negative experiences and feelings need to be released if the person is to be fully healthy and achieve his or her potential. This releasing may take many forms, and may or may not involve the shedding of tears or verbal expression.

> 'Disease and illness is simply a conflict of sounds … healing is simply bringing those sounds into harmony or bringing them to consciousness. Often you have to bring these sounds into the conscious awareness so they can be dealt with, they will give rise to knowledge of habitual behaviour or attitudes/emotions which are causing the problem, all disease originates from some sort of disharmony, which is often, not always, an emotional disharmony which the person suffering from the disease may not be aware of because it's so much part of their nature'. (British publisher and attender at Sound Healing conference, in interview.)

What kind of people seek healing?

Although many who attend voice healing events do hold 'alternative' views which run contrary to current Western philosophy, they represent a diverse, heterogeneous group. In general, they are middle aged, middle class, predominantly female and largely white. They range from alternative types clad in tie-dyed shirts and sandals to trendy professionals and suited business people. According to my observations and the comments of voice healers, at least two thirds of workshop attendees are women, despite many practitioners wishing to attract more men. Although many are reasonably wealthy salaried professionals or freelance workers, voice healing also attracts the less well off, for whom some voice healing events are relatively expensive. The free workshops run by the Sacred Voices Millennium Music Village festival in London seemed to attract slightly more non-white people than Jill Purce's workshop in Devon.

These people included artists, musicians, craftspeople, charity workers, counsellors, psychotherapists, retired people, students, doctors, teachers, university lecturers, social workers, business consultants and archaeologists amongst others. One of the most represented professions was holistic therapists, including massage therapists, rebirthers, healers, acupuncturists, etc. One voice healer I spoke to stated that 75% of his clients belong to this group.

Why the need for this healing?

At Jill Purce's residential workshop, participants were asked on more than one occasion to address the group and state the reasons they felt a need for healing. One of the most common responses was 'to find my voice' and many explained that they had been told that they couldn't sing or to shut up as children. Alvin states that according to research, rejection of one's attempt at musical expression have particularly damaging and long-lasting extra-musical repurcussions (1983). Other reasons that were mentioned included:

> 'to heal a broken heart; bereavement; to improve relationships with parents and children; to find a singing voice; to gain confidence; to re-experience Jill's workshop; to work through issues surrounding abortion; to heal others; for unknown reasons; to gain motivation; to gain clarity to take important decisions; to love themselves and others more; to work on specific energy centres; to heal from effects of trauma or abuse; to overcome blocks; to heal livers, spleens, joints etc; to heal sexually; to relieve pain; to gain forgiveness; to find inner harmony; to find freedom from stress, anxiety, mood swings and depression; to combat addiction; to find the truth'.

Although some people were dealing with traumatic events such as emotional and sexual abuse or the effects of the holocaust, it would be difficult to determine whether attendees represented a particular emotionally vulnerable or discontented segment of the population, and if so why. Most people did not come for reasons relating to physical illness, although two participants were physically disabled.

While it was not possible to enquire into the reasons people were attending shorter workshops, similar reports were given by therapists I interviewed. James D'Angelo, for example, stated that although people may be able to name specific problems or ailments, they all come for the same reason - 'they want to be who they really are, they want to be free, liberated, that's what they are looking for'.

As Larco states, healing relates to concepts of harmony in a given social setting (1997). Harmony, for the group studied, is simultaneously a musical and metaphorical concept. As the world is a sound built phenomenon, harmony means consonance in all matters and a sense of omniscient interconnectedness or wholeness. This wholeness begins with the individual, and incorporates well-being on all levels, and implying a state of concordance between the inner and outer, subjective and intersubjective realities. That is, a person's 'true self' is apparent and his or her self-expression (vocal, emotional, creative etc) is not quashed by the norms of culture and conditioning.

Why these feelings of separation from the self?

People who go to voice healing workshops therefore feel some need to change something, to be more in touch with themselves or to find some kind of meaning in their lives. One of the organisers of the Sacred Voices Music Village voice healing workshops, Emma D'Costa, believes that the current increase in popularity of voice healing and other holistic and New Age therapies is 'to do with a desire in the West for some sort of spirituality. It maybe got lost along the way, and people see it in other countries, where they still have it'. This view was echoed by many, as was the view that people in the West do not or no longer use their voices in a healing or spiritual way.

When questioned about why they believe we in the West are not 'in touch' with ourselves, our voices and our spirituality, interviewees cited various influences including the media, cultural conditioning, English reserve and behavioural codes. One interviewee stated that people in the UK are more conditioned and inhibited than those in the US, using their 'true voices' less. It seems that there is a belief that we have become too civilized or cultured: that we 'no longer' do things which were once natural or primal. Culture has superimposed patterns of behaviour upon us requiring that we live in ways which stunt our expression and uniqueness:

> 'like most people in Western societies, I grew up learning to censor my emotions, my words, and every sound that came out of my mouth. I learned to make only sounds that were socially acceptable. As a child I was taught not to make loud noises of any kind: boisterous laughter, painful crying, screaming with pleasure. Most adults, repressed as children, have a fear of direct, emotional, gut level expression of feelings' (Gardner-Gordon 1993:6).

Jill Purce among others emphasises how we have lost the tradition of using our voices to heal, arguing that this still takes place particularly in indigenous and Oriental cultures. Economic development and Westernisation however, are not always seen as having negative repercussions: some in the voice-healing world compare the way we use our voices now favourably with how we used them in the 1950s, or see the US as a positive example for voice use. Thus, although this is a common theme in voice healing discourse, some people see authenticity of vocal expression as a concept which is unrelated to ideas about increasing modernity, secularisation or affluence.

2. THE POWER OF VOCAL SOUND IN HEALING

If healing means reaching a state of wholeness or interconnectedness with oneself and others, the natural world and the divine, why is the voice and sound used to promote this? In this section I will discuss the discourses and views about voice and sound in healing.[4]

Ethnographers and sound healers alike are taking increasingly phenomenological approaches to their work, both emphasising experiential and sensorial ways of gaining knowledge and authority, in contra-distinction to anthropological and ethnomusicological tradition, as discussed above. In Friedson's case this 'radical empiricism' led to his understanding of Tumbuka concepts about musical sound in healing as the substance or technical energy of healing [5] (1996).

[4] The two fields have close links in terms of organisation, and voice practitioners are included under the rubric of sound healing at conferences and in directories of practitioners. Some of those who call themselves sound healers also use the voice as well as other instruments in their therapy. Not all voice therapists, however, would see their work as directly related to sound healing.

[5] Both Friedson (1996) and Gell (1992) discuss the links between the aesthetic realm of art and technology, comparing Western separation of these realms with ethnographical studies where the two are a singular mode of existence.

The physical power of sound

Sound and voice healers regularly refer to certain principles relating to the physics of sound. Sound is vibratory disturbances in a gas, liquid or solid medium, a physical force capable of literally moving matter. Its use in Western medicine, e.g. ultra sound scans and sonic lasers, is cited as evidence of its power. Other scientific research into the powers of sound, such as in Cymatics.[6]
, is also cited in the sound healing literature.

Physics is used to argue that as the electrons and protons in all atoms and therefore all matter are in constant vibration, all things are constantly making a sound, albeit mostly inaudible. The body is conceived of as both sounding and as being highly responsive to sounds. 'Every cell in our body is a sound resonator. It has the capability of responding to any other sound outside the body' (Andrews 1999:9). This is due to the principal of resonance or entrainment, defined by Andrews as 'the ability of a vibration to reach out through vibrational waves to set off a similar vibration in another body' (1999:9). Parts of the body are made up of cells with similar vibration rates, that is, each organ or area in the body has a particular pitch. When disease or illness occurs, the pitch of the affected part of the body is altered causing disharmony or a lack of resonance. The believed effect is that due to the principal of entrainment, sound can restore the original healthy frequency in the body.

The emotional power of sound

In general, sound healers do not separate physical healing from the emotional or psychological sphere. They see sound as having a simultaneously physiological and affective impact. Although the ability of sound and especially musical sound to alter our mood or feeling is generally recognised, sound healers use sound not to make somebody feel better but at a deeper level to cleanse the body of negative energy or emotions which can cause disease or perpetuate undesirable behaviour. As explained in chapter one, negative experience is seen to impact upon the body at a cellular level, causing blocks which can result in disease. As sound works to restore the natural vibration or resonance of the cells, it acts to release trauma and pain. Many of those I spoke to experienced this phenomenon, which can result in crying, trembling, the emitting of emotive vocal sounds or feelings of 'regressing' to childhood.

Mental power or energy is seen as an important adjunct to sound in healing. Jonathon Goldman, a US authority, states that frequency plus intention creates healing.[7] Many healers state that love and good will for the client are essential and several of them I interviewed harness mental energy through their own or their clients' use of visualisation exercises.[8]

The divine power of sound

One of the tenets of voice and sound healing work is that 'sound is a vital force which permeates every aspect of creation' (Andrews 1999:3). The significance of sound to voice and sound healers must be understood with reference to this presumed divinity of certain sounds and the ability of sound to connect physical and metaphysical realms of existence.

Healers argue that matter, and therefore the world, was created through a primordial, divine sound. Origin and creation myths from all over the world, including the Christian 'In the beginning was the Word', are tirelessly cited to reinforce this premise. Moffit-Cook describes Hindu mythology and the concept that sound and mantras are considered to emanate a 'divine pulsation' and to be central to creation and living (1997:64). These Hindu beliefs, as well as the principle of *spanda*, that all things in the universe are vibrating, also seem to be central to the philosophy of sound healers.

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[6] Cymatics' is a term invented by Hans Jenny, a Swiss scientist and artist working in the mid twentieth century, following the work done by Ernst Chladni, a German acoustical physicist working in the early 1800s. This research shows how sound can force tiny particles to organise themselves into different patterns. When iron fillings and other materials are exposed to certain sounds they organise themselves into intricate and beautiful shapes, some of which are potent mythical symbols. The Sanskrit mantra 'OM', for example, caused particles to form the shape of a Tantric Buddhist yantra or meditational mantra representing the sacred vibration of creation (Gardner 1990:120)

[7] As stated on the cover of his CD of healing music, *Chakra Chants.* [Also in his book, not cited, *Healing sounds: the power of harmonics*. Rev. ed. 1996. Ed,]

[8] This involves picturing certain scenes, colours or other images in their minds.

It is claimed that by returning to that sound, grounds for conflict among peoples can be removed, despite cultural difference, by highlighting unity in origin. A hierarchy of divinity is recognized in sound, although the most sacred sounds are not manifested. As the table below illustrates, many of the characteristics of 'divine sound' are qualities or concepts central to the philosophy behind healing itself – the importance of nature and being natural, openness and universality. Many report an experience in healing voice workshops of not being able to tell where sound is coming from. There is a sense that it is coming from everywhere or becomes omnipresent. Sacred sound therefore, acts as a metaphor for the concept of 'wholeness'. Vowel sounds are considered especially pure and are often used in voice healing. The sound 'ah' is cited as one of the most commonly appearing sounds in world languages and for many signifies the energy of love. Sound healers believe that the sacredness of certain sounds (e.g. the mantra 'OM') are fundamental truths that are not related to cultural conditioning or worldview. One does not have to be a Hindu to believe in the power of a Sanskrit mantra.

According to a number of voice healing enthusiasts I interviewed, divine sound, by definition, will appeal to people from all cultures. Although each cultural group or nation has its own characteristic sound or music, this is just a slice or aspect of universal sound reflecting their particular vision or experience of the world. Behind those culturally significant sounds however, lies a universal sound. According to one interviewee, a New Age music expert, 'if you can get to the substantiating core underneath all the different aspects, you can resonate something that appeals to everyone in a universal way'. The sound of language is also perceived similarly - each language has a sound that reflects the nature of its people, some being purer and more sacred than others. Sanskrit is, according to a publisher I met at a sound healing conference, one of the 'purest' languages.

The ever-ascending system of overtones or harmonics is considered a gateway to the divine and exceptionally healing. According to Gardner, they are

> 'the steps of a stairway from the physical body to the "spiritual bodies". Harmonics are the sounds in healing music which bring us to balance by vibrating us at all auric levels' (1997:63).

Jill Purce emphasised that overtones are *naturally* present in all sound, and therefore in all matter. Overtones are to sound as a spectrum is to colour, she states, and the hearing and production of overtones can help us to remember or recognise the natural sound system within which we often obliviously exist. In contrast to this, she argues, is the fact that all Western music since the seventeenth century is 'out of tune', referring to the fact that it is tempered. Overtone chanting is considered therefore, a way of being 'in tune' with one self and with nature. Overtones are also seen as particularly healing because as more than one pitch is audible at one time, these extra frequencies provide additional healing power.

Silence (stillness) is as important as sound (movement or vibration) for most of my interviewees. For James D'Angelo, a voice practitioner whose work evolved from his interest in spirituality, healing is the still and meditative space one enters into after vocal or sound work. He refers to the concept of inner sound (or pulse) in Nada Yoga. Similarly, as Larco reports about indigenous healing sessions in the Andes, 'silence is as important as sound … silence provides a signal for people to look at themselves' (1997:52). For voice practitioner Jill Rakusen, it is from silent meditation that her knowledge, understanding, inspiration and much material for her voice work arises.

Sound versus music

In sound and much of voice healing, it is the notion of sound as a natural vibrational force which is considered healing, as opposed to the musical arrangement of sound, prescribed by culture. Along with colour and light, sound is considered a form of energy which works on a primarily physical as opposed to affective or symbolic level. While healers do allude to the use of ultra sound and sonic lasers in orthodox medicine (there is no doubt here that it is the physical vibrational quality of sound which impacts upon the body) music therapy is rarely mentioned despite obvious parallels. According to Bunt (1997), music is often seen as an adjunct to healing in music therapy rather than the active ingredient, and controversy arises when musical sound is placed at the forefront in treatment: in sound healing the opposite is true. This discourse about voice

and sound workshops favours the intrinsic healing power of sound over the positive results that arise from the communing and opening up which take place at workshops.

A fundamental conceptual difference between sound and music is that sound is considered a natural phenomenon, whereas music is the result of human enterprise and an expression of a particular cultural reality. Sound as a physical force transcends cultural difference. Unlike Blacking (1976), who believed that all reactions to musical sound, including physiological, are determined by cultural context, sound healers believe that sound has an effect on all levels of the body regardless of culture or nationality.

Sound and humans

There is an emphasis on the importance of sound in human development. The literature frequently alludes to its significance to the baby in the womb, as hearing is the first perception to develop. A baby's ability to discern sounds such as its mother's voice as emotional information is considered significant. The argument on the centrality of sound in human life echoes Blacking's theory that music is a primary modelling system for human beings (1976).

A vast range of human emotions can be communicated without language according to voice worker Paul Newham (1999). Early man may have expressed emotional states by making appropriate noises and vocal sounds. With the advent of language this range of communication became less prominent. Thus primal, pre-linguistic grunts, whoops, laughter and guffaws are considered very important in expressing and releasing emotion. Similarly, Gardner-Gordon equates toning[9] to the expression of the 'pure, uncivilised human being' and the cry of an infant (1993). Music therapist Dorit Amir states that 'many vocal sounds have universal meaning: the singing of birds, the roaring of animals, the crying of babies' (1997:112). Langenberg states that in music therapy, the sound experience is understood as an archaic element beyond culture (1997:97).

Although widespread amongst therapists, these claims would probably be refuted by some anthropologist and ethnomusicologists – the interpretation of bird song as the voice of the spirits among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea contrasts dramatically with interpretation in the West (Feld 1982). But echoing voice healers' emphasis on the non-verbal, Blacking describes a situation from his ethnographical study in South Africa, where *tshigombela* (Venda girls dance song) performers sometimes substitute words with combinations of phonemes in their singing, giving them greater musical expression. He notes that 'this is important as it is the part of the shared experience of musical activity which may become transcendental in its effect on individuals' (1979:71).

The power of the voice

The human voice is widely considered the most important tool in sound healing. Like any other sound, it is a resonator and can work on a physical level to vibrate cells. When the voice is used, it sends vibration all around the body as well as having a healing effect externally, on listeners. It is considered a natural resonator, a flexible and practical healing tool. It is portable and always with the owner and is flexible in terms of range and tones and harmonics. Comparing it to other musical instruments, many stated that the emotional quality of the voice makes it the more powerful healing agent. The voice is also seen as a primal, integral and natural part of the human being, a reminder that we belong to the natural order.

Through the voice the recent past and the ancient are conjured up, i.e. that of one's childhood as well as one's ancestors. Using the voice helps to focus on the present according to a voice healer I interviewed - 'it stops all the faffing around we do in our heads, we are there in the moment, we might be calling up the past but we are right there in the moment, we are enchanted'. It is a basic form of expression that connects with immediacy to the emotions - 'using voice and singing can mean that people become more open about showing and expressing emotions'.

Fundamental to the healing process, the voice links mind, body and spirit:

> 'It is the lynch pin between mind, body, the spiritual and the emotional, the vocal chords are rooted in the body, through them we express our thoughts, our

[9] Toning is utilizing the vibratory power of the voice by making long, sustained sounds using a vowel, a consonant or a combination of both, without the use of melody, beat, rhythm or the use of words or specific meaning.

emotions are expressed through them, often unwittingly. We can consciously decide to nurture our true selves or our spiritual side with the voice and when we do use that will, although sometimes it is possible without, we can move mountains.'.

'Voice is more immediate than other creative arts, it is more direct, when you sing you are more visible, 'feelable' and audible. You are more present than when you paint'. (Voice healers in interview)

3. HOW IS VOCAL SOUND EXPERIENCED IN HEALING?

Methodology

I spent five weeks conducting field research. Participant observation was carried out at all events I attended - Jill Purce's Healing Voice Week, eleven voice healing workshops and a day-long Sound Healing conference. I also carried out face-to-face, written and telephone interviews with voice healers and their clients.

Examining the way in which music is used in therapy[10] or healing world-wide, Baumann divides approaches into three categories - active-reproducing, passive-receptive and the physical approach or sound as energy (1997). Most Western voice healing incorporates the third approach, understanding vocal sound energy as a vibration carrier and source of ethereal energy with healing effects. Baumann's categories may then be used for subdivision. Most sound healing is active-reproducing.

The workshops

Jill Purce's residential Healing Voice Week

Held in a large early Victorian guesthouse in an idyllic setting in the Devon countryside, this was my first experience of using the voice in a healing capacity. About two-thirds of the other 90 or so participants had previously attended Jill Purce's events and a unique environment was immediately created in which it was commonplace to speak of the colour of one's aura, the mood of the local water spirits and the energies at one's throat chakra. Each day the activities took place in a small chapel on the grounds of the estate, where everybody sat barefoot and cross-legged on cushions in the empty white-washed space. Jill, accompanied by her assistant Alysia, always sat Buddha-like in the centre of the chapel space on a piece of brightly covered woven 'ethnic' fabric, armed with her trademark Tibetan bell. Group toning and chanting was always followed by silent meditation and many assumed lotus postures for this.[11]

For the first two days, the focus was on group toning and chanting, breathing exercises and overtone chanting (see 4. below). On the third day we rose at dawn to mark May Day, gathering dew and singing as the sun ascended and began two highly intense days of individual and group healing sessions in the chapel. My dairy entry records the following events:

'The facilitators then began burning sage and distributing the smoke around the room with the eagle feathers as the large group began the evocative Tibetan Buddhist chant we would sing almost non-stop for two days, 'o ma vajra guru, o ma sidi hum'. Jill then beckoned Alysia to stand up and signalled to two men from the group to stand behind her. Furiously Jill billowed the sage smoke from the conch shell she held underneath Alysia's chin into her face and the intensity of the group's chanting increased. Like a puppet without strings, Alysia then dropped backwards and the two men eased her into a lying position on the floor. Jill, circling her with an intense expression, repeatedly waved her eagle feather wand over Alysia's slight body, causing her to convulse and shake'.

All this was totally new to me. I knew that we would be randomly taken from the group for an individual healing session and I wondered anxiously when my turn would come and what would happen to me. Would I really fall into trance as Alysia had done? Would I cry hysterically as she did? I dreaded my turn. One by one, people were plucked from the group. In the same way as with Alysia, the person was encouraged to relinquish control and fall backwards onto the floor. While some people seemed to collapse

[10] What does or does not constitute music 'therapy' is a question posed by Horden from a historical perspective. This term is potentially confusing due to its associations with the established **practice** of music therapy (2000).

[11] A yoga posture with legs crossed over each thigh commonly used for meditation

involuntarily, others had to be eased backwards by gentle swaying and rocking of their bodies. Once they were lying on the floor in whatever state of consciousness they had reached, the ritual was tailored to that particular person and was often directly related to the issue they had mentioned that morning.

Rattles, cymbals and other instruments were used at different stages of the procedure, resulting in shaking, convulsing and moaning. Combined with the hypnotic chanting, the sounds of these instruments were incredibly intense, and they seemed to have the same effect in the body as an electric charge. Jill applied the crisp clang of the cymbal and piercing whistling bone with the precision and skill of a surgeon with his injections and incisions.

Some healings were more violent than others. Shortly after falling to the ground and having been administered various sounds, which seemed to serve almost to awaken some part of her being, one woman jolted upright and with an ashen face, let out a long, piercing shriek. The rest of us shuddered, hearing in that scream her terror and trauma. Crying, from silent weeping to convulsive wailing, was part of the session for many being healed and for others moved by the poignancy of what they were witnessing. Looking around the room at times it occurred to me that the group resembled a pack of primates in a documentary film, as people comforted, held and stroked one another.

My turn came early the next day, by which time I felt less threatened by the prospect. The assailing waft of sage, Alysia's plaintive singing and the sea of mesmerising voices lulled me into a desire to surrender to my senses. I surrendered control and fell back on to the ground, jelly-like. I remained conscious of my surroundings but in a dream-like state, almost observing my fate without trying to alter it. The clash of resonant metal at the side of my head sent a searing current into my ears and through my body which shook and trembled. The pungent air around me was billowing vehemently, throwing me to and fro like a rag doll, and the two-line chant pulsed onwards. During my session, I reacted on a very physical level to the sounds around me, but did not experience catharsis as Alysia had done. Surprised at one point by a deep male voice in my right ear, I propelled myself to the far side of the space where sweeter voices calmed and soothed me. The experience was like a sonic journey, and the scenarios orchestrated by Jill and Alicia uncannily reminiscent of experiences I had long since tried to forget.

Although the facilitators had some basic information about the 'issues' each person was dealing with, many reported seemingly inexplicable coincidences and parallels between their dramatised reconstruction and reality. This was attributed to spirits working through the healers. After my session I felt numb. Although I was told the whole thing took up to 25 minutes, it felt like much less. Over the next few days, the way I felt about certain issues changed. I had gained clarity of thought and felt more empowered to deal with what had previously seemed threatening.

Trance, possession and altered states of consciousness have proved fascinating for Western scholars who seem all too determined to rationalise or functionalise these phenomena. I would see the experience I describe above not as a bizarre metaphysical occurrence to be dissected and explained, but as an entering into an alternative state of consciousness (alongside meditation, sleep, caffeine enhanced lucidity etc.), of which there are undoubtedly many more than we commonly recognise (Bock 1980). Although in very different field settings to my own, scholars such as Stoller and Friedson have described their experiences of trance and possession. Friedson, for example, stated that upon leaving the field for the last time, he felt his dreams indicated that he was nearing readiness to be possessed by *vimbuza* spirits (1996:22). Less of a leap of faith was necessary for me to enter into the London voice healing world, but the similarities in healing contexts seem to me evidence that altered states of consciousness such as trance experiences are available to anyone, given certain sensory conditions and openness on the part of the individual. It is not necessary, I would argue, to have a corresponding worldview or cultural conditioning to access these realms.

The next days of the Healing Week were spent focusing on ancestors and carrying out other chant-accompanied healing rituals. Much of Jill Purce's work is unique to her and is not typical of the wider voice healing field, which is why I do not deal at length with all of it here.

Shorter workshops

Although residential group workshops are not unusual in the voice healing field, weekend, day and afternoon workshops are more common. While Jill Purce's workshop involved many esoteric or metaphysical activities (e.g. chanting to deceased ancestors and carrying out mental dialogues with them) others focus more on deep-breathing, the production of sound or combining vocalisations with movement, reflecting practitioners' varied backgrounds.[12] I attended a series of hour-long workshops which provided a glimpse into other facilitators' approaches. Some involved listening to and learning the rudiments of overtoning, the production of two or more pitches simultaneously by altering the shape of the vocal cavities.

Bonnie Barnet's workshop involved lying on the floor doing yoga-like breathing exercises and making sighing sounds, walking around the room toning and huddling up as a group while making a communal polyphonic chord, what she calls the 'Millennium Hum'.

Suet Wan Thow started her workshop by inviting the small group sitting on the floor in a circle to link hands, and speaking to us about her desire that a safe place be created in the room, which would allow for healing and give people the security to 'be themselves'. As the spontaneous toning began, at first tentatively and more vociferously when more drums were added to the exercise, some people were inspired to stand up, sway and dance around. Some used sounds resembling words or phrases, repeated syllables, incredibly high pitched shrieks or cries, groans, 'tribal' sounds, puffs, whoops, barks and shrieks. All sorts of animal sounds emerged, as did sounds reminiscent of oriental and African music. I limited myself to comparatively conservative sounds – humming and vowel sounds - not really knowing whether I had failed to let go and 'be myself' or whether it was really in me to start groaning and howling.[13]

James D'Angelo's workshops, of which I attended several, ranged in length from one to four hours. Not unlike some of the other facilitators, James usually starts his workshop with a short explanation of his theoretical approach to sound and spirituality. His techniques include 'ritualised' or exaggerated laughter, keening (wailing) and groaning in which he uses various consonant and vowel sounds. His vocal exercises are combined with special body movements – shaking, stretching, lightly pounding the chest, running the hands along the auric field etc. All of these exercises are specific, slow and deliberate and the group members carry them out together. D'Angelo also uses vocalisations (e.g. 'soham') combined with movements and incorporates a commonly used technique, toning the chakras, into his workshops. (See 4. below) Personally, I found these exercises provoked unanticipated bodily and emotional responses – choking sensations, breathlessness, trembling, a feeling of imbalance between the right and left sides of my body. It was not apparent what other workshop participants felt doing these exercises, although in interview James D'Angelo explained that sometimes tears are provoked. During the meditations which followed these exercises I felt a profound sense of calm and indeed an altering in my state of consciousness. My body felt awakened and alive, my senses more acute and my mind uncluttered and flowing. After one workshop I was surprised to perceive an incandescent yellow glow radiating from James' upper body and spark upwards from his head as he spoke. Becoming accustomed to altered emotional and sensory states, I accepted this as a consequence of this type of work.

4. VOICE HEALING TECHNIQUES ENCOUNTERED

Passive-receptive techniques

Intoning

[12] n holistic and mainstream health care, music, theatre and psychotherapy/counselling amongst other areas.

[13] At the end of the workshop Suet extended her special gratitude to those who had 'really connected with the exercise', referring to the more vocally outrageous of the group. The exercise was enjoyable and uplifting but I could not help feel that despite the emphasis on freedom and spontaneity there was a hierarchy in terms of how 'oneself' it was perceived one had been, and an unspoken rule that one was more oneself when loud and experimental.

Also known as sound healing, this is the main passive-receptive technique I observed. The term is used here in a special sense, as the application of vocal sound by a practitioner directly into the client's body, focussing upon the realignment of energies or cellular patterns, via sound. It could be thus seen as a process of purification from the outside inwards, ridding the body of stored dis-ease, trauma and negativity. The past is being exorcised from the physical level, priming the individual for greater integration of mind, body and spirit. This technique is practiced by various sound healers and is one I observed on two occasions. Although sound healers feel that cells and organs vibrate at certain pitches, few seem to have a fixed notion of the appropriate pitches for healing different parts of the body. Intuition and experimentation are emphasised, as is positive intention and the imbuing of the sound with 'loving energy'. This approach was criticised however by a minority of interviewees who feel that more research and indeed caution are necessary.

At the Caduceus Sound Healing Conference, I witnessed voice-worker Amanda Relph demonstrate this technique. A woman volunteer from the audience sat on a chair in front of the group as Amanda directed long, resonant vowel sounds into her aching shoulder at a distance of about 10cm – 20cm. She varied the pitch, as if probing for something, and the quality of her voice wavered as she sang. Later she explained in interview - 'I project sound into the physical body to change matter. If there is a deadening or a wobble in the voice, this is the dis-eased area, as when it is clear it is more resonant'.

As well as to cure physical illness, this technique can be used to promote healing in general as I later experienced first hand at a workshop, in which I was one of two participants. I wrote the following account in my notebook:

> 'When it was my turn, I lay down flat on the cushions which had been spread on the floor. Following Anna's instructions, Jane let her hands wander over my back, feeling for temperature extremes and other energetic indications of dis-ease. I heard a deep, muffled murmuring and felt a narrow stream of intense heat enter a point on my lower back, penetrating almost to the bone. My right arm tingled to the fingertips. Jane sang into my body, placing her lips against my clothes and omitting a low pitched, overtone rich 'oo' several more times. My body and mind seemed to slowly melt away from one another and I felt powerless to control the strange currents of electricity which seemed to be pulsating around inside me. Waves of pressure, like all pervading anxiety, overwhelmed my entire body until the muscles could no longer contain the tension and released with a sudden convulsive movement. Then, like the return of electricity after a black-out, the wider picture shot into my head and I felt an urgent need to escape. I jolted upwards, crawled off the cushions and sat cross-legged with the other two women. When I looked at Anna Louise, I saw that tears were pouring down her cheeks'.

Although I was confused about my physical reaction to the exercise, I did not feel the urge to cry despite an air of expectation that this would be beneficial. I did however feel vulnerable and somewhat fragile in the days following this workshop. On a physical level, this experience of sound was one of a tangible physical force, causing involuntary shaking or muscle spasms. Throughout my field-work, I found that certain parts of my body would readily respond to sound in this way, especially to highly resonant or intense sounds. This shaking is reminiscent of many ethnographical accounts of healing with sound, especially those associated with possession (De Oliviera Pinto 1997, Moffit-Cook 1997, Rouget 1985 et al). The process of applying sound to the body in this manner also resembles the practise of the Temiar in Malaysia (Roseman 1991) and Hindu village healers in India (Moffit-Cook 1997).

Active-reproducing techniques

Toning

Toning, in its various different forms, is one of the techniques most commonly employed in the workshops I have attended, to promote harmony and inter-connectedness, and is used by Jill Purce, James D'Angelo, Suet Wan Thow, Bonnie Barnet, Gilles Petit, Amanda Relph and Shulamit. It is invariably mentioned in voice healing literature (see footnote 9). Toning, by stripping vocal utterances of logical meaning, ranks emotional expression through sound over linguistic meaning or

communication. Avoiding the use of language also overrides cultural references. (see Sound and humans, in 2, above)

As well as in groups, toning can also be used as a form of individual expression and catharsis. James D'Angelo's exercises (see The Workshops) can be considered a form of toning. Spontaneous improvised toning, e.g. at Suet Wan Thow's workshop, facilitates a forum where subjective experience becomes public and shared. Graham (1994) describes a similar dynamic: how Xavante youths in the Brazilian Amazon publicly share dream-songs, thereby merging individual experience with collective experience in performance. Likewise in spontaneous vocalizing a 'mediating between the creativity and experience of individual selves and the experience of collectivity occurs' (Graham 1994:723). Although the emphasis here is on spontaneity and on rule-breaking, what emerges is a performance, where the more experienced workshop goers are more proficient at 'letting go' and making these arbitrary sounds.

Toning the chakras

This common technique was used in Jill Purce's and James D'Angelo's workshops. The word 'chakra' comes from a Sanskrit word, meaning wheel. Chakras are described as 'whirling vortices of light in the electromagnetic field (aura) around each person's physical body' (Gardner 1997:1). Normally seven major chakras are dealt with at workshops (see diagram). According to its location, each chakra is believed to relate to certain aspects of a person. According to Roden, chakras should ideally be clear and open, but due to modern lifestyles, pain and stress, we tend to close them down. Pure sound, she claims, directed at the chakras, acts immediately to stimulate, harmonise and clear the energy (1999).

CHAKRA & LOCATION	CORRESPONDING ENERGIES	TONE	NOTE
ROOT CHAKRA, sacrum	Physical and sexual energies	E (red)	C
SACRAL CHAKRA, just below the navel	Emotion and appetite	O (home)	D
SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA, just above the navel	Vitality, nervous energy, intellect	AOM	E
HEART CHAKRA, at the sternum	Compassion and love	AH	F
THROAT CHAKRA, at the neck	Communication and creative expression	UU (blue)	G
BROW CHAKRA (also called Third Eye), above and between the eyebrows	Insight, intuition and perception	MM	A
CROWN CHAKRA, just above the head	Bliss, universal consciousness and 'oneness with All That Is'	EE	B

The table illustrates what energies or issues correspond to each chakra, according to Kay Gardner (1997) and Gardner-Gordon's (1993) guide to tones and pitches for toning. It is important to note however that suggested tones and notes for each chakra vary among practitioners and no standard formula exists. While some find the naming of pitches problematic, others suggest that these systems are useful as a starting point and can be adapted by the learner, judging his own reactions to the sounds and where he feels the sound vibration. James D'Angelo, for example, gives specific pitches but emphasised in his workshop that this was *his* particular system and that each person should go with what they feel is right for them.

At Jill Purce's Healing Voice week we toned five of the major chakras by making long tones on vowel sounds while keeping the corresponding chakra in mind. Doing this exercise for the first time, I did find some difficulties, (see above, James D'Angelo's workshops). This, I was told later by a fellow participant, was probably due to 'issues coming up' around these particular energy centres. At James' workshop, we toned the chakras using the Sanskrit mantras Lam, Vam, Ram, Yam, Ham, Om and rising in pitch in the intervals found low in the harmonic sequence.

The concept of toning the chakras is related to intoning in that it involves 'purification' at a physical level. Moving up the chakras however, the emphasis shifts from the individual to his/her ability to love and show compassion, communicate, perceive and ultimately commune with 'All That Is', as Gardner puts it (1997). This exercise, which many recommend as a daily practise, is effectively an embodiment of the concept of healing, as it touches upon all the levels at which wholeness or interconnectedness is sought – individual, group, human, nature/universe and divine/source. It acknowledges the body, and of course vocal sound, as the site of all-encompassing healing.

Singing

Singing is used as a healing tool by various practitioners, although it is not one of the more common techniques among the healers I personally observed. Despite this, I did speak to various individuals who use it as their primary tool. Indeed, a movement called 'the Natural Voice', pioneered by Frankie Armstrong in the 1970s, has influenced many of them.

Practitioners use singing in a specific, transformative way, speaking of the positive effects of singing: enhanced communication and self-awareness, increased compassion, increased self-confidence, enhanced perception, etc. These are also observed by people outside the healing voice context, as this statement reflects.

> 'When I sing, especially my own material, I experience a complete release of energy, a feeling of complete freedom, a feeling of specific honesty in those moments, a feeling of real truth to the extent that between songs I don't have anything to say, no words can express the emotions I am feeling as I've done it all through my songs. I have experienced a realisation of the strength of my communication through song. I came from quite a controlled background, and maybe singing is a way of saying 'this is me and it doesn't involve any control at all'. Personally I've found it amazingly healing. Singing is such an essential part of me and it opens me up to such an extent that I realise what I do and don't want. You are not so scared to say no. Intuition feels much stronger, and I feel a huge projection of love, a complete rendering. It is a moment of spiritual enlightenment every time.' (Interviewee, a young black London singer-songwriter who has never attended a voice healing, New Age or holistic health event.)

Singing is used by voice workers like Sibylle Rhovier and Jill Rakusen as a way of finding and revealing a person's true essence. Singing in this context is not about creating an aesthetically pleasing sound for an audience but is a means of becoming, being and communicating one's 'true self' or finding one's essence. This is the self which transcends any conditioning or repression. Although singing may be considered a fun and relaxing activity, according to these facilitators it is also the pathway to profound self-transformation. Practitioners speak of singing from the heart and believe it is potentially a way of expressing the most profound aspect of our being, the spirit or soul. Echoing these claims, Amir states that 'in Jewish culture, singing has always been the main means of connecting with the depths of the soul' and uses this technique in music therapy in Israel. She adds that songs can help clients express feelings that cannot be put into words and that the human voice provides an intimate connection between people. (Amir 1997:111-12)

Special workshops are also run for people who think they cannot sing. Many healers believe that it is within the capacity of the majority of people to sing, and that an inability to sing is often a result of repression and being told to mime or stand at the back as a child in school choir. It is believed that it is a fundamental human right to sing and through 'liberating' the singing voice, other aspects of the personality may flourish. Blacking (1976) also remarked upon and criticised the fact that in Western Europe, musical ability is erroneously restricted to a chosen few. Like the voice healers interviewed, he argued that man is by nature musical and felt that 'music can become an intricate part of the development of mind, body, and harmonious social relationships (1979:viii). One voice healer compared an out of tune singer to a disused violin, as instruments go out of tune if not played regularly. This analogy implies that regular vocal work is beneficial for one's pitch keeping, but also emphasises that being 'out of tune' is a metaphor for not being in right relation with one's surroundings.

Group toning and chanting

In many group workshops I attended, communal toning or chanting was experienced. In addition to the positive effects sound vibrations are presumed to have on the individual, group vocal work is used for its power in creating feelings of group unity and 'wholeness'. While most people report extremely positive peaceful and loving feelings during and after this exercise, some have had more profound reactions:

> 'On one occasion, I was in a ballroom with a large group of people meditating together. I experienced the unity of that room. The whole room and everyone in it was one….the whole room was just contained in that sound and there was an amazing peace, no separation whatever, a dissolution of that striving individual that is there most of the time and nothing whatsoever like it. That is the strongest experience of sound that I've had. That is what the sound work is moving towards'
>
> (Interviewee, Caduceus Sound Healing Conference attendee.)

Jill Purce used group toning or 'tuning together' often on simple open vowel sounds several times daily during her workshop. When a group tones together on different pitches, a broad polyphonic sound emerges which normally evolves and metamorphoses during the exercise. Invariably the sound comes to a spontaneous close, all voices ceasing together without any planning or instruction from a leader. During Jill's workshop this was sometimes done while the group stood arm in arm or huddled tightly together. It was also done while the group completely surrounded an individual, sometimes described as a sonic massage or sound bath. The Caduceus Sound Healing Conference was opened and closed with a group 'tone'. At several points during the Sacred Voices festival open-air concerts, voice healer Bonnie Barnet facilitated a 'Millennium Hum', that is a group toning, which involved hundreds of people toning together to the drone of several instruments. (See figure 9 and audio recording)

Group chanting, distinguishable from toning as it involves repeating words (generally foreign) as opposed to sounds only, was used extensively by Jill Purce. Chanting in Latin and in Tibetan was a daily event at her workshop and a Buddhist chant was sung continuously for two days to accompany individual healing sessions (see 3. above). Here the sound acted as a container and a catalyst, as described by Moffit-Cook with reference to village healing in India (1997). As one participant said about the sound created during this ritual:

> 'it was like a sea of sound we felt happy to relax into and let whatever was going to happen, happen. It was a safe environment, a safe sound. It would have been impossible without sound as it helped us to relax, to get to different dimensions, go through barriers, it was a pathway. Without the openness that the sound brought, it would have been difficult to release whatever needed healing. We were all there moving and breathing, by making sounds ourselves we were not thinking about anything else, totally free from all that inner judgement, it was just get the rhythm, get the freedom, get the flowing and just go with it without questioning or anything like that, just let go'. (Dutch business consultant and Healing Voice Week participant.)

The fact that Hindu and Buddhist chants, North American songs, Tibetan instruments etc, are all used in the workshops apparently without any concern about decontextualisation or appropriation highlights the notion that sound is believed to be effective regardless of cultural and contextual factors.

Overtoning

This involves making an extended vocal sound, as in toning but making the harmonics audible by manipulating the vocal cavities so that more than one pitch can be heard at the same time. This practise seems to be extremely popular in voice work, and I experienced three voice healers teaching this technique. Although other practitioners may not teach this specifically, many demonstrate overtoning in their workshops or allude to it in some way. (e.g. James D'Angelo, Bonnie Barnet)

At her workshop in Devon, Jill Purce taught overtoning. The following is an extract from my field notes:

'Jill chanted and I clearly heard the whistle-like tones dance above the fundamental note she was singing. I thought that it would take me years to learn to do this, and was amazed that when we chanted as a group, other participants who had been to her workshops could do this already. We then found a partner and my partner and I sat face-to-face, legs crossed. We toned on vowel sounds in sequence 'Uu', 'Oh', 'Ah', 'Ae', 'Ee' and in the opposite direction. My face, head and body was in vibration, and when we both toned the same sounds at exactly the same time, the intensity of the vibrations was stronger and the feeling of oneness augmented'.

Many people have reported strong emotional experiences when overtoning. These range from 'very loud deep crying that seemed to explore grief, anger and frustration, ending in sounds that could only be attributed to giving birth' to 'deep ecstasy'. Others report healing migraines or becoming very calm and 'in tune with oneself'.

Overtones are often spoken of with reverence and awe. Although some consider it superfluous or 'faddy' to learn to produce overtones as harmonics are naturally present in all sound, it seems that many revere overtoning for its apparent spiritual qualities and all-encompassing healing power. Anna Louise for example never produces overtones without 'offering them up', that is, to a higher cause such as the good of children or victims of war. Additionally she never overtones for extended periods of time – she does not want to 'abuse the gift from the ancients'. Interestingly, Gage Averill states that in barbershop singing in the US, overtone rich 'expanded sound' has taken on a kind of quasi-mystic significance for barbershoppers (1999:49). She relates this to the metaphor for social unity it represents in group harmony.

I have observed how overtones, when produced with skill, provoke awe and amazement in a group. This is not surprising considering the seemingly impossible nature of the sounds produced. When he visited Tibet and heard a monk singing a three-tone chord, ethnographer Huston Smith believed that years of training and practise must be necessary to learn this skill. (1967) Terry Ellingson who, as a singer, found that with practise he was soon able to produce overtones proved Smith wrong. Ellingson described overtone chanting as 'numinous' to listen to and found that the practise provides increased self-awareness. He stated that overtoning 'brings about a whole new experience of vocal coordination that is almost an experience of beginning a new life, vocally' (1970:829).

Experiencing healing

There is unanimous faith in the healing powers of voice and sound among the people I spoke to, and the experiences and feelings they described while using their voices cannot be described as everyday. Feelings and states of enhanced joy, illumination and peace were commonly recounted and were profound enough to affect people's outlook on life - 'Each time I am chanting, I feel uplifted. I feel that life is worthwhile to live'. (Israeli workshop participant) The sense of interconnectedness so vital to the concept of healing was also reported and variously described as the dissolution of separateness, oneness, the feel-good factor etc. The effects of voice healing workshops also seemed to reverberate into people's lives after the event, and individuals reported achieving desired goals e.g. weight loss, increased clarity, more self-awareness and integrity and enhanced sensibility etc. In my case, I noticed a dramatic improvement in my overall mood and frame of mind after Jill Purce's workshop (increased serenity, happiness, joie de vivre, optimism) and I was told that I had become more compassionate. Sarasini (2000) has recently quoted research carried out by Eugene D'Aquili and Andrew Newburg to illuminate what happens to the brain neurologically during mystical experience. They argue that chanting and other ritual activities can stimulate certain areas of the brain and promote a state known as "Absolute Unity of Being," or AUB, which they describe as "the abolition of any discrete boundaries between beings, by the absence of a sense of time-flow, and by the elimination of the self-other dichotomy" (1999). I believe that voice healing aspires to the attainment of this state, and that it is regularly reached or approached in voice work, especially prolonged group chanting and toning.

While enhanced states were often achieved through chanting and toning, many reported extreme catharsis and emotional release during voice work. This is encouraged by most healers. Others feel that sudden and dramatic catharsis can be 'too much' for an

individual to cope with and prefer a more gentle approach. These kinds of reactions are simply accepted by others. Although a few occasions where sound work has seriously disrupted or negatively impacted upon a person have been reported,[14] most have welcomed emotional release, viewing it as an extremely positive and necessary unburdening.

5. CONCLUSION

In the same way that music can be used as a marker of ethnic or cultural difference and uniqueness, vocal sound is employed in the voice healing context in a manner which seeks to transcend the potentially divisive or separating notion of culture, promoting an alternative human identity based on the idea of oneness and wholeness individually and as a member of a wider community.

The voice healing movement serves to promote a concept of identity which embraces the expression of individuality as well as interconnectedness with all other people, by virtue of a shared humanity. This is an idealistic notion of all-pervasive harmony in the world, emphasising the essence of the individual and the essence of humanness. Healing addresses individual, group and spiritual identity, conspicuously omitting the identities of gender, ethnicity, race and nationality.

The movement seeks to transcend culture by encouraging a kind of vocal and emotional expression which is not dictated by cultural norms. Healing involves concordance between the inner and outer selves or subjective and intersubjective realities, not the maintenance of tradition and convention, thus minimising cultural difference and separation of peoples. Fernandez argues that wholeness is a state of relatedness or 'conviviality of experience', accessed through the principles of consanguinity and metamorphosis or transformation (1986:162). He states that all religions are concerned with the restoration of relatedness, and as we have seen, voice healing is as much a spiritual activity as it is a health related quest, implying a considerably radical shift in identity for those who adopt its premises (Fernandez 1986).

The voice healing field and national and ethnic movements use musical sound in similar ways despite being in many ways philosophical opposites. Vocal sound is used as a means of experiencing the essence of the identities in question even if the message being communicated is homogeneity as opposed to heterogeneity. As with ethnic groups, the notion of a common past, origin, spiritual home, ancestry and solidarity are all present in the discourse of voice healing (Smith 1986). However, cultural attributes are stripped to their most basic and universal to highlight commonness among peoples. Stokes states that the concept of authenticity is crucial in the use of music within ethnic identity formation: 'this is what is really important about our music, this is what makes us different' (1994). In voice healing this is replaced by: this is how music makes us human and connects us to ourselves and to each other. Similarly, authentic expression comes not from one's cultural heritage or ancestors but from 'within'.

In order to show how vocal sound is effectively used to make experiential this set of beliefs about identity and wholeness, I have considered how meaning-loaded sounds are used as symbols *as well as*, from a phenomenological perspective, being a significant sensory stimulus provoking powerful physiological, emotional and psychological experiences. This challenges the treatment of sound and music in healing as either epi-phenomenological or uniquely symbolic in function.

The continuity between concepts of wholeness, the discourse about vocal sound and the actual physiological and emotional powers of sound come together to fuel transformation. Reily's concept of enchantment helps to illustrate the power of music-making to transform, albeit temporarily, religious conviction into experiential reality (1995). In my ethnography, sound, and especially that of the human voice, is theorised as an omnipresent divine vibrational force which has healing powers. This belief is 'felt' when voice work creates communion and feelings of transcendental wholeness.

[14] One woman, herself a sound healer, told me that a sound healing session with Tibetan singing bowls 'knocked her out' for 8 months. She now feels very nervous about them and avoids them as she has a very fine aura and spirit.

The dynamic of sound at a group level, according to Stokes, provides for feelings of shared experience and emotion (1994). Similar to many voice healers, Shutz sees intersubjective experience as emerging from a 'mutual tuning-in relationship' of the primordial sensorial kind present in communal music making, which day to day verbal communication lacks (Fernandez 1986). Turner's notion of communitas is also applicable to the feelings of oneness enacted in voice healing, especially the more ritualistic like Jill Purce's in which the three stages of separation, liminality and aggregation can be identified. One could even see a sense of Turner's anti-structure here (1969). (See also Larco 1997 and Holloman 1974).

Indeed sound is seen as an energy which can transform and create. Fernandez argues that in ritual a sense of resonance or the analogy of a contiguous structure is created, a relatedness which can be transferred to other domains in life via metaphor, iteration and replication (1986:176). Equally the premise in voice healing is that the sense of wholeness achieved will have repercussions in all areas of the individual's life, the more metaphysically inclined considering that sound can change our vibration to such an extent as to transform us from bodily to spiritual beings.

As Blacking's notion of 'humanly organised sounds' reminds us, sounds are chosen deliberately and act as powerful images or symbols. Fernandez shows how the image is used in African revitalisation movements to signify wholeness (1986). Similarly vocal sound provides an ideal forum in which to transform the illusive notion of wholeness into an experiential reality. According to Achterberg, imagery is the thought process that involves and uses the senses, including audition, and has always been man's principle healing tool (1985). How then are sounds chosen by voice healers to enact the concept of wholeness? Which sounds are chosen to render tangible or sensate an 'expressivistic humanism', where one can be oneself *and* 'belong to oneness'? (Heelas 1996:69).

By focusing on sound instead of music, a *natural* phenomenon is privileged over a cultural one - 'sound' symbolises natural and universal. Additionally, many of the vocal sounds produced in healing voice workshops are nonverbal, e.g. primal sounds, vocables and vowel sounds. The latter are considered the universal basic unit of communication. This emphasis downplays culture, a potential marker of difference, and alludes to the past, the primitive and more expressiveness. Overtones, fundamental to all sound, symbolise the natural universal order. They also provide the timbre or individual colour in an instrument or voice, an homology perhaps of individual uniqueness. Many of the techniques are participation friendly – no musical skill is required or expected and quality of voice is not at issue. This has the effect of transcending any competition and division. Sarasini describes how the homophonic soundscape in Murid liturgical chanting suggests 'one voice' or equal participation (Sarasini 2000). The way in which sounds are treated as universal patrimony and are eclectically combined emphasises apparent equality and unity among peoples. The notion of aesthetics current in this field comes close to that described by Judith Becker with reference to Tantric philosophy in which 'what we call aesthetics or art appreciation, was about transformation and the achievement of enlightenment' (1997:16). Thus sounds are used and considered beautiful if pure, natural, open, resonant, full, consonant and pulsating. The achievement of these sounds is related to intent and lovingness as opposed to virtuosity and training. Normal Western aesthetical values and hierarchical notions of talent and proficiency are transcended and inverted.

Western voice healing, occurring in highly industrialised and differentiated modern societies where a strong need for healing or wholeness is evident, seeks this by 'revitalising' or drawing on Western or oriental 'mystical' or 'ancient' traditions – Buddhism, Native American, Hinduism, shamanism, kabbulism, Sufism. Sounds from these cultures are used to symbolise a less corrupted, natural, spiritual and wholesome order than that in the West. Fernandez argues that the concept of wholeness is a difficult one for modern man to grasp, as we are individuals with multiple identities and the concept 'stands in contrast to the affliction of our endless profanity' (1986:160). [15]

[15] As anthropology has shown, we are a species preoccupied with restricted codes of solidarity in interaction and modern man is more prepared to see the possibility of this wholeness in other times and cultures. Wholeness, we find it easier to believe, is something pertaining to pre-industrial societies where feelings of consanguinity and possibilities of mystical participation exist (Fernandez 1986).

Indeed Lagenberg argues that ethnic sound producers in music therapy challenge patients to behave more spontaneously (1997).

The use of tribal, oriental and other non-Western sounds thus feeds upon long-standing Western notions of the Other. As Taylor argues discourses of world music as novel, authentic, emotional, spiritual and primal also thrive on these notions (1997). Although the voice healing world promotes mutual respect among cultures it could be accused of perpetuating occidentalist interpretations of the Other - these arguments are abundant in ethnomusicological literature (Hutnyk 1997, Taylor 1997 et al). On the other hand this reverence for non-Western sounds, and the accrediting of 'primitive' man with untold wisdom may even be a way of symbolically compensating for the undeniably inequitable relations which exist between 'the West and the rest'.

In conclusion, therefore, voice healing is a forum where the use of vocal sound allows the experience of an alternative identity, based on individuality and common humanity. The potency of vocal sound itself, combined with the associated symbols used in this context, provide an experiential setting where a sense of wholeness as a human being can be achieved. The current growth of the holistic health industry and the popularity of New Age philosophies in the West may well signify, as Fernandez (1986) and Heelas (1986) suggest, a crisis of identity among certain sectors of Western society, and the need for 'revitalisation'. While the naturalistic and arguably orientalist notions current in this field may be unacceptable to many in the social sciences, and the emphasis on spirituality and apparently elitist character alienating to many sectors of society, this movement is commendable as one of the few ways in which the potency of musical sound is actively promoted and developed as a positive and unifying tool for human transformation.

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