

**CHOREOGRAPHING THE NON-EPHEMERAL: AN INVESTIGATION OF
CYCLICAL TEMPORALITY USING MINIMALIST DANCE**

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Abstract

This thesis is a philosophical and performative investigation of the embodied practice of cyclical temporality used in Indian classical music and dance, called *taala*, including an argument against the ontological specificity of dance as ephemerality. Extending on cyclical phenomena in Indian thought, the temporal structure in Indian classical music and dance is both linear and cyclical, constructing a unique perception of time as a living entity. Through minimalist movement composition, choreographic exploration and the development of a dance work called *Art of Time*, I worked to support the arguments of *taala* and its entity-driven definition of time. By challenging the interpretation of time flowing linearly in my choreography, my discussion aims to transcend normative framings of time, body, and presence as seen in Western scholarship and dance writing, specifically liberating dance from its diagnosed ephemerality.

Keywords: *Taala*, time as an entity, cyclical temporality, non-ephemeral performance, minimalism and *taala*

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mom, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, and finally, my great-grandmother's mother, who survived involuntary migration from India to Singapore, and whose strength continues to inspire me.

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Introduction

“I go forth alone, I stand as ten thousand.” This phrase from Maya Angelou’s poem *Our Grandmothers* holds me in remembrance of my ten thousand ancestors; I stand today carrying the complex histories of my previous generations in my own body, everyday confronting both my heritage and lost heritage through generations of colonization. As a brown-skinned, Singapore-born Tamil woman living in Canada, I look to my continual indigenous practices about embodied learning, research, and artful practice to undo transgressions regarding the knowledge of the body. What knowledge systems in my body have I suppressed all these years? What information can I gain from the embodied arts? What role does embodiment and embodied arts play in the transformation of logics, techniques and institutions?

After my induction into postsecondary study of the natural sciences, I began to depart from my practice of bharatanatyam; however, there was something tangible about the practice of Indian classical dance that drew me back resoundingly. Now that I have submitted to its currents, I am trying to understand exactly what knowledge systems I carry in my body when I practice bharatanatyam. For this thesis work, I bring my attention to the complex rhythmic practices offered in Carnatic music and utilized in bharatanatyam which have captivated me both physically and mentally: I am drawn to my daily reinvention through activating various forms of memories, including muscular memory, affective memory, and cellular memory, through my participation in these rhythm systems. These rhythms, however, are more than familiar- I wonder if I am participating in a process that is more than mere indulgence and safety, and is, in fact, an old, epistemological process of embodied learning and interplay.

I have spent over two decades taking bharatanatyam dance and Carnatic music classes in Singapore, Canada, and India, attending concerts, interviewing senior gurus, immersing in the

culture of Tamilians, and internalizing the language of specialized rhythmic devices. During these years, not only did a transfer of embodied knowledge take place, but the seeds of perspectives were sown in this process which empowered the visibility of other hypotheses and embodied understandings about the flow of time. What piqued my interest was the idea of cyclical temporality and the conceptualization of time as an entity-like structure which can be captured by the embodiment of cyclical time-keeping tools. According to Carnatic music tradition, in addition to time flowing linearly, it also has form that is available for capture through physical embodiment. If we think of time as a flowing river, for example, there can be a purposeful and technique-driven capture from the flowing stream: imagine a bucket capturing this water from a stream and binding the water into a cycle. In this analogy, the bucket is an embodied rhythmical device called *taala*.

I specifically enjoy the ambiguity in the interpretations of time used in the context of Carnatic music: “Time is not only a measure; it is a living entity that defines and redefines our sense of ourselves as individuals and as a people. It is thereby both an author of change and its witness” (Krishna 60). In Indian thought, time is categorically a concern for ethnomusicologists: I lean on Lewis Rowell’s book *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* in my thesis to describe the details and origins of the specialized embodied tools and devices used to support processes of art-driven interaction and interplay with time.

Thus, in my research, I aim to understand the philosophical arguments of *taala* and test my understanding through a practical exercise involving “repurposing” *taala* to minimalist dance choreography. Through academic and choreographic research, I hope to support the arguments of the entity-driven definition of time, which both disrupts and nuances the Eurocentric and dominantly held view that time flows linearly only. I use *taala* to unfold various questions

regarding embodied knowledge, time and presence: How is the embodied capture of time imagined by Indian classical performance artists? How does *taala* problematize the much re-iterated view that dance is ephemeral? More practically, how can I use minimalism in dance to demonstrate the arguments of *taala*?

Choreography is a discipline, a technology of the body, a process of archive, and a form of physical poetry to communicate what can not be explained by words. It addresses the politics of the body and the politics of daily sensory experience. All dancers have an indelible connection to the sense of time. Borrowing from Carnatic music, however, I'd like to build a case for the cyclical representation of time, hoping to demonstrate how there are ingrained inequalities in how we sense the world, which perhaps is due in part to the neglect of cultural artistic practices that value embodied knowledge and processes (e.g. Flamenco, etc.). By examining the work of Rainer and de Keersmaeker, who explored a discourse of experimental dance practices asserting the finite materiality of embodied experience, and Caspão, who interrogated dance's relationship to temporality, this research is meant to expose inequalities in the way that we talk about Dance (with a capital "D") and break down old social and political hierarchies in relation to perception, aesthetic experience, and presence.

A much re-iterated view on dance is that its performance is ephemeral, which I argue to be false. "Dance is ephemeral" is an assertion that assumes that movement makes formal disappearances "on the grounds of a measurable Euclidean space and within a perception of time as a flowing linear line" (Caspão 136). Noverre, Franko, and Phelan are among the influential dance writers that strongly assert the ontological specificity of dance and performance as ephemerality since the late eighteenth century. I note that in the present day, within Canada and globally, the assertion of "dance as ephemeral" is iterated as an accepted truth in writings about

Dance. I argue that this view reflects the values and preferences held by the dominant, Western culture, with specific ontological understandings about temporal and spatial relationships that support the notion that time flows linearly only. I do not contend the notion of dance's materiality as ephemeral, but rather I think that the perception of dance as ephemeral is lacking a dimension that makes room for other temporal understandings, like the cyclical patterning of time.

Our everyday perceptions are limited by our beliefs about how the world works. Hence, I aim to communicate what I believe are unique perspectives about time and time-keeping in music and dance aesthetics through scholarship and my personal experience learning Carnatic music and bharatanatyam. This paper will discuss the philosophies and aesthetic investigations of presence, body and time as seen in Western scholarship since the eighteenth century. Moreover, ethnomusicological research on Indian thought, illustrate the connection between aesthetic practices in Indian classical music and dance and the understanding of cosmic processes and disrupt the ontological definition of dance as “disappearance.” Drawing from my experiential knowledge of the Carnatic music system, I pursue, through my choreographic work called *Art of Time*, an intentional and embodied capture of time in the form of a rhythmic device called *taala*. I propose that this capture will reject the labelling of all dance and dance choreography as ephemerality, as well as shift perspectives about the experience and conceptualization of time in performance.

CHAPTER 1 | Body, Presence and Time

In this chapter, I chart a trajectory of developing thoughts regarding philosophical and performative investigations about embodiment, presence and time as specifically seen in Western

scholarship. Starting with a discussion on the choreographical work of Yvonne Rainer and Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker in the 1960s and 1980s who were among the first few choreographers to question normative social and political concerns of the body in North America and Europe, I contextualize this discourse with the recent writings of Paula Caspão and André Lepecki who are Western dance scholars who questioned present-day understandings of the corporeality of experience and the problematic, yet singular, perception of what constitutes the presence of dance. I use their arguments to develop my assessment of how choreography and choreographic process can be used to renew the current cultural theories about body and presence.

The late twentieth century was a time where many choreographers shared the common goal of using performance practices to transform bodies into sites of resistance against traditional perceptions of performance. This trend starts with Rainer in the 1960s in New York and continues with de Keersmaecker in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, theoretical ideas about the body and genealogy were emerging in the written work of Michel Foucault in 1977 and other poststructuralist theorists, which Ramsay Burt notes, were provoking readers around the world (Burt 29). Coincidence or not, questioning traditional ideas about body, history, and presence were things that entered the consciousness of leading philosophical and creative thinkers at the time. Rainer's *Trio A* in 1966 and de Keersmaecker's *Rosas danst Rosas* in 1983 are among the main contributors to the canon formation of postmodern dance in the late twentieth century.

Trio A premiered as a work-in-progress and was initially the first section of a larger work involving other artists called *The Mind is a Muscle*. Choreographed without music, *Trio A* was a solo work which depicted a flow of everyday, pedestrian movements like toe tapping, walking, and kneeling. Similarly, De Keersmaker's work consistently mark a visible "stripping down" to

essential principles that specifically address spatial constraints of geometric pattern, bodily parameters of movement generation, simplicity of movement, and close adherence to a score (musical or otherwise) for choreographic writing (“Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker,” par. 4). In *Rosas danst Rosas*, abstract movements constitute the basis of a layered choreographic structure in which repetition plays the lead role. The fierceness of these movements is countered by small everyday gestures.

Trio A, in the words of Julia Bryan-Wilson from her article “Practicing Trio A”, was a “polemical, assiduous rejection of some of modernist dance’s primary tendencies” (64). Rainer later put her assertions against these tendencies in writing in 1965 which she called “NO Manifesto”:

NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and
make-believe no to the glamour and transcendence of the star image no to the
heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to the involvement of performer
or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator no to the
wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved. (3)

This impassioned writing was inspired as a response to the anti-war movement at the time, and is an example of how Rainer argued against traditional ways of perceiving the body during performance. She described that she was against the “impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism” and that she loved the body “its actual weight, mass, and unenhanced physicality” (Rainer 2). At the end of the program, she described her “state of mind that reacts with horror and disbelief upon seeing a Vietnamese shot dead on TV—not at the sight of death, however, but at the fact that the TV can be shut off afterwards as after a bad Western. *My body remains the enduring reality*” (Rainer 2).

The body's "enduring reality" in the choreographic was the major theme in *Trio A*. In order to target this concept, Rainer utilized a radical approach towards "phrasing" in dance performance which did not show a variation in energy distribution normally seen in traditional phrasing. Without energetic differences between and within each movement phrase, only the performer's body is brought to awareness. Rainer viewed the body more as the source of an infinite variety of movements than as the purveyor of emotion or drama. Rainer tried to create an opportunity for dancers to be themselves and let only their bodies be the enduring reality.

Both Rainer and Foucault were interested in the corporeality of experience and claimed that the physicality of the body can be a site of resistance to normative ideologies. Foucault made clear in his writings that body itself should be included in historical narrative:

the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally impregnated by history and the process of history's destruction of the body. (83)

What's interesting is that Rainer, too, problematizes a culture of erasing the body, as she attempts to re-empower the body by claiming that her body could not be forgotten or turned off, and thus remained as the enduring reality. Arguably, Rainer used dance choreography to allow new kinds of presences to be acceptable.

Foucault's writings on the relationships between truth, power, politics and the body are also of interest to my research. As Giorgio Agamben aptly explains:

One of the most persistent features of Foucault's work is its decisive abandonment of the traditional approach to the problem of power, which is based on juridico-institutional

models (the definition of sovereignty, the theory of the State), in favour of an unprejudiced analysis of the concrete ways in which power penetrates subjects' very bodies and forms of life. (5)

The State, meaning the nation as an organized political community, is a structure that is built on top of a series of power structures in a network, that as Foucault describes, “invest[s] the whole body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth” (Foucault 122). This diagrams a relationship between politics, power and the body. The school, for example, is a structure that is built below the State, and is thus fastened to the State's power dynamics.

Aristotle argues that politics is the master science, “for it is the one that prescribes which of the sciences ought to be studied in cities, and which ones each class in the city should learn, and how far” (Aristotle 1094a-1094b). The main point is that power dictates what can be studied, how much can be known, and what cannot be known. Power, in a sense, dictates what is true and what is knowable.

If politics is the master science, the resulting danger is the slow erasure of other sciences born from cultural ideologies not belonging to the dominant culture. One such example is the way that time and presence is understood in performance today: there exists a conditioned view that dance or performance is ephemeral, that it can be ontologically defined by presence of a moving body and its disappearance. I argue, however, that this assumption draws a vulnerable dividing line between “Dance” as defined by this supposed ontological definition and the processes and cultural ideologies that inform the Indian classical performing arts as I understand it.

The notion of dance as absence and presence, according to Lepecki, was diagnosed in the late eighteenth century after Jean-Georges Noverre's writings called “Letters on Dancing and

Ballets” (Lepecki 125). He asks: “Why are the names of *maîtres de ballets* unknown to us? It is because works of this kind endure only for a moment and are forgotten as soon as the impressions they had produced” (Noverre 10). Lepecki notes that Noverre’s perception of the materiality of dance as ephemeral, echoes the voice of previous Western dancers, like Thoinot Arbeau, in the late sixteenth century, who asserted that dance’s unfortunate ephemerality can be overcome by writing (Derrida I). Noverre’s lament about dance’s supposed flawed materiality is central to modern dance theory. However, according to Jean-Noël Laurenti there is a problem with Noverre’s argument: “how can the presence of the object be regained through that which decomposes it? (Laurenti 86).” There is a neglect of the dimension of time in Noverre’s perception of what constitutes the presence of dance.

Lepecki argued, in his essay “Inscribing Dance,” that Jacques Derrida’s radical reevaluation of the problem of materiality and of presence within Western metaphysics in the late 1970s lead to the rethinking of the relationship between dance and writing seen today. Derrida is the first to note that the trend in Western metaphysics is photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light (27). This focus on light, however, further affirms my assertion that the dimension of time is perpetually neglected from discussions about presence and the body. Western philosophy is concerned with what visible, and if it cannot be seen, it should be written down. Writing, of course, must disappear in order to reappear: each character is produced by a series of subsidiary motions that themselves cannot accede to meaning. As noted by Mark Franko, concepts of dance’s appearance and disappearance trace back to the Renaissance court and geometric dance:

The choreography of geometrical dance employs stable positioning, patterned movement, and patternless flux. It is pattern that alters the perception of the performance space,

transforming it into a flat or two-dimensional environment. In contrast, the movement out of pattern allows the space to reassert its depth and volume. The dissolves, or *melanges geometriques*, as Beaujoyeux named them, most likely occasioned the resumption of a three-dimensional space out of what had appeared to be a two-dimensional surface plane. (Franko 25)

According to Franko, when a body disappears, the space asserts and reasserts itself, which based on this argument means that the experience of dance does not exist when there is no change to the assertion of space. In 1993, the assertions for ephemerality as dance continues with Peggy Phelan in New York: "Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive" (148). She asserted that "without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility-in a maniacally charged present-and disappears into memory, in the realm of invisibility where it eludes regulation and control" (148).

In summary, dance is seen as absence and presence and Lepecki argues that it was Noverre's "mournful energy" that initially delimited dance theory's epistemic field and thus fueled the present-day fascination in how dance scholarship sides with photology: meaning most dance scholars envision "dance writing as an endless effort to counter dance's self-erasure" (Lepecki 130). There now exists an accepted notion that dance, regardless of form or cultural origin, is an activity that should be documented or else it will be forgotten. "Dance is ephemeral" is an assertion that I have come across as a reader and audience member in Toronto, Canada, where the word "dance" is asserted with a capital "D," meaning this assertion is regarding all forms of dance, which incorrectly includes dance forms, such as the Indian classical dance forms, that do not necessarily perceive dance as "disappearance".

Paula Caspão, through her writings in 2007, was among the first scholars to contest the reiterated view that dance choreography can best be defined as the perception of “vanishing present bodies” or the ephemeral (136) after Derrida’s *trace*. She notes that this view is problematic because of the assumptions that it makes time flow linearly and that it takes place in measurable Euclidean space (136). She believes that these assumptions also bleed into our everyday lives and thus calls for a reframing of ongoing temporal and spatial perceptions (137). Caspão builds on the research and assertions of Jacques Rancière, one of the most influential present-day philosophers popularly known for his arguments that illuminate intersections between aesthetics, politics and education. Caspão contextualizes Rancière’s research into her arguments about how dance and performance should not be labelled as ephemeral with ontological specificity: Caspão questions the assumptions that there is flowing linear time and a measurable Euclidean space, and how these two dominating conditions inform aesthetic perception, and examines further how aesthetic perception may inform nonaesthetic experience (137). Caspão argues that this connection between aesthetic perception and nonaesthetic experience acquires a political dimension worth discussing: “we should ask to what extent that common-sense notion of perception limits both our conception of sensory experience and our modes of sensing, perceiving, moving, and thinking” (137).

“If we want to analyze the complexity of our perception, we will need to take all fractal, non-Euclidean, and nonlinear dimensions into account,” says Caspão (145). To illustrate an example of this, I borrow an example shared by Rancière during his lecture at the Astrup Fearnley Museum in 2016. Referring to the photo in Figure 1, Rancière explains that the composition “expresses a new life.” He says, “It expresses its dissent character in relation to the old world. It finds a new common space which has two main characteristics: first it is a non-

hierarchical space... with the very opposition of high and low has been subverted.... The second aspect: the oblique and helical lines frame a space that has become time” (“Lecture by Jacques Rancière: ‘Art and politics: Dissensus and its metamorphoses’” 17:35-18:10). This photo is an example of how art can be used to reconfigure the limits of our perceptions by challenging our perception of space and time.



Figure 1. Rancière’s example of dissent character. Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3CKIZgwf3k>

Caspão proposes that new insights on time, space, and perception are required to remedy the problematic view of dance as “disappearance.” Specifically, she offers the suggestion of relationality, a term that means “already in the world and registering materially in our bodies,

even before we become consciously aware of it” (140). In the definition of time imagined by Indian classical music and dance practitioners, as specifically written about by TM Krishna in his book *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story* (60), time is understood as an entity-like structure, which can be registered materially in our bodies through embodied, time-keeping devices. Thus, I feel that Caspão’s interpretation of relationality supports my entry into choreographic inquiry about cyclical temporality. In addition, Caspão prescribes the idea of stillness in performance: “Try again: convey all possible and impossible heterogeneous ontologies, logics, geometries, choreographies, kinetics, and aesthetics you can imagine; use them all to rethink human and nonhuman changing co-presences, interconnected sensations, and merging writings, even before you get to dance and performance” (155). Through relationality and stillness, she calls for a reframing of ongoing temporal and spatial perceptions, along with a reframing of perceptions of perceptions itself: “Let ambiguity play, and interplay (with) it” (154).

CHAPTER 2 | The Idea of Time in Indian Thought

Time has existed as both a horological and philosophical question in most civilizations, with varying interpretations of its technical format and significance. Given that my work examines *taala*, I will first give context to the cultural environments, ideologies, and values that support the philosophical arguments of *taala*. Leaning on ethnomusicological research, I will discuss the development of ideas around time in Early India, a period which includes historical eras identified as "ancient" and "medieval" in the entire subcontinent of South Asia. In Indian thought, there is an emphasis on processes and transformations rather than focusing on permanent certainties (Rowell 25). Understanding the rationale for why and how embodied traditions, such as *taala*, took form is an important step in giving due acknowledgement to the

cultural knowledge and ideologies that my research draws from, giving it a proper place within current, post-colonial knowledge systems. I purposefully avoid divesting Indian thought from mythological and theological associations because myth and epic are used as storytelling tools to diagram the philosophical, aesthetic, and technical concerns of various sciences. Art and metaphor are used in Indian thought to transcend ideas that cannot be expressed through the hard sciences.

I examine the deity recognized for music, dance, and theatre that symbolizes the materialization of ideas around time in Early India. The deity, Shiva, is known as the divine cosmic dancer and is represented through popular iconography called Nataraja, which appeared in sculpture as early as the fifth century ("Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)" par 1). Figure 2 shows a copper sculpture of Nataraja from the Chola period (880–1279), which is currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Nataraja is suspended in a pose that is a metaphor for balance: his one right hand gestures "fear not, for here I am," the left hand holds a flame, which represents destructive energy, the other right hand holds a drum which symbolizes the first sound or the first vibration (i.e. the concept of creation), the other left hand points to the uplifted foot which symbolizes release from the bondage of ignorance, the right foot stands on a dwarf demon that represents ignorance, and his matted hair represents the Ganges river which flows horizontally signifying that he is not static but whirling and the energy is bursting out. According to Ramli Ibrahim, "Shiva is the controller of time; thus, he dances his cosmic dance on the axis of the universe, creating and re-creating the various rotations of the planets, the cycle of seasons, birth, death, rebirth, such that no one moment is the same" ("The Metaphor of Balance" 2:05-4:12). This pose embodies a series of contradictions and "reconciling the oppositions" between perpetual motion and eternal stasis, creation and destruction, and reality

and illusion (Rowell 3). Rowell explains that in this pose, Shiva is being arrested at a point of perfect equilibrium as he is surrounded by symbols of universal continuity: fire, water, space and time (3). The image of Shiva as both creator and destroyer embodies the Hindu concept of time as an endless cycle, which, as explained in the description provided by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, contrasts with the Western sense of time as a linear sequence of events ("Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)" 0:50-1:15).



Figure 2. Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja). Source:

www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39328

The frame around the Nataraja represents cyclical phenomena, which is an important theme in Indian thought. The idea of cyclicity is also demonstrated in concepts such as karma, reincarnation, and *taala*.

The interesting thing about traditional mythic thought is that it poetically transcends ideas about the universe and the self through forms of art, like poetry, sculpture, music and dance. Its fascination with cosmic order, balance, and equilibrium are examples of how Indian thought is more concerned with processes and transformations, thus blurring the lines between ontology and epistemology in Indian thought. If we tried to dissect the meanings of time purported by Indian philosophies, we would see many inconsistencies. For example, they differ on whether time is real or empirical, whether it could be perceived or only inferred, and whether it is one or many atomistic (Rowell 187). Rowell notes that Buddhist, Jain, and Yoga philosophies also contribute to the construction of the meaning of time (187). He explains, "Concept of time as a succession of discrete instants—merging, in a celebrated Buddhist image, in the apparent circle of flame produced by a whirling torch, or in the illusion of a stream of water, both of these images have become popular analogies for the continuity heard in music" (187). Rowell's research into temporary imagery in ancient Indian literature points to time as a circular concept as well (184). However, I find his findings incongruent with my practical knowledge of Indian art. I have always held the view that time is undefined; its path or movement has no identified shape; however, the rhythmic tools in Indian classical arts serve to create a boundary or limitation over whatever time is. Rowell explains that in later Indian thought, "the idea of a cycle took on a double meaning; it became a symbol not only of continuity but also of limitation" (184). There may be contradictions in the conceptualizations of time in ancient Indian literature and iconography, however.

In Indian classical music, the temporal structure is signalled both visibly and audibly at all times through a choreographed gestural language with symbolic and ritual connotations (Rowell 181). Hand gestures are the embodied practice of keeping time in Indian classical music. Rowell explains that "the musical experience, as traditionally conceived, appears to demonstrate a confluence of two simultaneous streams of time—a physical, divisible, external time and an internal stream of continuous time, devoid of distinctions" (181). It appears that time is a form, but yet is formless too. Rowell further explains that "the words chosen or coined to represent the various temporal concepts contain etymological clues suggesting that temporality in music is understood as a manifestation of the cosmic process of continuous creation" (181). Control, limitation, and equilibrium are among the keywords for the organization of time in music, as if to suggest that the power of time must be continually held in check lest it run away with us (Rowell 181).

CHAPTER 3 | Taala

In Carnatic music, *taala* can be understood generally as a metre or rhythmic pulsation, although the *taala* procedure has no precise counterpart in Western music. A *taala* is linear in that it allows the melody or rhythmic phrase to move forward, "yet it is also cyclical in order to hold together the whole linear melodic movement within one repeated rhythmic matrix" (Krishna 63). It is a metric cycle with a specific number of beats, ranging from 3 to 128, that recur in the same pattern throughout a musical or dance performance. My research is founded on the two conditions of *taala* that make its process unique in the world of music: 1) the selected metre must be physically manifested into a composite unit of hand gestures and 2) the composite unit of

hand gestures is repeated cyclically. The ideas of cyclical or linear, according to TM Krishna, "are not literal, but abstract, referring to the sense of movement that the music generates" (63).

The *taala* is a crucial ingredient in any musical and rhythmical performance in Carnatic music and bharatanatyam. Through my personal encounters with *taala* in music and dance class, the acceptable vernacular was "keep *taala*" and "follow the *taala*." The phrase "keep *taala*" means to physically keep the *taala*, which refers to the physical practice of hand gestures and movements that involve striking the hand to make a sound. For example, for a *taala* called Adi Taala, an eight-count cycle, eight gestures create one composite pattern of movement. Adi Taala's pattern can be diagramed as the following, where each letter corresponds to one type of gesture:

A B C D A E A E

This composite pattern repeats itself in precisely the same way right through the composition. I will not further explain what these gestures are since my research is not concerned with the specificity of hand gestures in the various *taalas*. What is important here is the embodiment of an overt pattern and its cyclical repetition.

I took vocal Carnatic music lessons for eleven years during my childhood, and in music class, if I were not keeping *taala*, my music teacher would ask me, "Where has your *taala* gone?" We were made to always keep *taala* when singing, regardless of whether in practice or performance. It seemed essential to provide visual and audible evidence of the *taala* and the purpose of this is tied to the overarching intent of Indian classical music and dance forms: reaching the "sum." Reaching the sum refers to the process of exploring mathematical possibilities within a defined *taala* so that the total number of beats fits congruently within the *taala* cycles. For example, if the *taala* is Adi Taala, the eight-count cycle, we could fit two fours

within one *taala* cycle, and four fours within two *taala* cycles, and so on. What we cannot do, is fit three fours within the Adi Taala cycle or five fours within the Adi Taala cycle, etc. When the total number of counts can be evenly divisible by the *taala*, the last count on the last *taala* cycle is called the sum, and finding the sum is the *process* of reaching this perfect number count. From this we can see that the *taala* procedure is not merely about keeping track of the metre, but to assist in embodied calculations about rhythm structures.

The values 4, 3, 7, 5, 9 (chaturasha, tisra, mishra, khanda, sankeerna respectively) are essential to all the different *taala* structures and the *laya* (speed). I have stated the values in the order of 4, 3, 7, 5, 9 and not 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, because this is the order in which we are introduced to these numeric patterns. It is traditionally accepted that four and three are fundamental rhythmic values from which every other value emerges.

The concept of *taala* was first introduced in a chapter of the Bharata Natyashastra, a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts created between 200 BC and 600 AD (Das 134). Its author was Bharata Muni, an ancient sage, teatrologist and musicologist. In this treatise, the word *taala* is derived from the Sanskrit words describing the palm of the hand and "primarily refers to the beating of time and clapping of hands... but generally, it is used in the sense of time-measure" (Bharata-muni 54). Abhinavagupta, a philosopher who wrote a commentary on the Bharata Natyashastra in the 10th century, endorsed the traditional Indian view of time as comic power. He did not think that aesthetics and philosophy were mutually exclusive. Abhinavagupta described *taala* as the "equilibrium of all worldly activity by means of divisions (*kalaa*), time (*kaala*), and rest (*laya*)" (Rowell 189). In summary, he conceptualized three temporal elements: *kalaa*, "the division of musical time into individual units", *kaala*, "the ongoing stream of time itself," and *laya* "the interstices between successive units" (Rowell 189).

This explanation by Abhinavagupta is given in reference to the Nataraja iconography described previously. Abhinavagupta's interpretation, according to Rowell has likened the temporal processes in music to the three phases of the cyclical evolution of the cosmos: the differentiation of primal matter and its division into perceptible forms; orderly movement in structured time; and finally, the dissolution of all created forms back into their original state of undifferentiated matter, after this cycle begins once again (Rowell 189). The equation reads: equilibrium (rhythmic or cosmic) = division + time + rest (189). All three actions, division, time and rest, are manifested by physical actions (the hand motions of *taala*) or symbolically, Shiva's cosmic dance.

I asked my Nattuvangam (South Indian rhythm) teacher in Singapore, Gayatri S., whom I address as Gayatri Akka, to share her personal interpretation of the meaning of *taala*. She paused to figure out how to translate her response from Tamil to English and said finally, "*Taala* is like a boundary... a boundary around time." She hesitated to expand further on this, fearing that she might accidentally define the *taala* too strictly. When I pressed her for more information, she shared a metaphor to help me see the relationship: "*Taala* is King, and we are its slaves." During our lessons, I continued to clarify the meanings and interpretations of all the terms used to define *taala*. There is a term called *akshara*, which refers to a syllable-like unit used in rhythm notation. As a rule of thumb, each *akshara* has exactly four *matras*, which are subunits of the interval between two *aksharas*. In an attempt to understand the term *akshara*, I asked Gayatri Akka if *akshara* is synonymous with the English word "beat," to which she said, "No." From this, I understood that *akshara* was also a metaphysical concept. The intervals between *aksharas*, according to TM Krishna, "is not to be perceived as a blank between two forms, but a form in itself" (57). Rowell, in his research, asserted that *akshara* means "syllable" as well as

"imperishable" (36), which itself is an assertion that sound is an imperishable concept.

According to his translation of old Indian literature (the Upanishads) on the subject of sound, *akshara* is woven and warped by a multidimensional tapestry holding the past, present and future (Rowell 48). These metaphysical discussions on *akshara*, materiality and time, leads me to think that maybe rhythmic devices like *akshara* (loosely translated as syllable) need to be felt to be fully understood.

As my fascination with *taala* grew, I asked more Nattuvangam teachers what they thought *taala* was. One of my teachers, Manohar Balatchandirane, explained *taala* through the metaphor of water. He said if time was a stream of water, *laya* is how fast or slow the water is flowing, and *taala* is the concept of taking a bucket, capturing the water from the stream, and binding it within a cycle. The image of water appeared in the popular Nataraja iconography as well, where Shiva is depicted as the controller of time. I cannot place my memory on the first time I came across the idea of time as an entity and its capture could be pursued by the embodiment of *taala*, but these ideas were reinforced when I came across TM Krishna's writing about *taala*. He said, "In Carnatic music, time is not only a measure, but a living entity that defines and redefines our sense of ourselves as individuals and as a people" (60). If we can accept that Indian classical music and dance practitioners believe that time behaves like an entity, and they believe that they can participate in the capture of this entity through embodiment, then we see that the practice of *taala* does not support the idea that dance is ephemeral, since the practice of capture and ephemerality are opposite processes. This argument forms the basis of my choreographic research dancers of the York Dance Ensemble.

In summary, my choreographic investigation addresses whether time can be presented as an entity-like structure and whether dancers can participate in the capture of this structure. Given

the anthropocentric orientation of *taala*, can a *taala* elicit a feeling? For example, can we feel the sense of numbers and counts? Does a four feel different from a five or seven? The cultural ideology of Indian thought is obviously not confined to the domain of physics. Following the tradition of epistemology in Indian thought, *taala* is a process of searching for the sum, notably with a very modest expectation of the outcome of the search: to feel the ever-so-captivating feeling of numbers and rhythmic pattern and to revel only in the search.

CHAPTER 4 | Primary Patternings in De Keersmaeker's *Rosas danst Rosas*

This chapter will analyze the primary movements and patternings in *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983) in the context of my choreographic research. A primary goal that I have set for myself is to be able to translate a repeating rhythmic score into movement, without losing the energetic qualities of the music during its translation. In my view, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker successfully accomplishes this in her choreography of *Rosas danst Rosas*, a performance that continues to offer a timeless and valuable experience for a wide range of audiences through its rigorous and prolific exploration of a relationship between dance and music. Hence, as a process of learning and movement research, I will examine this work in detail. In order to learn from de Keersmaeker's choreographic process in this piece, according to my professor, Darcey Callison, I need to dissect and delineate its choreographed movements. Therefore, I will attempt to notate and describe the movements in *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983) by accessing the theoretical and experimental system devised by Laban for movement observation, description, and interpretation of human movement. Inspired by Laban's concepts of Effort and Shape, which are qualitative measures of flow, energy, and texture, I have analyzed the flow in this choreography and its

pairing with the quantitative punctuation of the music to describe how *Rosas danst Rosas* creates emotional tension, feminine perseverance and exhaustion.

I selected a sample of the choreography to conduct my primary analysis on. I specifically looked at a twenty-second clip between 14:30 to 14:50 of the thirty-one-minute piece [link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLLZExpGBOY>] and I motif-ed the dancer in the second row. During this segment, I was able to discern six different phrases, or perceivable units of movement, that each communicate one meaningful idea. Since *Rosas danst Rosas* is a highly documented choreography, I used other videos of the performance to support my motif-ing of the segment [links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssQsVnECVqU>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2LyQono6rk>]. I also slowed the speed of the videos during my analysis to observe the movements with clarity.

My motif of the segment evolved over several weeks. I started with jotting down first impressions, yet I was faced with challenges in writing about qualities related to perseverance and intensity. After researching and learning about the choreographer's exact intentions and motivations for the piece, I refined my approach to writing the motif. De Keersmaeker explained in an interview that *Rosas danst Rosas* had seven components that make the piece what it is ("Rosas danst Rosas - The vocabulary in the second movement (NL sub)"):

1. *La tête*
2. *Les poses éventail*
3. *Chipotage*
4. *Phrase simple*
5. *Éventail*
6. *Retrograde les poses éventail*

7. STOP

La tête refers to the nodding that the dancers do to acknowledge each other in the beginning of the process, which was inspired by how musicians do this in preparation to their ensemble performance. *Les poses éventail* are everyday poses that De Keersmaecker incorporates: “like images, the movement is taken cell by cell, stopped, and interfered with very simple sitting poses, which have a certain simplicity and sort of have a quite daily but emotional taste.”

Chipotage, a French word meaning quibbling, refers to a “very long counter punctual structure” and choreographed variations between repetitive movement phrases. If we can denote A, B, C, D, E for five different movement phrases utilizing the “*poses éventail*,” then she creates her “*chipotage*” using the following structure:

Person 1: A A A B A A C A A

Person 2: A A A A A A C A A

Person 3: A A A A A E A A D

Person 4: A A A A A A A A D

In this way, it seems like the performers are “quibbling” with each other through movement.

Phrase simple is simply the aspect of the running through a movement phrase, akin to speaking a sentence. In the example given above, phrase simple are A, B, C, D, and E. To me, the dancers were embodying the build-up of a persistent argument (i.e. *chipotage*) through a delicately punctuated sentence, which I will explain in the body of this chapter. *Éventail* is again simple poses, but they are not everyday poses, but rather “simple cells.” *Retrograde les poses éventail* is the reverse of the *chipotage* pattern. STOP is “a big stop to give it air; everybody is waiting” during this time. This whole structure (1 through 7 as outlined above), is repeated several times with other patterns (“Rosas danst Rosas - The vocabulary in the second movement (NL sub)”).

In summary, I was inspired by De Keersmaecker's concept of everyday poses that had "emotional taste" and her structured approach to writing a score for her work. In Chapter 5, I explain how I adopted her method to producing a score for minimalist dance choreography, in the creation for my work, *Art of Time*.

There is a high dependence on numbers and patterning in *Rosas danst Rosas*, since the variations performed were logically planned out numerical patterns created by interpolation. It is also interesting to note that the piece was always performed by exactly four dancers. Lastly, the key piece in my research of *Rosas danst Rosas* was informed by the music score, which specifically used a time signature of 2-2 within 4 beats. In other words, the four beats in the music loops with an accent on the second beat: one TWO three four, one TWO three four, and so on. This information becomes important when we consider relationships between the music and the choreography, specifically when we consider how the accent of the "TWO" receives consistent visual punctuation throughout the piece.

Since I am also interested in how de Keersmaecker created her movement phrases, I will next examine her physical choreography in detail. In the first phrase, the right arm hits the stomach, the left arm bounces on the stomach, and next, a rapid third movement brings the right arm into the horizontal middle space. This free and indirect movement of the right arm, marked by the second beat, is suspended here and stillness follows. In the next loop, the movement flows from the right arm to the stomach, the body folds on the second beat, and stillness follows again. In the next loop, the body unfolds, the right arm touches the head on the second beat, and stillness follows yet again. This whole sequence repeats once in my chosen motif segment.

In the next phrase, the dancer's body shrinks on the first beat and sharply turns on the second beat. Stillness follows for the next several counts. The music score indicates a clock

ticking, bringing rise to pulsating tension. At this point, we can start to see a discernible relationship between stillness and the beat cycle. I noticed that the third and fourth beats almost always embody a stillness (see Fig. 3 for example). I argue that De Keersmaecker incorporates a cyclical pattern specifically highlighting the accent on the second beat in each loop and this is a primary pattern in the piece.

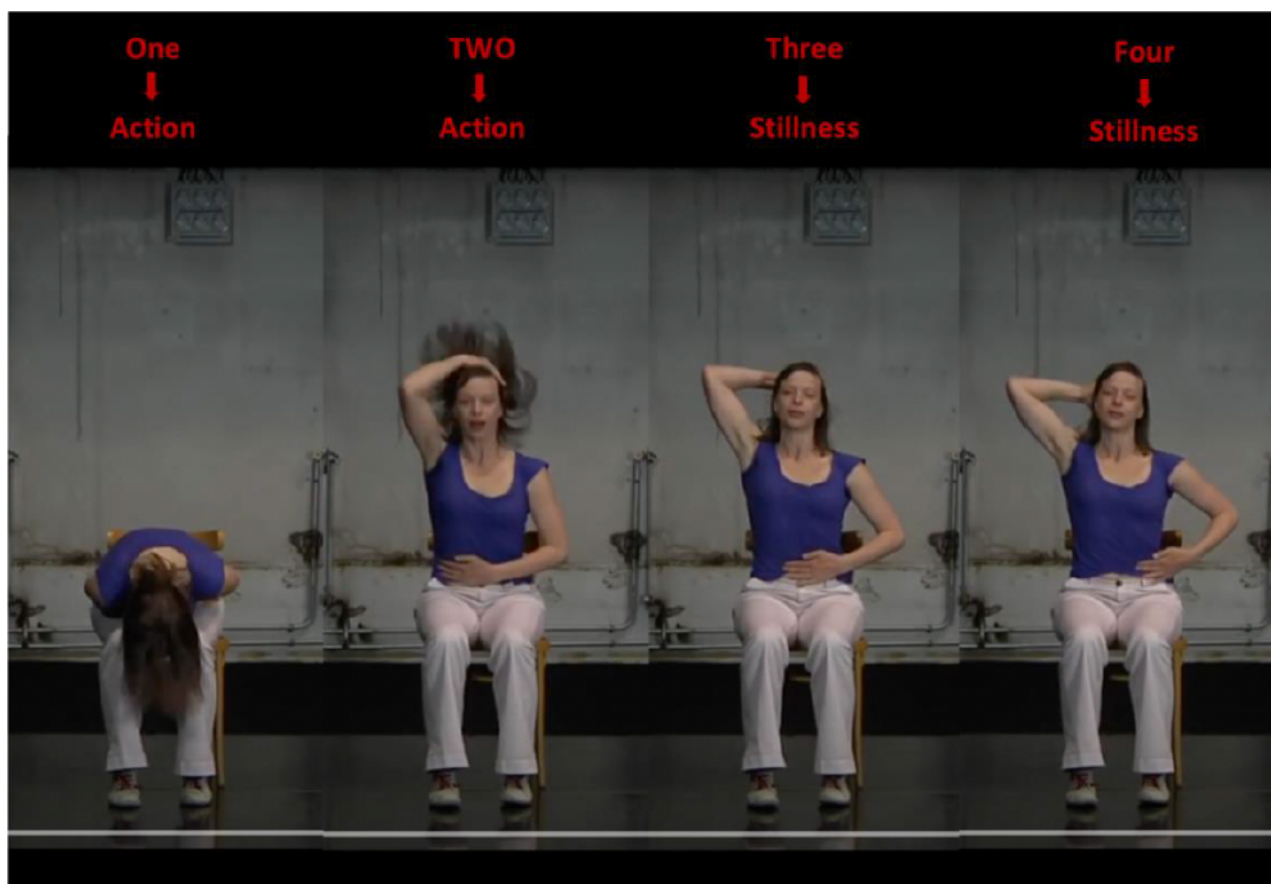


Figure 3. Example of the primary pattern in Rosas danst Rosas (1983). Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2LyQono6rk>.

During the third phrase, the tension held by the dancer's twisted form is released when she twists back to the sagittal forward position. According to my analysis from several video

sources, the right leg folds under the chair on the first beat. On the second beat, the right arm dabs across the body. Here, the dancer embodies a Dabbing effort quality because the arm directly moves from point A to point B, and it is quick and light. As anticipated, the second beat is followed by a short period of stillness over the next two counts. The variation continues over the next set of counts: the right arm hits the stomach on the first beat and the body folds on the second beat, but this time, there is no stillness after the second beat. The body unfolds on the third and fourth beats, signifying the endurance of the dancer and the disinhibition of flow.

I believe the next movements start a new phrase that is centered around the hair, the skull, and her hands. On the first beat, both hands contact the skull. The hands remain there while the body starts to grow on the second beat. Her body continues expanding into the third and fourth beats which I captured as stillness. Her hands then move over and around her head on the next first beat. Her right hand firmly clasps her right breast sharply on the second beat. There is stillness for two more counts. The body folds on the next beat and her right arm meets her right leg on the second beat. Instead of the usual stillness that follows the second beat, the body unfolds – again signifying endurance and tension against the music. Furthermore, we receive more glimpses of “*les poses éventail*,” which here are distinctly feminine poses that involve flipping hair, cupping the breast, etc.

The fifth phrase embodies a climax in my eyes. The body continues to persevere and argue, but it also increases in intensity through a series of disruptions of the primary pattern, which I previously asserted was central to the piece. The first disruption is the shortening of stillness to one count instead of two: the dancer’s hands contact the skull on one, the body expands on two, there is stillness on three, and the body folds on four. The next disruption is the

unusual stillness that occurs on a second beat: the body hits the pose on one and embodies stillness for two. This same disruption occurs one more time for the next loop.

What role do disruptions play? I think of disruptions as primary patterns that work to unsettle the viewer in that they assert information that challenges our ability to predict our environment. I think that as observers of *Rosas danst Rosas*, we become unconsciously aware of the primary pattern in the choreography, which strongly weaves congruent patterns in the music and is presented to us as an integrated texture. When this familiarity of the texture is disrupted, I think it works to draw more of our attention and cultivate a feeling of intensity.

The final phrase in the motif carries the energy of the climax and also reinstates the primary pattern in the choreography. The right arm slashes on one, there is a pose on two, and there is stillness on three and four. This structure repeats two more times, and the phrase culminates when the dancer stands up from the chair.

I observe the upper body to initiate majority of the movements in this choreography, including the movements of the right arm, head, hair, and eyes. The choreography heavily utilizes the Upper-Lower developmental pattern of body connectivity. The spacing in the piece occurs in the vertical plane as the body folds, unfolds and twists at the waist. The primary shape is the twisted still form since I found more emphasis on this body shape in the choreography. For example, the twisted form was sustained for a longer duration than the other shapes embodied.

What we see in this choreography are textures formed by punctuations in the movement flow and energy. Each time a movement was initiated, it was punctuated by the body's expansion while in static position. This is a moment where the dancer's lungs are being filled with air and expanding in all dimensions. We also hear the dancers forcefully expel the air when they are not embodying stillness. These pattern variations in the flow of air and energy are

specifically paired with patterns in the music. To me, this choreography successfully melds music and movement, and demonstrates how a texture can be weaved with both these components. The choreography mainly takes shape in the vertical and horizontal dimensions, which inform weight and space respectively.

De Keersmaecker belongs to a generation of makers and thinkers for whom practice and theory operates on a continuum; therefore, my understanding of her discourse about the creation of *Rosas danst Rosas* was key in my interpretation of the choreography. Through careful analysis of the choreography, I hoped to have gained valuable access in de Keersmaecker's approach towards idiosyncratic ways of moving that include the minimal, the abstract and the textural, and toward structuring the grammar of movement, such as movement punctuation, in units, cells, and phrases.

CHAPTER 5 | Choreography

Taala, as I have argued thus far, is a rhythmic tool that operates on the assumption that time is an entity, and the cyclical use of rhythmic, numerical configurations can be used in time's capture. This philosophy, combined with my interest in minimalist patterning, resulted in the development of a choreographic work called *Art of Time*. *Art of Time* was performed in February 2022 and made into a digital work (see link <https://vimeo.com/687186009> with password "mfa2022").

The development of *Art of Time* involved nine dancers from the York Dance Ensemble (YDE), a resident company of the Department of Dance at York University that is comprised of pre-professional dance students trained in modern, contemporary and ballet dance styles. I choreographed the first half of the work, and the second half was collaboratively choreographed

with YDE performers Sophia Abbas, Gabriela Brathwaite, Olivia Burling, Reece Caldwell, Rayn Cook-Thomas, Nicole Faithfull, Hannah Petrie, and Emily Williams. The ninth dancer dropped out during the middle of *Art of Time*'s development process due to reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My music composer, Kalaisan Kalaichelvan, is a Canadian, multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural artist professionally trained in classical piano and bharatanatyam. Thus, he entered my creative process with previous knowledge about *taala* systems and rhythmic patterning in the Indian classical music system. Kalaichelvan and I shared a common dream for the abstraction and contemporization of the fundamental components of bharatanatyam to catalyze an authentic approach to creation as both South Asian Canadians. Rather than pure bharatanatyam performance, pure ballet, or a “fusion” of both, we both idealized hybridity through what seemed like honest expressions for us. For this project, I wanted Kalaichelvan to create a music score that would help me recreate a sense of *taala* in a Western musical context, which could also support my pursuit of the various energetic qualities I was aiming for in my choreography, as I have seen in de Keersmaecker’s *Rosas danst Rosas*. The music composition was among the last few steps in my development process, as Kalaichelvan created the music after I provided him with videos of the choreographed phrasing, an explanation of the narrative arc and proposed score.

For *Art of Time*'s presentation, as seen through the link, Simran Kapoor served as the Light Designer, and Cara Johnson served as the Costume Designer. I explained to Kapoor that I desired to remove any markers of a traditional proscenium stage (e.g. to remove visibility of the black flooring) since I didn't want the work to have any location markers of where it was being performed. My goal was to stage a presentation that neither fits into the mold of performance,

nor mathematical experimentation. Despite the performative aspect of the work, I wanted to contextualize it as an in-between between scientific and artful endeavours. Therefore, through my instruction, the work was dimly lit by Kapoor, allowing for the dancers to shift in and out of the light. Johnson created costumes that supported my desire for a minimalistic colour palette on stage, as I only wanted to see the hues of black fabric and skin. Notably, she supported my ideas about flow: she incorporated skirts which were designed to possess varying degrees of flow and flare to play on the concept of flow in the choreographed movement.

The choreography of *Art of Time* can be divided into two parts: the first part is a series of phrases that I choreographed, and the second part involves the dancer's collaboration through a series of set improvisational tasks. The work starts with me clapping the *taala* into a mic as dancers walk indirectly in space. Once the clapping fades, the dancers at their own pace fold and unfold towards the ground and into a lying-down position on their backs. The dancers then complete their assigned phrases within their respective planes, addressing directionality, flow, and resistance. During the second part, the dancers participate in improvisational tasks that allow them to break away from the highly technical structure of the *taala*. In the end, according to my narrative, the dancers cannot resist the urge to embody the *taala*: they participate again in the rhythmic cycle. Returning to their original places, they take a collective breath and fall to the ground in unison. My goal for this work was to address cyclicity and non-ephemerality. The dancers appear to be stuck in phrases and when they eventually break out of the phrase, they still return to these phrases. During the improvisation, the “jump back in” into the capture cast by the *taala*.

In this chapter, I will address all the steps in my process of research and choreographic development in the order it was carried out. These steps are Invocation, Embodiment of *Taala*, Improvisation, and Phrasing.

Invocation

I was inspired to include "ritual invocation" as a step in my process by Sammy Chien, a Vancouver-based, first-generation Taiwanese-Canadian dance artist. I took his workshop during my time at York University, where he led his participants through what he labelled as an invocation ritual that prompted us to reflect on our presence and collective spaces. Similar to a guided meditation process, he prompted us to feel grounded, centred, and present, as well as to acknowledge a sense of togetherness with the other participants in the workshop. The practice of invocation was a familiar feeling to me: it was the first practice I learned in bharatanatyam class as a child. I wondered if the ritual practice of invocation as a preparatory step to the practice of art was unique to Asian culture. Chien's workshop urged me to search for significance in what I viewed as the ordinary in my own ritualistic practice of dance.

An invocation is "the act of invoking or calling upon a deity, spirit, etc., for aid, protection, inspiration" or "a form of prayer invoking God's presence, especially one said at the beginning of a religious service or public ceremony" ("Definition of Invocation"). As I mentioned in my chapter about Indian thought, deities are used as metaphors for cosmic processes. I assert that in the East, the purpose of the invocation is not to draw "spirit" into your body but rather to acknowledge the relationships between the body and cosmic processes. As a bharatanatyam dancer, the invocation that I practiced almost on a daily basis before the start of my dance practice was a Sanskrit verse in praise of the Shiva deity or "Lord of Dance," as

explained in chapter 3. One of the most potent images of cosmic balance, explained by Ramli Ibrahim, is encapsulated in this verse taught first to dancers of Indian dance. The verse describes Shiva as Nataraja or Lord of the Dance as well as the supreme creator and destroyer" ("The Metaphor of BALANCE | Datuk Ramli Ibrahim | TEDxShanghai" 0:20-0:45). In the verses are lyrics that praise Shiva:

To the One whose body is the Universe
 Whose Language is the total sum of sounds
 Whose Ornaments are the moon and the stars
 To That pure Spirit- Shiva, I bow.

To me, the purpose of this invocation is not only to praise the deity but also to honour the divinity within the body by drawing a connection between the human body to the body of the universe. I re-interpret this verse into another, an Ode to the self:

I acknowledge the divinity within my body
 My body is the whole universe
 My speech embodies all sounds
 The ornaments of my body are the stars and moon
 Such is my magnified presence.

I acknowledge that this is not the same verse but rather a new concept that, in my view, targets the same purpose.

The YDE dancers received my recitation of this modified verse at the beginning and end of every rehearsal. It was meant to support our endeavour to connect to our bodies and create an opportunity for knowledge systems in the body to unearth and unfold. The YDE dancers were also asked to acknowledge their innermost selves, all their teachers of the past and present, and

the earth. They were invited to touch the ground with their hands and then place their hands over their eyes, culminating in the ritual invocation, which is also something that bharatanatyam dancers do. The YDE dancers expressed their enjoyment and appreciation for this process, and I am grateful for to this program for giving me the time and space to develop this ritual. Each time we did the invocation, I was able to lead the dancers through it with clarity and ease, and these skills can be reused in future settings, like a dance class or rehearsal, where I would like to inspire a group of movers to acknowledge relationships between their body and cosmic processes.

Embodying *Taala*

Directly after the invocation, I led the YDE dancers through a series of introductory exercises designed to give them a sense of cyclical repetition of rhythmic beats. For this, I used an app on my android phone called Jalra, which delivered sounds of a traditional percussion instrument called the mridangam according to the beats per minute that I manually set. Using this app, I was able to set the *taala*, *taala* pattern, and beats-per-minute. As part of the training, I used the Jalra app to administer first an eight-count (*Adi*) *taala* cycle and next, four-count (*Chathurashra*), a three-count (*Thishra*), five-count (*Khanda*), and seven-count (*Mishra*) *taala* cycle. I played a track that looped on the set number of beats and asked the dancers to walk anywhere in the room at the speed that their bodies were informing them to move. I instructed them to walk for four cycles and improvise for four cycles.

Next, they were led through the clapping of these cycles. They were taught to clap at three speeds: the slow, medium (double of slow) and fast speed (double of medium). They clapped their hands together, and some preferred to clap against the floor. Later in the

development stage, I encouraged the dancers to clap the *taala* while they watched their peers embody the *taala*, which significantly helped them to grasp the rhythm with precision.

Finally, they were asked to stamp the *taala* with their feet. Stamping means striking your foot on the ground to make a clapping-like sound. They stood, with their spines erect, wrists on their hips while stamping. For each stamp, I told them to absorb the energy from the floor through the foot, core/spine, and body. I told them their body should be held firm and prepared to access the energy of the rhythm through repeated stamping, since personally, I have always found greater ease and resonance with the presenting rhythms when my body is held firm and feels prepared. Once the music played, we stamped in place according to the beat. Next, we moved through the space while stamping at the same pace. In the sagittal plane, we moved directly backwards for a fixed number of stamps and then moved directly forwards for the same number of stamps. This exercise was repeated a few times so that the dancers had the opportunity to allow their bodies to resonate with the rhythm in the *taala*, and thus the *taala* itself.

The use of rhythmic walking, clapping, and stamping was a process I designed for the YDE dancers to acquire an innate (embodied) sense of the specific rhythmic patterns I intended to research: *Chathurasha* (4), *Thishra* (3), *Khanda* (5), and *Mishra* (7). The way that these numbers are patterned seemed to be culturally specific, and this belief was affirmed during one of my work-in-progress meetings where I received a comment about what seemed cultural about my research: it was not the movements that seemed cultural, but rather how the movements were phrased in relation to time that seemed cultural. From this, I deduced that *Thishra* is not a universal sound of “three,” *Khanda* is not a universal sound of “five,” and so on and so forth. These numerical expressions, rather, are expressions that are uniquely South Asian. For example,

the rhythmic syllables for *Thishra* are “Tha Ki Ta” and when you say it out loud repeatedly, there is a metre that is inherent in the quality of *Thishra*: the first beat is stressed and the second and third are not stressed. Khanda, a second example, had the syllables “Tha Ka Tha Ki Ta,” which mean that the first and third beats are stressed and the other ones are not. The specific meter that is created from the repetition of these numerical expressions is culturally specific and I needed to invest time in teaching the YDE dancers on how to embody them.

Improvisation

Next, the dancers were asked to embody the *taala* taught to them in the previous section through a task-based improvisational activity. For example, for the five-count *taala* cycle, I asked them to walk in four counts of five and improvise for four counts of five and asked to repeat this cycle for a few minutes until I said stop. They were given specific improvisational tasks like moving in slow-motion or motifs like the circle, triangle, square, water, and horizontal extension. The purpose of the task was simple. I invited them to answer with their bodies, could you lose yourself in the *taala* and then fall back into the embodied expression of the *taala* without missing a beat?

The dancers were then asked a set of questions about the number they embodied. For example, they were asked, "How do you feel about the number five? What was your body saying about it?" The dancers shared what was salient to them—some explained that they felt resistances, flows, and even colours. They were encouraged to discuss and reflect on what they experienced.

Later in my development of *Art of Time*, the performers were asked to carry out specific improvisational tasks during the latter half of the work. Starting at the point where some of the

performers clapped the *taala* against the floor, they were instructed to walk with consistent pace and intention, imagining that they were in the real world and had someplace in mind for where they had to be. Next, they were asked to cluster during their walking, while inserting a quick turn in their path—I had imagined, for this, the entropy of water molecules, which are sporadic and moving, and contain quick, but subtle bursts of energy. Next, I instructed the dancers to improvise for five counts and arrest the movement in a still pose, and then continue their paced walking. Immediately following this, the last task involved free improvisation that included only one task: half the performers were told to embody “weightfulness” and “groundedness” to establish a connection with the earth (as we’ve been doing during our invocation exercise) and the other half was told to embody “lightness.” Finally, they were asked to transition from their improvisation into the final choreographed phrase in a timely order assigned by me.

Phrasing

I borrow from De Keersmaecker's method of phrasing and phrase patterning (the French idea of *chipotage*) to develop the structure in the first part of my choreography. I will begin by sharing a video of my first attempt at choreographing a phrase, a variation of which was used for the final choreography. I share this 30-second excerpt of my research that explores the number five using a rhythmic phrase borrowed from Carnatic music, a system of music from South India (see link <https://vimeo.com/554775828/f201bb7f4b>). The *taala* I chose for the making of *Art of Time* is called "*Kanda Chapu*," where *kanda* means "five" and *chapu* "means to divide." In the video, there is a directional movement with arms and quick changes of the direction in the whole body; however, there is also a multi-focused indirect space effort in the head and eyes and a free flow reverberation in the lower, which is cast by the skirt. The skirt flows with the accents of the

Kanda Chapu Taala clapped, which are placed on the third beat and the rebound on the fifth beat. If time is a flow of rhythm, the purpose of the piece is to extract time, like capturing water with a bucket from a flowing stream. My professor Susan Cash commented, "There is a dual feeling of stopping action with the directional movement of the arms and a searching around the environment for something hidden. Moving in the horizontal plane can suggest a cyclical feel, returning to the beginning to start again, but it also can be seen as trap, containment and may prevent evolution." I repeat movements along this axis to confront and reflect on time. I start with a stop gesture and twirl back with my body and gaze to touch the past and then rebound into the present. The STOP gesture signifies a resistance to further injustice on the body as a source of knowledge.

I intentionally chose to remain on one plane because I was inspired by the work of De Keersmaeker's *Rosas Danst Rosas* and I think that only moving in one plane helps me to target the subject of time. I ended up making four phrases, two on the ground, one in the middle and one standing. The arrangement was such that at no point during the phrases was the work front-facing. It was supposed to be like the gears of a clock, always a return to where you started. A feeling of being stuck, of being pushed and pulled inside a gooey structure.

Later on, in my development process, I began to choose motifs that may show some narrative about the enslavement of the body to time, like, for example, waking up in the morning, getting up, responding to your name, and falling back asleep. Borrowing from Abhinayagupta's interpretation of the temporal process as an equation encompassing division, time, and rest, I specifically wanted to incorporate at least one resting posture. Using the push and pull heard in the *Kanda Chapu Taala*, I wanted to do also parallel these cyclical, everyday activities with

some elements of push and pull. The quick turning of the neck is one example of push, and the slow melting of the body, vertebrae by vertebrae, was one example of the pull.

I wanted to meet these moments of push and pull instinctually. The *Khandam* (along with *Thishram*, *Chathurashram*, *Mishram*, and *Sankeernam*) is a rhythmic pattern I encountered at the age of seven, and it has since been in my life. To extract my natural tendencies towards the *Khandam*, I followed advice from dance exponent Mavin Khoo. While completing this MFA program, I noted at Mavin Khoo's workshop, something I have never heard before regarding how Indian Classical dancers choreograph works that are outside the scope of Indian Classical dance: specifically, before choreographing for contemporary dance or ballet companies, Khoo first visits his traditional bharatanatyam practice. He explained that by first confronting his traditional practice, he is able to garner an access point to creative tendencies and cultural fibres required for the creation of authentic expressions of movement.

So, while at the studio at York University, before I created the phrases, I always practiced a *jathi* or a rhythmic composition of some sort. Tracey Norman, a faculty member at York University, responded to my question about whether my work is an example of fusion dance by explaining that it was not my choice of movement that reflected the idea of fusion but rather my approach to time that felt cultural. This statement gave me confidence about my research outcomes because it proved that 1) there was indeed an approach and relationship to time that seemed culture-specific, and 2) my choreographed phrases were successfully addressing the accents of the *Khanda Chapu Taala*.

Now that I developed these phrases, I used de Keersmaecker's method of *chipotage* to arrange them in a way that would create an interesting broad-view texture in all the bodies in performance (see Figure 4). I found this method to support my aim to create a performance work

that utilizes minimalist movement and, at the same time, creates an argument through the intentional layering of these minimal movements. The argument I was going for, of course, was that cyclical temporality in performance can be used to expose the perception of time as an entity rather than a linear construct, and that this very process endeavours for the capture of time which opposes the idea ephemerality in dance.

	Sophia	Gabby	Hannah	Reece	Nicole	Olivia	Emily	Rayn
Section 1 (start)	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
	A	A	B	B	A	A	B	B
	B	B	A	A	B	B	A	A
Section 2	A	C1	A	C1	A	C1	A	C1
	B	C1	B	C1	B	C1	B	C1
	C1	C1	C1	C1	C1	C1	C1	C1
	C1	C2	C1	C2	C1	C2	C1	C2
	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2

Figure 4. Written score of first half of *Art of Time*.

Since the understanding of temporality and spatiality are interlinked, I will also address my exploration of spatiality using *taala* in my choreography of *Art of Time*. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the movements are choreographed exclusively on each dancer's horizontal plane, as I had imagined that the containment within one plane would allow feelings of spatial capture and

entrapment to arise. The dancers repeatedly confront a past and future within the plane, symbolizing a physical structure to time and, therefore, time as an entity. Secondly, I wanted the first half of the work to have the quality of being viewed symmetrically from any angle outside the circumference of the presentation (the second half of the work was front facing to adapt to the proscenium stage environment). Thirdly, I did not consciously try to erase the unoccupied space on the stage by my insistence for very dim lighting— I had initially imagined the presentation of my choreography in a gallery environment that is well-lit, and this is the approach I hope to use in the future. Most importantly, in my choreography, I adapted an interpretation of spatiality in *taala* called *margam*. Margam in Sanskrit means “path.” My guru explained to me that when two individuals embody the same *taala*, it is believed that they are on the same *margam*. I enjoy this interpretation because it disrupts the meaning of a physical path— *taala* generates pathways in space through the creation of rhythmic architecture. Therefore the idea of *margam* addresses both spatiality and temporality. The notion of *margam* appears in my work during the second half of *Art of Time* when the dancers are out-of-phase during their improvisation but eventually join the same pathway.

Changes and Challenges

Investigating *taala* is one of my personal passions. I found that dance had always distracted me away from many aspects my natural life in unexplainable ways, especially detracting me from my routine practices in formal education. I later realized, however, that I was primarily drawn to confronting my *access* to the cultural and beautifully intricate rhythms, patterns, and cyclical interplay. I became obsessed with embodying and reciting South Indian rhythms. Looking back, I think it was because it gave me a clear entry into the cultural memory

of who I am. Numerous times at various ages, I found myself at my study desk with my textbook opened, yet completely distracted by the rhythmic sequences I came across that day in dance class. I would tap the rhythm on my desk with my pencil again and again until I got it right with the *taala*. Considering my passion for embodying rhythms, it means a lot to me to now write about and delve into the discovery of what *taala* is and what it is saying about the characterization of time.

Through this research, I challenged myself to step outside of my cultural bubble in which *taala* is normally practiced and then learn how to apply it in another musical and aesthetic context. In other words, I wanted to apply the concept of *taala* in a performative setting outside of bharatanatyam to gain the skills necessary to choreograph and speak about the use of *taala* in Western academia and other Western performance spaces. Now near the end of my thesis research, however, I am faced with more questions about *taala*: Can *taala* be embodied by dancers when there is no audible *taala*? If the *taala* is not audible, is it still there? What specific conditions of *taala* make dance non-ephemeral?

Another issue: I'm not sure I was able to communicate the narrative arc with the conviction and depth I was hoping for and perhaps I needed more time to continue my choreographic process. In the narrative I imagined, the bodies find resonance in the *Khanda Chapu Taala*, the *taala* gets lost for a little while in the middle of the composition when the bodies are in circular extension, and then the bodies find the *taala* again, or rather the *taala* captures them. The issue I found was that the work did not communicate a sense of *taala* that was strong and resounding enough. I wanted the *taala* to feel like a current that was washing over the dancers; this was not the experience for me as an observer. For example, near the middle of the composition, when the *taala* in the music returned, the dancers were told to clap

the *taala* on the floor; however, I noticed that the dancers had trouble catching this *taala* again. This points to the conclusion that the *taala* was not strong enough to be heard, felt, or embodied. It took some time for them to once again find resonance with the *taala* in the music again.

The parameters of *taala* are clearly outlined in the *Natyashastra* as discussed in chapter 4: *taala* is a metric cycle that repeats itself right through the composition. From this, I have learned that the *taala* should not stop in the middle of the composition, because stopping for more than one cycle has the potential to disrupt the progression of *taala*, and thus disrupt the experience of a strong *taala*. In addition, I believe that the pulsation of the *taala* needs to be perceived either through an obvious, audible *taala*, or through the presence of polyrhythms that suggest the use of a *taala*. In other words, either we hear the *Khanda Chapu Taala* explicitly in the music right through the composition meaning that the *taala* is structurally there and that the dancers cannot miss it, or I incorporate the use of polyrhythms in either the musical or choreographical score so that the dancers never lose sight of the *taala*. For my question of whether *taala* can be embodied by dancers when there is no audible *taala*, I think yes, but only when there are polyrhythms, and this is something that I see ordinarily in *bharatanatyam* practice and performance.

The aesthetic purpose of *taala*, as I outlined in Chapter 3, is to arrive at the “*sum*,” and the use of polyrhythms before the *sum* is reached is perhaps a good route towards the communication of my research arguments. When developing the choreographic score, I had initially planned to incorporate what is called a “*theermanam*” near the end of the composition. The *theermanam* is a type of polyrhythm that signals that the end or “*sum*” is about to be reached. I composed this *theermanam* myself and shared it with Kalaichelvan for him to translate it into his piano compositions. Kalaichelvan felt, however, that he could not translate the

theermanam and place it into the composition, and so we decided to keep the *khanda chapu* patterning unspoiled without any overt cross-patterning. Our creation process overall seemed quite formulaic, as I endeavoured to insert *theermanams* where they should go, and when it did not work, I should have figured out another way to introduce a cross-pattern or polyrhythm into the *Khanda Chapu Taala*, because in doing so, I would have developed the process of “reaching the *sum*” with more conviction and depth. I now realize, that reaching the *sum*, is the primary, non-negotiable aesthetic consideration in Indian classical dance and music performance, and my focus on this process should not waiver in future performative creations about *taala*.

My collaboration with the YDE also nurtured some of my secondary research interests in phrasing. I was curious about the use of a stringed instrument in my work since I had a personal preference for music that uses the Carnatic violin, sitar, or dilruba. Before receiving the musical score from Kalaichelvan, I introduced an existing soundtrack called “Poetic Love” by Tech Panda to my YDE dancers during our improvisation and phrasing tasks. Using a phrase I choreographed, I allowed the dancers to explore circular movement and expansion using the sound of the dilruba instrument. I instructed dancers to dance the phrase I taught them and to add and layer their own natural impulses to the melody of the track. The dancers expressed their enjoyment of this exercise by saying that there was something about the instrument that was compelling. I think that stringed instruments, in particular, create vibrational, resonant energy- I wanted the dancers “feel” the *taala* through instrumentation that supports the connection and relationship between the body and music. I intended to foster a stronger embodied connection to the *taala* by providing an opportunity for the dancers to allow the music to shape their bodies, therefore creating an environment where the *taala* compels them in the space. In addition, there is a droning noise traditionally used in Carnatic music, called *shruti*, and I interpret this noise as

a resonating sound to the melody and the body. I had imagined that the combination of *taala*, a stringed instrument, and *shruti* would create an environment which compelled the dancers to keep connected to the cyclical temporality of the work.

For the making of *Art of Time*, I had asked my composer to use the three ingredients of *taala*, a stringed instrument, and *shruti*. However, my composer insisted on only including piano and the western violin in his musical creation of the *Khanda Chapu taala*. I assumed that my composer was not comfortable including overtly cultural aesthetics in the composition, therefore I did not push the idea of including *shruti*. We were both keen to avoid producing work that could be labelled as “fusion” and wanted to instead produce work that could be seen as cultural hybridity. Nevertheless, I feel strongly about including *shruti* and the dilruba in my future work, as I think that finding vibrational resonance is important to me. One existing form of vibrational resonance in the final work is the clapping of the *Khanda Chapu taala*, which I performed at the beginning of the piece. I look forward to focussing on the development of more corporeal experience of resonance in future iterations of *Art of Time*.

The YDE dancers had spent at least two whole rehearsals learning the *theermanam* I composed for them, despite it not making it into the final work. Learning the *theermanam* was challenging for them, but they were able to dance it with precision through persistent practice. One of my discoveries from this process is the importance of including my musician in the in-studio rehearsals, research, and workshopping. I think if my composer had attended the rehearsals with the YDE, they perhaps would have found some way to fit the *theermanam* into the Western musical score he was composing. Another discovery is how well the dancers were able to pick up the cultural polyrhythms introduced to them; it has given me the confidence to

employ dancers not specifically trained in Indian classical dance in my further development of *Art of Time*.

Another change I would pursue is in my choreographic construction of the phrases. Looking back, I wish I had worked to add more punctuation in my phrases. Instead of showing more stillness, I could have shown more of the accentuation of the *Khanda Chapu Taala* and if I had more time for my choreographic research. For example, to further this choreography, I would like to incorporate more punctuations with the use of breath. The spacing in the piece occurs in the horizontal plane as the body folds, unfolds and twists at the waist. But there could be more added to show the expelling of air and its subsequent intake and of course. I would work to match these energetic changes to the accents heard in the rhythm of the *taala*. In comparison to *Rosas danst Rosas*, did my work have a primary shape? The importance of having a primary shape is related to the strategic structuring of the choreography as a well-thought-out argument. A primary shape, to me, is the like the grammar that grounds the work, and as mentioned previously, I wanted to layer the minimalist movement together and against the music to create an argument for cyclical time. The primary shape of my work was perhaps the resting position since I think the movements that were emphasized were that of decay. In my future work, I would endeavour to develop another primary shape that instead emphasizes fluidity, from the imagery of water, and subservient emotions, which will perhaps work to give the choreography more depth. Water, according to my research in Indian thought in the previous chapters, is a recurring image used for the description of time (e.g. Nataraja sculpture has Ganges river as hair, stream of water as time in Buddhist, Jain, and Yoga philosophies, etc.) and I would like to bring more clarity to these images in my choreography.

I noted in Chapter 4, that in *Rosas danst Rosas*, the observers likely develop a familiarity with texture created with physical movement and musical punctuation, meaning they become unconsciously aware of the choreography's primary patterning and the weaving of this pattern with the same and cross- patterning of the music. I also argued that when this familiarity of the texture is disrupted, it works to draw more of the observer's attention and cultivate a feeling of intensity. I, too, wanted to include disruption in my narrative arc. I think this manifested in the form of decay again, as the dancers moved slowly in circular extension. In the future, in order to depict a clearer disruption or unexpected suspension of movement, I would endeavour to create a feeling of "reaching the *sum*" and once the *sum* is reached I would move into the decaying circular extension. This is the point in time where I feel like dance is clearly experienced as non-ephemeral. The music and movement have stopped, yet there is still the metaphysical experience of time's capture into a physical embodiment. Stillness, or the perception of stillness, as Caspao argued, is where dance cannot be viewed as ephemeral, and I further this argument that in the stillness that follows "the *sum*", we can find a shared sense of an embodied capture of time.

In Chapter 1, I addressed Rainer's impassioned writing called the NO Manifesto and as I look back at my research, I think her NO Manifesto played a significant part in shaping my choreography for *Art of Time*. The minimalist work of Rainer and de Keersmaecker were honest responses to the issues that were prevalent at the time, where there was a growing culture of spectacularity, opulence, and consumerism, which can feel tiring and overstimulating, therefore there might have been an impending need for minimalism. Further, as described in Chapter 1, Rainer's NO Manifesto was a response to anti-war movements at the time, or to put more broadly, it was a response to large-scale tragedy. I believe that global tragedies can illicit existential questioning: *What is the point of all this?* Rainer's answer, "My body remains the

enduring reality” is a response that resonates with me, as this feeling was something I confronted during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic struck, I was in Singapore, preparing to do a traditional solo- bharatanatyam dance recital which had the potential to pivot to a live, online format. When the organizer asked if I wanted to still perform, I said no. For reasons that I could not comprehend at the time, performing bharatanatyam did not make sense to me anymore. The spectacularity of art form (in the costuming, expressions, music, etc.), which is beautiful under normal circumstances, just did not make sense at the time. I had not known of Rainer’s NO manifesto at that time, but I had said No to spectacle, No to transformations and magic and make-believe, No to glamour and transcendence, and No to seduction. I just wanted *to be*: I wanted to see my own body, my own flesh, to feel that “I am here,” and these are the reasons why I think I took to minimalist dance. I felt that *my* body remained as the enduring reality.

Minimalism, as demonstrated by Rainer and de Keersmaecker, is a way to choreograph more from less. My special fascination with *Rosas danst Rosas* had to do with de Keersmaecker’s embodiment of *chipotage*; however, if I look deeper, I see that de Keersmaecker was generally interested in transforming embodied rituals of an orchestra into “dance” movement. For example, musicians have a practice of nodding to each other before starting to play, and de Keersmaecker repurposed this nodding to dance and called it “La tête” explained in Chapter 4. I really admire de Keersmaecker’s use of minimalism to mimic, transform, and abstract some of the embodied rituals or practices of music-making. Inspired by her, I included other embodied rituals in music-making that I would like to transform in my future development of *Art of Time*. For example, I noticed that before musicians start playing, they take a collective break in, while reciting “and one” in their minds. Currently in *Art of Time*, I use the concept of a “collective exhale” to culminate the work, and for the future, I would like to start the work with some level of

coordinated inhaling. The idea of *chipotage*, as well, is similar to the concept of *jugalbandhi* in Indian classical music and dance traditions, where *jugalbandhi* is a musical or tonal conversation between two instrumentalists. Transforming the practice of breathing and the *jugalbandhi* in a musical performance into a minimalist dance choreography is yet another area for development in my research of *taala*.

Overall, I feel as though *Art of Time* is a starting point for a larger work on cyclical temporality that I aim to produce. This research enabled me to reflect on what changes are necessary to convey the messages of my choreography. Included in my list of challenges to remedy are the development of a broad-view primary shape in the work that communicates the fluid and continuous movements of water and the further development of a noticeable primary patterning of phrases that utilize precise and purposeful punctuation in the movement that is synonymous to the stressed and unstressed beats in the music, and the subsequent disruption of this primary patterning to allow some tension to build within the work. Next, I need to work on incorporating polyrhythms in the movement and musical score to provide a fair opportunity for the work to “reach the sum” without the use of an obvious pulsation. I had argued that the use of polyrhythms helps make sure that the *taala* is felt, even though there may not be an audible pulse of the *taala*. Once the sum is reached, I am interested in immediately embodying this space in time with stillness. This frame in time, I believe, is when the viewer (and the dancer) may perceive the dancer’s embodied capture of cyclical time. Further, I assert that this frame is when dance can be viewed as non-ephemeral: in stillness, even though movement has “disappeared,” the experience of dance and time is still there. I also noted my interest in incorporating more use of breath in my minimalist dance choreography to mimic and transform embodied traditions observed in musical performance. Overall, my choreographic research of cyclical temporality

unearthed many issues that I am interested in exploring further, and I look forward to developing my choreographic ideas for future presentations of *Art of Time*.

Concluding Thoughts

From revisiting Rainer's work of using minimalist dance as a method of social critique and de Keersmaecker's work in transforming music to dance, I gained the confidence to use minimalist dance in the building of my choreographed argument against the ontological diagnosis of dance as ephemerality. In my thesis, I aimed to undertake a philosophical and performative investigation of embodied processes of cyclical temporality and demonstrate how and where dance can be non-ephemeral. I have assessed the versions of dance and performance as disappearance appearing historically, culturally, and politically as embodied "disappearance," and now I hope I have built a case for 1) why Indian classical performance traditions should be excluded from this ontological specificity, 2) how minimalist phrases can be layered into a composition that communicates the concept of *taala*, 3) my need to research further the capacity of minimalist dance to support the idea of reaching the "sum" and the stillness that follows.

Given the anthropocentric orientation of traditional Indian thought, traditional mythic narratives and iconographies have a lot to say about time, body, and presence: they specifically point to time as a circular concept and postulate that time can be embodied through an aesthetic process utilizing cyclical temporality. In Indian classical music and dance, time is seen as an entity available for embodied capture. Temporal concepts, such as *taala* and *akshara*, contain etymological clues suggesting that temporality in music and dance is understood as a manifestation of cosmic processes. Control, limitation, and equilibrium are among the keywords

for the organization of time in music, and the aesthetic play of cyclical temporality is used to transcend some of the ideas that cannot be expressed through science.

This research was an artistic experiment aimed at the reconstruction of the perception of time from linear to cyclical in order to eclipse normative framings of issues related to time, body, and presence. The much-reiterated view that dance's materiality is ephemeral is an example of the neglect and erasure of cultural forms of knowledge and inquiry on time, specifically hurting those from cultures that have an aesthetic practice based on a cyclical representation of time. Ambitiously, I had hoped to challenge the limits of our sensing time, as I have ordinarily seen during the practice of bharatanatyam, through the purposeful and punctuated phrasing of minimalist, everyday movements. Art and aesthetics, after all, is about producing new perceptions of the world to reconfigure what is considered artistic, as well as our modes of being, sensing, feeling, and thinking.

I am grateful for the York University Department of Dance for this opportunity to workshop my ideas on cyclical temporality. I was able to develop my personal method of invocation and practice sharing it with my YDE dancers twice a week, which has given me the confidence to continue sharing this invocation practice with other dance groups in Western contemporary dance. This experience has helped me to gain confidence in creating dance, as well as teaching dance. I felt I have made important strides in my inquiry into *taala*, but I have also confronted many challenges. *Art of Time* is a work-in-progress. I take home with me little embers of discoveries and further curiosities about how to develop this work into a stronger argument for how the concept of *taala* liberates dance from its ephemeral sentence.

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