

EMBODIED LIVES

*Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*



Edited by: Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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OPEN ACCESS

Chapter 13

Crystallization-Performance

Lise Lavelle

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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A Balinese Saying

Ilmu Padi (a lesson from the rice plant)

semakin tua semakin berisi, dan semakin merunduk
(the older, the fuller, and the more it bows)



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13. CRYSTALLIZATION-PERFORMANCE

A New Expression In Its Own Right

Lise Lavelle (Denmark)

In this chapter about the nature of crystallization-performance I shall refer to my first solo performance, entitled *Healing in Point: A Woman gets her Face*, performed in Java in 1990 at the Padepokan Lemah Putih School.

Within Amerta Movement there are two approaches to movement. One is called *Pribadi Art*, meaning Individual Art in Javanese. It is based on the individual student. Practitioners initiate movement from their inner, felt sense as a basis for their expression, using their personal story as material that is transformed into movement expression in the outside world. The aim is personal development. The other approach is called *Messenger Art*. As I understand it, for this the material embodied in the outside world is based on input from outside the practitioner's own autobiography.

Before proceeding to my performance, I will look first at the background to the performance, at what a crystallization-performance is and at why I see crystallization-performance as an expressive art in its own right.

An incentive for engaging in performance was my passion for practicing movement and awareness in the Amerta manner. This connected with my studies of Sumarah (relaxed) meditation in Solo since 1977. I came to these forms from the perspective of my Danish background, especially my training as a teacher of classical relaxation and movement from the school of Ingrid Prahm, a pioneer in this field in Scandinavia.

In addition, crucial to my process, was the experience of participating in a group dealing with loss and sorrow, called a

'sorrow-group,' following several deaths in my close family. In this group, I learnt that when one has gone through 'the necessary pain,' in connection with parting from persons who have died, it is time to move on. One moves on through learning 'new skills.' How do you know you are on the right track when learning 'new skills' after a major crisis? When your hands are sweaty and your heart is beating strongly you are on the right track. Actually it is a bit like when you learned to ride a bicycle! With practice, the sweaty hands and strong heartbeat will diminish. This to me sounded like crossing a bridge and reaching what Prapto called *the other shore*, thus transcending ways of merely coping that are no longer helpful and moving forward.

Practicing Amerta Movement while developing my 'new skills,' became a journey through all sorts of landscapes, from pain to joy, from humiliation to victory. The practice was a wonderful elixir to get back on the road again; endorphins fill your body and reality your mind!

Prapto's courses are often concluded with public presentations based on Pribadi Art or Messenger Art. They are referred to as *performances* or *crystallization-performances*. I will use the two terms interchangeably. In this chapter I am mainly dealing with performance from the Pribadi Art approach. Crystallization-performances from the Pribadi Art approach are based on one's personal story with the aim of expressing oneself via free, non-stylized, improvised movement. The mover is dancing her/his own steps. The Pribadi Art expression is a personal movement language.

I see a crystallization-performance as an expression in its own right. This is because it takes the form of improvisation within the present moment, in contrast to performances consisting of previously fixed gestures, gaits and rhythms, controlled by a choreographer. Content and form are characteristic of – or specific to – both the person performing (person-specific), and to the site of the performance (site-specific).

This means that the performance makes sense, in terms of content and form, in relation to the individual performer and to the site of the performance (often in the natural environment). Now the performer and the site are, like life, ever-changing; hence a crystallization-performance cannot be incorporated within the confines of a single discipline. Just as one cannot bathe twice in the same river, Amerta crystallization-performances are never the same. Everything relating

to these performances is moving and changing from one moment to the next – the performer, the site, and the spectators.

Below, I shall present my building-blocks (or special points) which came to constitute my framework for making the crystallization-performance, *Healing in Point: A Woman gets her Face*. It took place in 1990 after I had completed an initial course with Prapto at the school. I spent three months on this piece.

The making of this crystallization-performance was part of realizing my ‘new skills’ in relation to my ‘sorrow-group.’ Moreover, I was on my way towards creating a kind of healing theater. By ‘theater,’ I simply meant bodily expression and visible form as an externalization of inner impulses.

I was interested in healing in a sense of wholeness, and in letting nature heal us as when a wound heals by itself. I see healing as a blossoming, a liberation of inner stirrings – positive and negative – and as resources and potentials ready to manifest. Hence in my opinion healing is a natural part of human development. The aim of healing and of a ‘healing theater’ is getting re-connected with lost parts of oneself and, thereby, with the Source of Life.

Growing my Performance in the Valley

It all started in a valley belonging to the school, hereafter referred to as ‘the Valley.’ That is where the performance took place, as did the process leading to it. This Valley was normally never used during courses because it was isolated from the rest of the school, being hidden from it by vegetation.

The locals considered the Valley to be theirs and used it for grazing their animals. I went there simply because I liked the place.

To the north, the Valley is surrounded by large earthen mounds with bamboo groves and local hamlets. To the south there is a little river and rice paddies. In the east, the volcano Mt. Lawu, famous in the history and mystical practices of Central Java, is visible on the horizon, and to the west is the Padepokan Lemah Putih School.

The Valley was luxuriantly green, with much grassy land, but as a practice space it was a wild place because of its thorny, uneven ground with areas of scrub, liana, insects and poisonous snakes, of which I was afraid.

Prapto called the Valley *the Point* because its bottom was formed as a point rather than as level ground. The practitioner, when starting to move, was restricted to the small confines of the Point.

This dramatically reduced freedom of movement. Thus the student practicing there was in an energy center, i.e. in the center of the forces of nature.

The Valley also has a symbolic meaning according to Prapto. Its theme is receiving. Practitioners receive sensations, feelings and thoughts from inside themselves and happenings in the Valley from outside. The Valley embodies receiving from and communicating with the vertical axis connecting earth and heaven, sub-consciousness and higher consciousness.

Through my movement practice, I came to build a whole universe of my own in the Valley and thereby eventually to develop a framework. This consisted of a score based on my building blocks (or special points) as mentioned above.

My movement took place during the dry season, which meant a blue sky, white clouds and a bright sun. In the morning when I arrived, I would place myself on a bamboo mat close to the little bamboo forest that provided shelter from the burning sun. From there I had a view of the whole Valley. My bamboo mat and the area surrounding it became the starting point of my movement every day. It became my 'home' so to speak. I explored the Valley like a scientist: what kind of trees, rocks, bushes and animal life were there and what forms, proportions, levels, colors, smells and sounds did they have? I also tried to decide where exactly things were situated and at what distance from each other. I drew a map of it in order to be in touch with the reality of the Valley and as a help to orientate myself in its landscape.

Sometimes when arriving in the Valley and sitting on my mat I just could not relax or I became bored. What to do today? My body was not yet in tune with the Valley. Then I had to start to get in tune by getting into my body and feelings with awareness. I did so by doing relaxation or Qigong, Tai chi and Kung fu exercises. These exercises had a clear outer form, which helped me relax, instead of having to compose my movements myself as is necessary with Amerta Movement. These exercises also helped me feel myself more clearly and hence helped me warm up so as to start to move freely, now being in tune with myself and the Valley. On other days, performing free, improvised movement, Amerta style, was easy; this was because right away when I arrived I could tune myself in to the Valley and to the present moment and thus I could proceed directly to composing my free movement. This was so easy that it felt like

turning on a switch: I sort of ‘opened up,’ shifting my awareness towards the top of my head and felt that something flowed down from outside, maybe an energy or an inspiration to move. Whatever it was, my body was in tune with it and then knew what to do, i.e. which movements to make and where to go in the Valley.

My mind formed many pictures based on impressions from the Valley; one could say that I projected my life’s universe onto the Valley. For example, some trees at the front of the bamboo forest were as big as pillars and formed a majestic arch opening into the forest. To my mind this became an opening into a magical and unknown space. It brought to mind a poem by the French poet Baudelaire:

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laisent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers.¹*

Day in and day out I touched my personal universe, or it touched me. In some ways it was rather like entering the playworld of my childhood or the world of a fairy tale. Gradually I found the special points that appealed to me and upon which I focused as building-blocks or points of support in the natural environment. These building-blocks or points of support, as mentioned above, constituted my framework.

First among these points of support (hereafter just ‘points’ or ‘my special points’) was the bamboo forest in front of which I had placed my mat as a kind of home, to which I kept returning, since the bamboo forest provided shelter from sun and rain. At the same time as I projected the poem of Baudelaire onto that forest (a reference from my adult life as a lecturer in French at teachers’ college) the child in me was finding that this bamboo forest was ‘My Enchanted Forest’ with Little Red Riding Hood. Then there was one tree, the only one on the riverbank, jutting out above the river. In my mind’s eye, this tree became ‘My Tree of Life’ from which I looked across the river to the other shore.

1 Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes.
(Baudelaire 1954). This is the first verse of the poem, *Correspondances*.

A few other rocks took on a special value; sometimes I would step into the river to move and dance on some rocks there. When returning to the shore, a big rock on the riverbank helped me step back without getting sucked into the mud. This rock became 'My Stepping-up Stone.' This was meant in a concrete sense and in a symbolical one, as in 'stepping-up' from a low energy situation and getting on with it. Finally, there was a rock situated at the far end of the Valley which became 'My Stone of Sorrow.' Hence the points that formed my framework were: 'My Enchanted Forest,' 'My Tree of Life,' 'My Stone of Stepping-up,' and 'My Stone of Sorrow.'

The meanings I attributed to these points were not fantasy. They all made sense to me at the time. By their different physical forms and materials these points woke up stories in me. I saw these points as archetypes in the Jungian sense, as containers of common human factors embodied in nature or projected by me onto nature. The whole Valley came alive to me in an extraordinary manner because I spent every day there for several months with all my senses open.

By finding these points I created my own universe in the Valley. I moved in relation to the points, responded to them physically and worked out a movement vocabulary on that basis. Especially after I had worked through the sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories, and stories that the points represented to me or that I had projected onto them, the points came to provide a structural framework for my free, improvised movement. And later, when I was no longer so overwhelmed or consumed by my subjective experience of what they released in me, these points also took on a more common human value, which I felt would have a broader effect, rather than purely a private one. A transformation happened: 'My Enchanted Forest' with Little Red Riding Hood became 'The Enchanted Forest,' 'My Tree of Life' became 'The Tree of Life,' 'My Stone of Stepping-Up' and 'My Stone of Sorrow' became 'The Stone of Stepping-Up' and 'The Stone of Sorrow.'

The moment I could dialogue with my own universe, including my own pain, and not be overwhelmed by it, the performance was born. Now I could face the world with my story. That explains the second part of the title, *A Woman gets her Face*. The first part, *Healing in Point*, indicates that this healing took place in the Valley, which, as mentioned above, was also called 'the Point.' Moreover, it refers to the fact that by going into the very point of one's pain, one is healed or one finds the treasure, just as the heroine does in fairytales. Personally I felt that through my movement and my mindfulness



This photo from my performance, *Wings of Flying Mermaid*, on the Open Day at Padepokan Lemah Putih, 12 May, 2009, appeared in *Solo Pos (Solo Post)*, p.12, 14 May, 2009. Photo: Ratna Puspita Dewi.

I had recaptured from the underworld an important part of my genuine being and expression, part of my identity, which had been lost for me.

~ ~ ~

When the performance started, the Valley was already shrouded in tropical darkness. I simply came in at the entrance, emerging from the bamboo trees into the light of torches, with a mask on my face. The mask had a neutral expression thereby concealing my 'true face' with my thoughts, feelings and emotions showing on it. I then crossed the Valley at its lowest part moving in improvisation to the top on the other side while visiting 'my' points. Then, at the top of the Valley I took off my mask and showed my new, strong face to the world, now being able to face the world with my thoughts, feelings,

and emotions. Finally, I walked down to the river where a fire was built and put the mask high up on that fire. With this fire I drew a connection to my Scandinavian roots, as we have a tradition at the summer solstice of lighting hundreds of fires all over the country with a witch on top to celebrate the longest day of the year. My mask was like the witch. To burn the witch symbolizes the destruction of the forces of evil. I wanted to show the Indonesians this kind of a fire ritual especially as my performance coincided with the solstice.

After placing the mask, I lit the fire and stood there next to it, witnessing the unfolding action: the first flame searching upwards in the dark sky, illuminating it and the mask sitting on top; sparks leapt upward towards the myriad bright stars in the night and the delicately shaped new moon. The many, lit torches placed in the darkness from one end of the Valley to the other looked like a procession of people walking through.

Healing in Point: A Woman gets her Face

a solo movement performance by and with Lise Lavelle, Denmark.

Music & voice, Pelok Trisno, puppeteer, Indonesia.

Venue, The Valley of Padepokan Lemah Putih, Central Java.

24 June, at 7 pm, 1990.

This crystallization was intended as a Pribadi Art performance where one builds on one's private story and transforms oneself on that basis. However one may discuss whether this performance was theater, ritual, healing, therapy, a presentation, or *what?* For me it was a crystallization-performance according to the technique of Amerta Movement, but because of the healing I went through and the way this performance made me learn new skills and discover new ground, both privately and professionally, I also see the performance as a *rite de passage*, a crossing of the bridge, and a stepping onto the other shore to a new phase of my life, the spectators being my witnesses really, as spectators are in rituals, rather than anything else.

My performance was a crystallization-performance in its own right because it came out of my movement practice. Moreover, the performance was not made to entertain but to share my experience, rather like one does after a Sumarah meditation². One does so

² After having meditated together in a Sumarah meditation the *pamong* (guide) and the participants talk about their experiences during the meditation: could they relax or not? Did their experience come from their thoughts or feelings and emotions, from their physical body or from outside? And they also talk about how this all relates to their daily life..

honestly, but not to entertain. In fact, my whole meditation group was there at the performance to support me. I placed the audience at the very center of the Valley, where normally the performer would be. I did so in order to put them physically right in the performance. I did not anticipate that they would involve themselves physically in the performance; I just wanted them to be there. Moreover, to draw attention to my points, I had placed lit torches around them. To make my performance communicative I had added a few theatrical effects, like adding the mask and enlarging certain gestures. I also chose tools to move with from my practice such as two long bamboo sticks and a big, red dance textile. Although my daily practice had been without music, for the performance my movement was accompanied by the flute, voice and story-telling of a Javanese puppeteer, Pelok Trisno.

The performance itself came out of my practice, as did the message of going into the very point of one's pain to be healed. In contrast to being based on a preconceived form and preconceived contents, my movements were inspired by an inner urge as well as by outer conditions during practice.

Throughout *Healing in Point: A Woman gets her Face*, I had been inspired by Prapto's method which, in a physical sense, is very simple: to understand something you move with it, responding to it physically, be it the white Indian cows grazing in the Valley, a bamboo stick, a flower, a rainy day, a person, an inner chaos or your own body and being. You just move with it. There is nothing mystical in that although surprising events and understandings emerge. According to Prapto his method is not about shamanism nor drawn from religion. All he does, he says, when moving and performing is, "*to smell, to sense, to hear, to see, to touch and so on, because that way one can see much.*"³ One may also categorize that method as what in scholarship is called 'practice-based knowledge' and 'practice-based research.'

It is not necessary to have a concept or a story before starting a movement practice with the intention of making a crystallization-performance. The performance grows out of the process of moving, especially if the improvisation takes place outside in nature where there is much inspiration and input from the vegetation, and from animal and human life.

Moreover, the story, as I felt it, was already there locked up in my muscles and in the Valley, waiting to be found. At a certain

³ My fieldnotes, Java, 1990.

point I got the strong impression that it is not I who creates, rather something or someone does it for me. I am just a page in a big book. I believe and have experienced that just as fairy tales come from people's dreams, there are structures and whole dance dramas tied up deep inside our bodies.

~ ~ ~

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Baudelaire, C. (1954) 'Correspondances' from *Les Fleurs du Mal (The Flowers of Evil)* (1857), trans William Aggeler. Academy Library Guild

In 1988, inspired by Prapto, **Lise Lavelle** PhD initiated her own movement work naming it the 'Dance of Life and Healing Theater,' and in 1997 changed it to 'Embodiment, dance of release and transformation.' Broadly speaking, she turned her training in classical Danish relaxation and movement, in Sumarah meditation, as well as in Amerta Movement with Prapto, into a 'holistic' movement practice. Lise also drew on earlier studies and practices of martial arts, Qigong, Tai chi, Kung fu, ritual dance, and Theravada Buddhist walking meditation and mindfulness (studied at the Wat Kiriwong Temple in Thailand), as well as on a Jungian approach to personal development and creativity.

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