

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 29

*I Will Trace the Constellation of My Stars
with My Fingers*
Ellin Krinsly

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

Taken from the book *Embodied Lives*,
published by:

Triarchy Press
Axminster
UK

info@triarchypress.net

www.triarchypress.net

First published in 2014.

Second edition published in 2025.

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-909470-32-3

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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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29. I WILL TRACE THE CONSTELLATION OF MY STARS WITH MY FINGERS

Ellin Krinsly (USA/Australia/Mexico/Ethiopia)

Preface

My metaphor is not complete

My constellation is on the path of becoming

If you gaze up at the turquoise blue ceiling of Grand Central Station in the heart of New York City, stars glisten and the constellations are connected into their images by golden threads: Pegasus the winged horse, Pisces the fish, Leo the lion. The ceiling is a memory from my earliest years, powerful and exalting. It is a grand urban and architectural wonder, revealing both day and night, an honoring of nature.

The metaphor for my life's journey is stars in the sky. Someday my stars will become a constellation, a revealed pattern, but for now the stars are within the ever-present flux of life: new ones are added, some flash brighter, some move farther away.

The stars of my metaphor are both symbols of the places I live with my partner Arie van Duijn, the collaborative intercultural performances we have performed around the world and the performance rituals I have done to mark the anniversary of my father's and mother's deaths.

Golden threads connect the stars in my metaphor. The golden threads are my training and apprenticeship with Prapto in Amerta Movement.

Introduction

I was born in New York and have lived half my life in Sydney, Australia. We rent a small casita in a mountain village in Mexico and we volunteer each year at a community in Ethiopia. Each of these places is home when we are there. In each country, a different aspect of my creativity is evoked.

In New York the urban intensity brings energy and a connection to my heritage. When we live in Sydney, the walks in the sand and swims in the ocean bring a transformative calm. Mexico feeds my soul through the ancient beliefs that are still alive in the Mexican culture today. My heart expands with the generosity of the Mexican people. Ethiopia is a new home, a small community in Aleta Wondo where we volunteer: a community where a hundred local women come each day to learn to read and write and where I collect local stories to make books for the school children. Ethiopia is a land where people still walk long distances.

For fifteen years, Arie and I have been participating in intercultural collaborations in physical theatre and movement with artists from Sulawesi (in Indonesia), Mexico, and Mongolia. We perform in nature, in sacred sites and in theatres in those countries. Our Glass Studio and the performing garden attached to our tiny Sydney home is where we recreate our intercultural performances for community evenings, to share our lives artistically and culturally. The performances in Sydney are the bridges.

My life, lived as a metaphor of stars in the day and night sky, is in flux. My life is open to life.

Metaphor

The strands of Amerta Movement have emerged at different times and in different ways in my life, not as a set pattern.

Prapto seeks to discover and offer metaphors for his students as they study and practice Amerta Movement as a way for them to understand themselves and to guide their practice. Sitting in the soft moist air of Solo, Prapto would answer questions after a practice session. Often he would say, understanding what your practice means may not be revealed for a long time, years.

The notion of metaphor always eluded me. I first entered the practice with Prapto in Amerta Movement in Solo in 1992. In 2008 Prapto came to New York City to give a workshop. It had been some

years since I had last practiced with him in Java and my life had changed dramatically.

During the workshop I was seeking to understand how Amerta Movement resonated with my heritage in the city where I was born and to find a metaphor for where my life had taken me. Prapto asked me if Sydney, Australia was still my home from where I radiated out to collaborate and perform interculturally.

No, Sydney wasn't any longer my one home.

Suprpto then suggested that Sydney might be a terminus for me. But that did not resonate with my feelings either. I didn't have roots in Sydney or New York or any one place. My metaphor still hadn't emerged. Prapto then opened a question for me, one that deep in my unconscious was seeking an answer through metaphor.

Where was my home?

Now years later my metaphor of stars in the sky has emerged and reveals to me how Amerta Movement and Prapto's wisdom and brilliance continue to guide my life.

I Will Trace the Constellation of my Stars with my Fingers

...as I trace the influence of the golden thread of Amerta Movement and *kejarwaan* in my life.

Kejarwaan is an Indonesian term meaning 'Javaneseness' and 'Javanism' and harks back to a time when animism was the mystic belief of the Javanese people. *Kejarwaan* derives from the Hindu Buddhist period of Javanese history. It shapes the cultural values, the conduct in daily life, and the ethical and spiritual values of the Javanese people. Prapto's cultural and spiritual heritage in *kejarwaan* was passed down through his parents.

In *kejarwaan* the creator and created are not separated. Humans are part of the whole, of the universe; and the universe lies within each human. Each of us has the possibility to find unity with nature and spirit.

The strand of Amerta Movement touched by *kejarwaan* that has been a trajectory in my life is the view that life can be experienced as a continuum and is interconnected: the notion of non-duality expressed in the belief that nature/spirit/human have equal value, not separated but connected into one unifying existence.

Alice Pitty studied with Prapto over an intense year and lived in other communities in Indonesia. In her writing she maintains that

Prpto is teaching his own culture or *kejawaan* but in unique ways:

“I believe Prpto is indeed teaching Javanese culture, but he is not teaching Javanese culture from the perspective of Java. He is teaching Javanese culture within this broader framework of placing Javanese values, philosophy and psychology within a global mapping of cultural exchange that is stimulated by the broad range of nationalities represented on his courses.” (1997, 5)

This “global mapping of cultural exchange” in Amerta Movement has guided me to discover my own relationship with intercultural performance and collaboration.

Framework of Practice

Prpto’s framework for Amerta Movement may be seen as a system illuminating multiple ways for making connections. In the 1990s Padepokan Lemah Putih had four physical areas for practice: the *Pendopo*, with a tiled roof and strong wooden pillars representing home; Square, an open grass area that alluded to marketplace; a red concrete octagonal shape called Mandala, for circulation; and Road, a place of intersecting paths for journeying.

At a cultural level, *Pendopo* as home could also be seen/experienced to represent the traditional Eastern village culture where people stayed and lived at home within the collective *We*. In contrast, Road could be seen/experienced to represent Western culture, where people travel and leave their homes for work and for new opportunities. This is more the culture of the individual *I*.

One of the reasons I left New York was that it was such a driven culture and city. Individualism is a characteristic of the city, and often isolates people, which was my experience.

Prpto invited us to move in each area and to choose one for our practice. I chose the Mandala set into a bowl of hills. Mandala embodied the theme of ‘purification in circulation.’ Circulation is a quality that connects people in a collective feeling, unifying not separating. I was seeking the flowing connection I had felt between the Javanese friends on our workshop. Mandala was a firm and safe base to explore my fear of my awkward movements and my insecurity in entering into communication with others. The shape of the red Mandala, the energy of the hills, the flowing movements of other practitioners moving in Mandala encouraged my movements to flow.

I learned a more sensitive way of connecting through the exercise of moving in ‘The Passive in the Active’. The flow of movement allowed me to begin to feel when another practitioner was open to me joining in movement, rather than my habitual New York ‘drive’ to just enter, whatever. I learned to wait, which in my New York culture would be passive, but in Amerta Movement was actively being attentive to another.

The interconnectedness of ‘circulation’ in movement offered me ways of exploring how to find a dialogue with those people I didn’t have much in common with, as well as discovering the areas that we did share, thus discovering a vastly richer personal and intercultural world. Here were the roots that became my life in intercultural performance.

Amerta Movement Beyond the World of Mojosoongo

Through Amerta Movement, Prapto enables his students to understand that life is in constant change, flux. How do we find balance, calm when everything is always changing? Changing our sites of practice supported our ability to be in flux.

Parangtritis, a place of dunes and ocean on the Southern coast of Java where everything is constantly changing, is the home of the mythological Queen of the South Seas. It provided the ideal environment to confront the reality of flux and constant change. I gained the courage to balance in not having balance, to not know what would happen when I entered into circulation with the shifting sands, with another person, or with the group. I began to seek flux.

Seeking flux has become my life, discovering new ‘homes,’ new stars to form my constellation. My home is where I am.

Studying with Prapto was like emerging from a two-dimensional life into a three-dimensional being-in-my-life. I had found the nourishment that I was seeking. It was out of this aspect of Amerta Movement, this system illuminating multiple ways for making connections, that my desire to perform interculturally was born.

Intercultural Performance

When I muse about the ceiling of Grand Central Station, stars that are connected by golden threads into constellations, I feel that practicing within the “global mapping of cultural exchange” has been the inspiration for Arie and me to create our lives with ‘homes’ in different cultures, our *pendopo* on the road. We have created our own continuum of belonging and individuality.

In 1999 Prapto was invited by the founder and director of *Teater Kita Makassar*, Asia Ramli, to give a workshop to artists from Ujang Pandang (now Makassar) in Sulawesi. Arie and I were apprentices with Prapto in that workshop.

Pak Ram, as he was affectionately known, had with a group of young artists moved to live in Sombu Opu, a cultural and nature site on the edge of the city. They lived there for two years, practicing trance, delving into animistic rituals, exploring alternative improvised movement, as a way of creating contemporary theatre emerging from their own cultural heritage rather than from a modern Western aesthetic.

The Sulawesi artists were professional performers and Arie and I were drawn to collaborate with them. Like a comet streaking across the sky we didn't know then where we would land, but the energy unleashed towards collaborative intercultural performance was born out of that workshop. We began an intercultural performance collaboration that spanned twelve years. Arie's and my performing name became 'Between' – translated from the Indonesian word *antara*. 'Between' because we wanted to find ways of creating performance that connects cultures. My Masters of Theatre in Intercultural Performance at Wollongong University, Australia was based on our collaborations and performances.

An Intercultural Performance that Traveled from Spain to Mexico and then on to Australia and Sulawesi

A friend who I met while studying for my Masters was exploring the work of Nicolás Núñez, a director of alternative theatre from Mexico City. Núñez had studied with Grotowski and lived for a year with a Tibetan community in India. His theatre, performed at Aztec and Mayan pyramids, was often based on traditional Shakespearian and Mexican drama. Núñez was going to walk the famous Pilgrim Road in Spain, with a group of his performers, to develop a performance.

Most people know the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela* as the famous Catholic Camino. Núñez wanted to walk the *Camino del Dragon* (walk of the dragon, as the camino was known before it became the Catholic Camino). We walked in the spirit and meaning of the Mexican God Quetzalcoatl, the feathered Serpent. Quetzalcoatl was related to the gods of the wind, of the dawn, and of arts, crafts and knowledge, and the patron god of the Aztec priesthood.

The Camino along the north of Spain travels through three

distinct regions. Núñez connected each region with one of three creative states: facing our condition, finding our creative meaning, and spiritual transformation. Arie and I were invited to join. Forty days and forty nights we walked across Spain.

Each evening, I would practice movement in windswept trees, in fields, on ancient stonewalls. I would practice to arrive anew, to feel within my body and being the journey and my connection to the spirit of the *Camino del Dragon*, to nature, and to the others on the road. I would practice to have the resources in my body and being for creative work.

“From the *kejawaan* perspective, real knowledge, is both mysterious and subjective, it is personal insight into the true nature of things that cannot be formulated objectively.” (Muldar 2005)

Six months later we went to live for half a year in Mexico City to be part of the performance based on our individual and group journey on the Camino. Each member created his or her own story mainly within the tradition of psychodrama.

Arie and I created three separate performances based on the three geographical and creative directions of our journey: facing our condition, finding our creative meaning, and spiritual transformation. For us the synthesis and meaning of nature and the spiritual entwined with our experience inspired our performance.

These three individual performances were a continuum representing the whole journey. *Caseria des Estrellas* (Home of the Stars) was performed Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in a small theatre in Coyoacán for two months.

Upon returning to Sydney we recreated the three performances into a performance called *Eye of the Dragon*, which we performed in our Glass Studio and garden. Life offered us a gift. Hamrin and Pak Ram from *Teater Kita Makassa* happened to be in Sydney collaborating with Aboriginal artists for a performance at the Sydney Opera House. Hamrin was able to play music for our three performances sitting on top of the large rock shelf, hewn from an old quarry site, bordering our garden. He offered us the feathers we moved with when, in the essence of Quetzalcoatl, we transformed into the Plumed Serpent in the third section of *Eye of the Dragon*. The continuum, the golden thread of the Camino’s journey had now traveled in our performances from Spain to Mexico to Australia.

Pak Ram felt that the mythological story, the connection to nature, the completeness of our journey in performance would speak to

audiences in Sulawesi and invited us to perform *Eye of the Dragon* in Sulawesi at a festival in Barru and also at the Art House in Makassar. The performance spoke to the audience in ways we could have, but didn't, predict.

The festival in Barru was in a small *pendopo* and almost 500 people were surrounding the *pendopo* on three sides. In the middle section of the performance I faced my struggle with human relationships using a ragged piece of bark, howling. Instead of the intense feeling of pain that many in the audience felt in Mexico and Australia there was surprised laughter. One of the features of *kejawaan* and Indonesian culture is finding equilibrium in emotions and not directly expressing anger, fear or any overt emotion. The laughter expressed their discomfort at these raw emotions. When I flew into Ari's arms expressing the transformation of the Dragon to a Plumed Serpent the audience cheered.

And so the journey on the *Camino del Dragon* in Spain, which became an intercultural performance in three parts in Mexico, was a performance in our Glass Studio and garden for our community in Sydney, Australia, wove its way back to Sulawesi where we had first begun our collaborations in intercultural performance.

The deep satisfaction of this artistic pilgrimage was that the "global mapping of intercultural exchange" had become a constellation in itself, the Plumed Serpent, which was shining brightly in my metaphor.

Ritual Performances

Outside the Hall of Golden Buddhas in Candi Mendut, the Buddhist monastery connected to Borobudur, is a long stone corridor. One dark night, illuminated by the brilliant reflections of lights shining from the Golden Buddhas inside the hall, we practiced movement with Prapto.

We practiced in the rain, frogs hopping everywhere. It was a time of purification through rain, frogs, and Golden Buddhas. The intense atmosphere and energy of practicing monks filled the space. My inner feeling of life through the improvised movement practice was joy, freedom and connection beyond anything I had ever known: my life was being purified.

Years later we visited Koyoasan, the Buddhist Monastic Centre established twelve centuries ago on the top of Mt. Koya in Japan. Walking beneath the looming pine trees in the ancient cemetery,

the wish to create a ritual performance to honor the recent death of my father came to me. I had no personal tradition or rituals in my life to guide this. Even with all the feelings and experiences of ritual through Amerta Movement and through many intercultural collaborations encompassing rituals on Sulawesi, Bali and Java, ritual was still not a daily part of my life.

Inspired by the walk in Koyoasan, on the first anniversary of my father's death in New York I gathered fifteen of my close friends at 7.30 in the morning in Sydney. On that sunny morning far away from New York and Japan, I shared my love and sadness in a ritual performance for my father.

Starting in a small park above our home I had hung ties in trees, my father's ties, ties worn over 60 years of his working life. My friends gathered and drank fresh orange juice, and I waited in a park below. Picking the ties from the trees as I had requested, they walked down the public stairs where I had chalked sentences, short sentences about my father: my father wasn't an easy guy, but he loved us dearly. They walked down the stairs to the park with an open vista to the valley below, where I sat. My friends hung my father's ties in the large spreading trees. I moved in and with the trees, and air and valley, I moved with the ties, I read a quirky, funny letter my father had once sent to me and when I was done, we all went back to my house for breakfast. I had created my own ritual performance for my father.

Many years later, my beloved mother died, also in New York. As she was dying she would take my hand and press it to her cheek. I knew immediately that I wanted to have a lunch with friends in Australia who had met my mother, sharing my mother's favorite food. That was arranged. After the funeral in New York and before returning to Sydney I had a dream. In the dream my sadness and grieving was like deep blue dye seeping into me.

The dream inspired me to create a ritual to honor my love of my mother. Returning from New York to Sydney, I had two weeks before the lunch. Ana, my dear friend Ana, who has helped us create many costumes for our performances in Sydney, helped me sew an indigo blue top and pants, and a simple, white, Japanese-style, sleeveless, wraparound coat. I ordered dark blue indigo dye and a BBQ for the fire to heat the dye. I practiced in a small flat grassy spot in our garden surrounded by a stone wall where my friends would sit.

In the performance ritual my hand touched my cheek, just as my mother had taken my hand to touch her cheek. The coat, as I took it

off, became a symbol of my wish that my mother's soul would leave her body and find peace.

I plunged my hands into the dye heated in the fire and stroked my face and arms, covering myself with the dye, my grief. I moved my love.

The sun was full and warm that day, and as I shed the white coat, a gentle rain began to fall while the sun still shone. And the rain fell, like loving tears from heaven until the moment the ritual ended.

My life of intercultural performances, homes on the road, rituals for my parents, are stars that have emerged and are connected through the golden thread of Amerta Movement. I will trace the constellation of my stars with my fingers. The stars that shine in the never ending possibilities of life.

Rahayu.

Thanks to life and thanks to Prapto.

~ ~ ~

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Ellin Krinsly entered the world of Amerta Movement with Prapto in Java in 1992. Amerta training has led to intercultural collaborations and performances in Java, Bali, Sulawesi, Mexico, Mongolia and Australia. Volunteering at a small community in southern Ethiopia with her partner, Arie van Duijn, has inspired performances in Australia and Mexico. Their most recent performance, performed in the Night Garden of the Glass Studio in Sydney, 2014, was stimulated by travels in Iran and based on a poem by Hafiz.

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