

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

Afterword

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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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AFTERWORD: A PRAPTO COMPANION



Parangtritis, Java, 2014. Photos: Karolina Nieduza

“I am in the atmosphere of story. But, at the same time, I have an awareness of the ability to create my own story. I am not just in the story of others, or of society, of my family or of the ancestors. But I am also not nullifying them. They still exist in my life story. And to hold both is not so easy.”

SUPRAPTO SURYODARMO: AN INTRODUCTION

Joged Amerta is a practice developed by Suprpto Suryodarmo (Prapto), a Javanese movement artist and teacher. The following material describes some of the background to his teaching and movement workshops.¹

The practice was developed at Padepokan Lemah Putih² (Prapto's interdisciplinary arts institution, located near Solo, Central Java) and also throughout the world where he has travelled and taught, in conversation with participants from many different countries.

In 1970, Prapto started “*to practise movement with the approach of exploring like a child...*” He practised “*in many conditions of time and space, in nature, temples exploring the qualities of freedom and limitation*” (Suryodarmo, 2010). He perceived the world through movement rather than from stasis, or, as he initially described it, “*from the Buddha walking, rather than from the Buddha sitting*”. Alongside Buddhist practice and observing the movement of children, his practice was influenced by studying the elements and movement in nature, the practice of Sumarah (a traditional Javanese meditation practice of ‘letting go’ or surrender) and, through his parents’ influence, Javanese mysticism.

In his seminal performance *Wayang Buddha* (Buddha’s Shadow Puppet), first performed in 1975, Prapto demonstrated his innovative combining of traditional and contemporary forms by moving as a self-articulating shadow puppet, as puppet and puppeteer in one. He embodied the central Buddhist precept that the only constant in life is change, as exemplified through movement: he was moving, the sound was moving, the light was moving, the screen was moving and the members of the audience were moving. This performance could be seen as one of the early examples of developing contemporary performance without losing the roots of Javanese traditional culture.

In 1982 Prapto travelled to Europe for the first time with the

1 For a full picture of Prapto’s artistic work please visit <http://bit.ly/ELtp11>

2 Padepokan Lemah Putih offers a vision of contemporary art in which the natural landscape and social environment, including their historical backgrounds, are determinants in the creation of the works. It provides opportunities for local, national and international participants to exchange and share experiences through the process of creating artworks, conceptual projects and joining in workshops, performances, gatherings, festivals and other activities.

Sardono Dance Company for the Milan Siladek International Pantomime Festival in Cologne, Germany. As a result of contacts made during that trip and during a subsequent trip to Switzerland in 1983, three Westerners travelled out to Solo to work with him for two months in March 1984. They included Christina Stelzer³ who has written a chapter in this book.

Thus began an avid exchange of movement practices, of attitudes and approaches to life, an in-depth process of meeting between East and West that lasted for over three years. Some of Prapto's Western colleagues practised Tai chi and/or had studied with Anna Halprin, amongst other somatic movement traditions. Among a variety of cultural backgrounds, the main language, passion and tool for research was movement itself. Over time each person, including Prapto, developed their own particular approach to movement in dialogue with their own traditions and by "cooking" their own particular approach as they shared experiences with their colleagues. Prapto called the emerging work Amerta Movement, meaning the 'nectar of life' movement.

More formal movement workshops in Java began in the Spring of 1986 and gradually Prapto established the course programme at the Padepokan Lemah Putih. His stated intention is "*lessening the sense of identification through the practice of movement arts*"⁴ (Suryodarmo, 2010), which explicitly informs the cycle of his movement workshop programme to this day, as well as the design of his garden school and his performance work. After 28 years his practice-as-research methodology, although constantly evolving and becoming more refined through movement, is basically complete.

In 2010 the name of Prapto's work evolved and became Joged Amerta. This change was due to his feeling that his moving being had also become a dancing being "*moving dancing, dancing moving*" and he wanted the name of his work to reflect that development. *Joged* is a common word for dance in Indonesia and also carries a sense of social culture, ranging from children who dance for fun right

3 They were Christian Böhlinger, Susanka Christmann, and Christina Stelzer. In 1985, during a further year of intensive practice in Java, this pioneer group was joined for some months by Christine Rod and by José Mulder van de Graaf. For full details of the timeline please visit the book's webpage: www.triarchypress.net/embodiedlives

4 This is an approach coherent with a Buddhist view of no fixed sense of self, a view based in the constancy of change.

through to the dances in high society. For example, *joged* exists in the palace culture in Yogyakarta up until this day.

Today Prapto uses the term *Joged Amerta* for his own work. This has released the term *Amerta Movement* as a more generic term for the garden of work inspired and influenced by his practice.

Unlike most similar practices, *Amerta* was never meant to be passed down to students in the more formal, teacher-student style of pedagogical training, which he refers to as a ‘pyramid approach’. Although there is a series of courses that comprises the framework of *Joged Amerta*, and a logical progression from one course to another, there is no formal training to become a teacher.

Instead of teachers, Prapto has created over time a list of around 90 ‘dialoguers’ who have his permission to share practice within the tradition of *Amerta Movement*. Prapto encourages these dialoguers to offer practice from the attitude of ‘gardener’ rather than from the attitude of ‘teacher’. A gardener is creative and tends to the needs of the soil and habitat as well as to each particular organism. Each plant has different requirements to grow and blossom. A gardener/teacher is trained to “*open the atmosphere first in space and time*” and then “*to see the condition, the habit of body, the character of person, like nutrition of growing*” (Suryodarmo, 2010) with the intention of supporting the growth and ‘blossoming’ of the mover.

So the gardener is invited to see from the mover’s potential (“*like nutrition of growing*”) rather than from the mover’s problems or difficulties. This is coherent with a view of no fixed sense of self, a view based in the constancy of change. In practice it demands a dynamic, creative, responsive approach and cultivates an atmosphere and an attitude of loving-kindness.

~ ~ ~

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- Suryodarmo, S. (1999) ‘Web Art Garden Statement’, <http://bit.ly/ELtp23>
 Suryodarmo, S. (2010) ‘Joged Amerta: Art in Joged Amerta Programme 2010-2011’ <http://bit.ly/ELtp11>

**INTERVIEWS WITH PRAPTO:
SOLO, AUGUST 2013**

These are extracts from public interviews with Prapto which have been transcribed and minimally edited.

All the words are spoken by Prapto.

The Art of Joged Amerta

“Joged Amerta is a practice that arises from the view of art.

Creation is never-ending and has the quality of blossoming in the garden. I put myself in creation itself as evolution, rather than creativity being one part of evolution.

How can I be an involved witness, how can I bring together the qualities of actor and audience within my breathing Being-in-Creation?

In fact, through being born we are already connected with the creation of the life, we are already in the pool of life, but we find it difficult to recognise what we have, to recognise our own unique potential.

In our need ‘to get’, we forget ourselves. How can we understand and create from what we have already, how can we find our point of growing from what we have already? How can we grow our sense of embodied but not remain ‘flat’ even when we are embodied?

As a way of approaching being embodied, I like the idea of our movement itself as a ‘costume’ or as our clothing. Clothing includes the sense of beauty, design, choice, filtering and an individual’s signature in the signs of nature. We are all just part of an environment.

Many ideas in writing, in painting, or even in the movies give us the sense of flat. Sometimes I see everything from the awareness of flat, be it in the Reality world or the Dream world. Even the Tree of Life can be flat – in the perception of

our understanding, it is flat. We cannot really feel it as alive.

Sometimes movement is flat – it has no nuance, no sensing, no impulse and our receiving of the world and of the other remains flat. How can we wake up our recognition in the pool of life, wake up our understanding, our awareness and our sensorimotor life so that we can feel ‘not flat’?

Awareness itself is not flat. It can be likened to a piece of fabric that is not taut. If it is taut, it cannot breathe. It loses its ‘living’ nature. It loses sensitivity, and that is ‘flat’.

How can we find a position or a place where we can have safety but where we are still able to feel present within the moment-to-moment creation? How can we be alive in the changing and still riding the changing without losing ourselves?

My whole approach in Joged Amerta is one of relax, of the Being Breathing, and of giving time and space for blossoming.

I am only one part of the circulation. I see it as my duty in Joged Amerta, as a gardener, to wake up the potential of each person – all that they have – so that they can find their own Being-in-Creation. But maybe, in fact, Time or the Garden or the Ancestors will speak to them – not only me. I can learn from what they all speak.

Through resonance we can wake up the potential of each person. The resonance is different for each person and for each culture and comes from what we each already have as an offering for humanity. We need to practice tuning with each other and with the situation, like instruments in an orchestra; same tuning but also different.

The unknown is shared but each person’s description of the unknown is different and each person’s way/stay/process to finding the unknown is different – it depends on their particular sensibility.

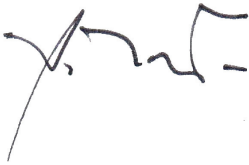
This really needs to be understood by all, otherwise the reaction is ‘I’ve got it! – what Prapto says is like this’ and the practice becomes a monolith.

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In fact, Joged Amerta is not like that, it is not for that. It is for the freedom of how to grow but can still have sharing. Sharing for me is the holy itself. Communication is the holy itself because it is like the growing for freedom. If we can have more diverse expressions or languages to speak with and to listen from, that is beautiful.

Joged Amerta exists for each person to find through movement their own Being-in-Creation in the pool of life and sharing what they have, like sharing garden movement.

Oh ah hum rahayu.”



(Transcribed and adapted from two public interviews with Prapto by Sandra Reeve, Solo 2013.)



Avebury, UK, 2009. Photos: Keith Miller

"A world without words is still in communication, but there are no words."

INTERVIEW WITH PRAPTO

Sound, voice, words, sentences

“I think that communication already exists in this life, whether we are aware of it or not. Actually, it is a bit strange when someone says, ‘I cannot communicate’ even though by those very words they are already communicating. I prefer to feel that we are in the life of the world of communication and that we are in creative evolution to create new ways, new symbols, or new sentences within that world of communication.

Decades ago, I tried to explore sound becoming voice, becoming words, and becoming sentences. In the beginning, it was just sounds. As time passed, the sounds became an expression. Then, from that expression, I really felt a desire to communicate, to convey something, to create words.

From there, a word was born though I could not understand its meaning. But also a word was born that I could understand its meaning.

What is interesting in expressing sound, voice, words, sentences is being able to bring a word into presence as a fact of the existence of the word. This word feels as if it is a form in my existence, in the existence of my body, mind, heart, intention, and seed.

Within that process there was an awareness of myself as a word; my presence can create words and arrange words. I am in an evolution creating words. I am in the atmosphere of story.

But, at the same time, I have an awareness of the ability to create my own story. I am not just in the story of others, or of society, of my family or of the ancestors. But I am also not nullifying them. They still exist in my life story. And to hold both is not so easy.

Here lies the existence of a polemic: entering into the world without words and into the world with words. A world without words is still in communication, but there are no words.

An example of the world without words is the main stupa at the temple of Borobudur which has neither bas-relief sculptures, nor a statue of the Buddha. It is empty. But, we can see that the stupa has given birth to many books from the world with words – from storybooks to holy books.

I really like the story about Siddhartha in the Lotus Sutra, when he pointed to a lotus with the movement of his hand and in that same moment the lotus blossomed. Simultaneously a monk understood and recognised Nirvana.

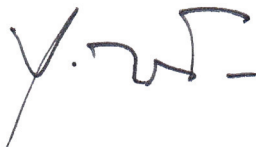
I interpret that happening as the Unity of the World of Nature Reality and the World of Symbol (or words), which is able to communicate embodied understanding.

The blossoming of a lotus also gives meaning to beauty in life – enlightenment. Both the blossoming of a flower and the awareness of being in the bud free up the illusion of a boundary between the inner world and the outer world, between space inside and space outside.

I put this as a symbol of the idea of my awareness being in relaxed, empty axis, in empty space within the life story that comes into existence by designing signature in sign nature.

This is the basis of Jaged Amerta, combining the World of Nature Reality and the World of Symbol, the Reality world and the Dream world in human movement, nature movement, space and time.

Oh ah hum rahayu.”



(Interview material recorded and translated by Diane Butler, Bali 2014)

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