

Trance-forming Dance

the practice of trance from traditional
communities to contemporary dance

Tony Yap Ph.D. Thesis

Submitted as thesis component of a practice-led

Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

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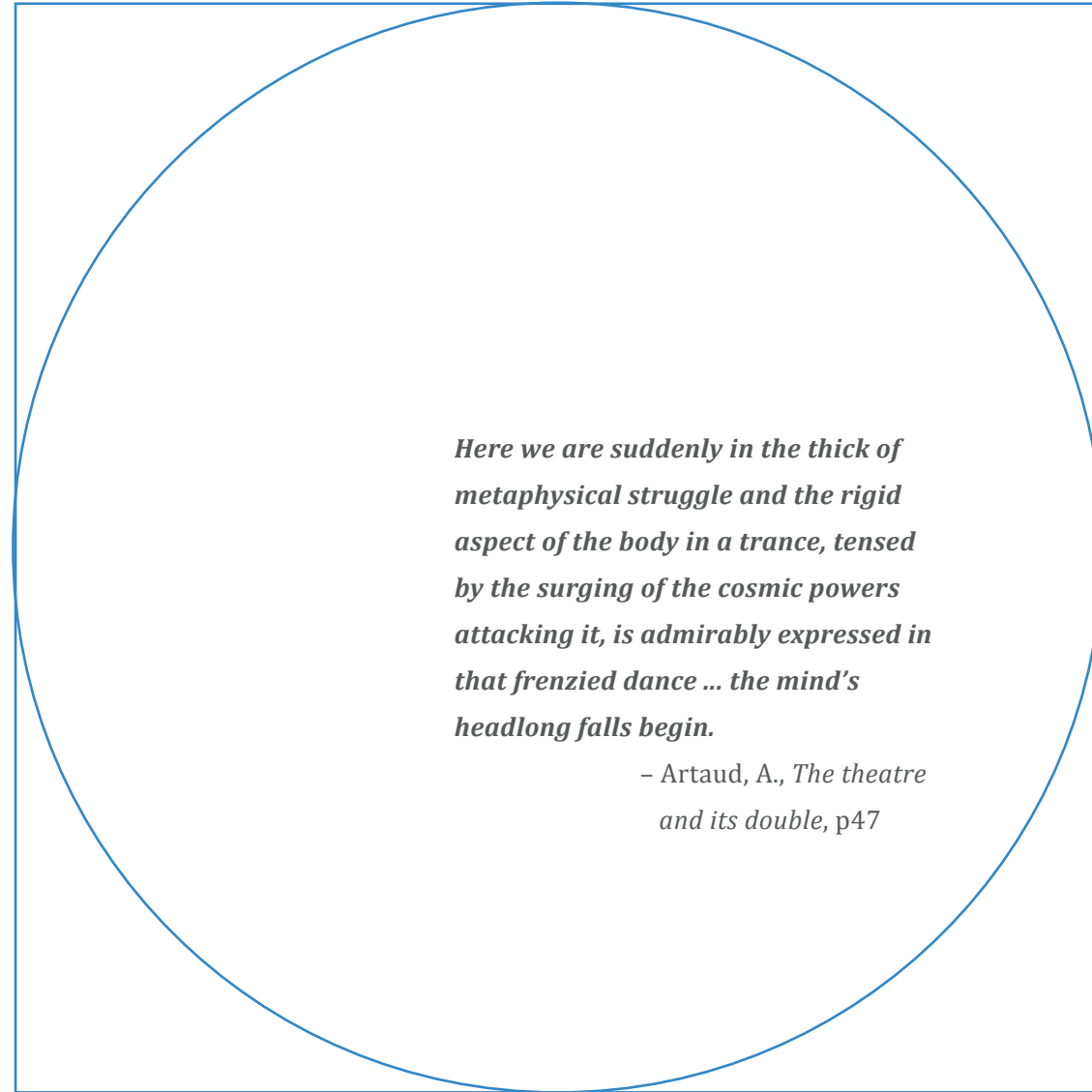
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Faculty of Victorian College of the Arts
& Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
University of Melbourne



*Here we are suddenly in the thick of
metaphysical struggle and the rigid
aspect of the body in a trance, tensed
by the surging of the cosmic powers
attacking it, is admirably expressed in
that frenzied dance ... the mind's
headlong falls begin.*

– Artaud, A., *The theatre
and its double*, p47

Abstract

This PhD thesis presents the work and research of a practice-led investigation into trance and its application to the performative arts – in particular, dance aesthetics. While the project is the culmination of my performative practice over the past three decades, the intention has been to look at traditional trance practices, particularly in the South East Asia region, to answer the overarching question: How can trance be translated from its original traditional cultural context for practical application to a contemporary dance context?

In this way, the research intersects three main investigations: i) Asian traditional trance practices; ii) Western and non-Western contemporary ideas and sensibilities; and iii) a new platform for theatre and performance. As such, the study can be framed by three main trajectories: trance, dance and transformation. These three themes will emerge repeatedly throughout each aspect of this study.

In locating the research thus it is important to acknowledge how my own practice as dancer, choreographer and trainer has been strongly informed by a hybrid South East Asian heritage borne of Dao shamanism and local Malay animism. This cultural upbringing has long infused my work, enabling me to develop an idiosyncratic dance language and to provide a descriptive richness in the particular realms of trance and possession that extends beyond a largely Western framework of understanding trance within a contemporary dance/theatre practice.

Declaration

I, Tony Ding Chai Yap, declare that:

- i. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, except where indicated;
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- iii. the thesis is less than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

Ding Chai Yap
24 May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude firstly to Ibu Ay Sri Kadaryati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar) and Mas Agus Riyanto for their generosity in sharing their knowledge, wisdom, time and willingness to collaborate and experiment with contemporary ideas from their specific traditional practices. Their friendship and creativity have opened new directions in my performance practice and together we continue to create new works.

I am indepted to Dr Elizabert Presa, my principal supervisor and Ms Helen Herbertson for their guidance and encouragement in the course of the research process. The process of articulating my ideas has been a challenge in the English language, and a rewarding one thanks to both my editors and colleagues, Dr Grace Pundyk and Nathaniel Finley, who continue to keep close interest in my research in trance and pedagogy and experimentations. I would like to thank Mr Brendan O’Connor, Evgenii Timofeev and Agung Gunawan who are mentorees as well as collaborators in my trance practices. They have been inspirators and provocateurs in the research process. My gratitude also to Andrew Ching, Kar Nee Suen and Takashi Takiguchi and all participating artists over the years, for upholding the Melaka Arts and Performance Festival (MAP Fest) in an incusive multi-disciplinary platform for international artists to perform, collaborate, exchange ideas and experiment on new forms in performances.

Special thanks to numerous long term creative collaborators and supporters – my creative family – including Reuben Lewis, Yumi Umiumare, Jill Morgan, Kath Papas, Tim Humphrey and Madeleine Flynn, Lisa Denthridge, Sean O’Brien, Mike Hornblow, Anthony Pelchen, Adam Forbes, Renato Cuocolo and the late Cira La Gioia.

My deep gratitude and love to my partner Mark Riley, in our extensive journey with appreciation to his courage and faith to embrace the unknown.

Preface

This research has been undertaken with the support of:

- > Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship (2017)
- > Australian Postgraduate Award (2016-2019)
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I am extremely grateful for this provision and the research opportunities it has afforded me during my candidature.

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Ibu R. Ay Sri Kadaryati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar)
who passed away on 30 June 2021

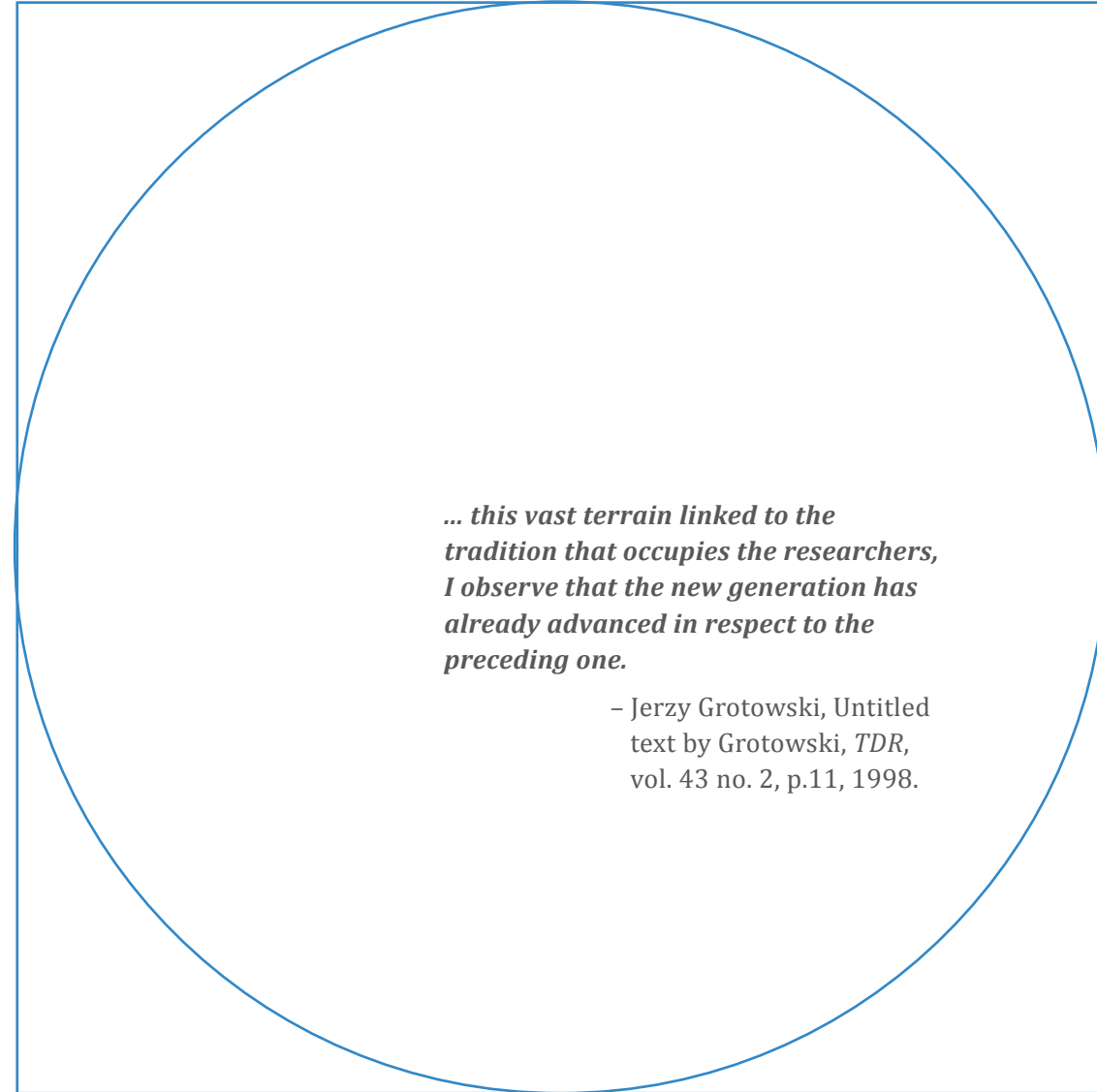
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Introduction

The year of Jerzy Grotowski's death, 1999, was pivotal for my dance practice. I was awarded the Green Room's 'Male Dancer Award' for my body of work, including *The Decay of the Angel*. The Decay of the Angel was a meditation on my father's death, and drew on a developing dance language of trance and Butoh to express the grief I experienced over his loss. Prior to this point, I had become increasingly disillusioned with my position as a dance practitioner in Australia and had been questioning the legitimacy of my practice and its acceptance from my dance and theatre peers in this adopted country. But the Green Room award was a turning point: an acknowledgement and enthusiastic acceptance of my heavily accented contemporary dance style.

Prior to this, and from my early work with the Grotowski-driven psycho-physical IRAA Theatre¹ from 1989 to 1996, it was clear that I had a greater critical response from reviewers of theatre practice than from dance. The situation within dance-critical dialogue in the late 1980s, and to a certain extent even today, was such that critics avoided theories and fundamental issues of dance aesthetics such as how dance is philosophically informed. The focus was (and is) much more on representations and how performance achievements are masked by physical techniques, form and 'expressions'. Thus, the recognition I received from my peers in winning the Green Room award was not only an affirmation of my efforts up to that point and an inspiration to further efforts as a performer – it also propelled me to more deeply understand

Footnotes:

¹ IRAA Theatre was initially directed by Renato Cuocolo. It is now known as CuocoloBosetti/IRAA Theatre, with Cuocolo and Roberta Bosetti the principal members. www.cuocolobosetti.org

trance in the choreographic practice. In doing so, I also committed to investigating and developing further my own dance praxis in a contemporary arena, and it was from this point that I began field research into the link between Asian shamanistic trance practices and contemporary choreography and theatre work.

Four main insights that emerged at that time were:

My dance aesthetics are in deep agreement with the philosophical work of Grotowski, especially in relation to his concept of ‘poor theatre’ – a theatre with a minimum of accoutrements other than the pure presence of the actor.

The *actions* and *inner action* conceptual trajectories of Grotowski can be juxtaposed to my concept of a trance *zone of resonance* – an oscillation between an interiority of the psyche and external physical actions.

The importance of understanding my own cultural heritage and how this links to my personal quest for spiritual knowledge in dance via the notion of ‘verticality’.

An acknowledgement of the strong influence of trance in the context of my South East Asian heritage and the commitment to establishing a contribution to contemporary dance aesthetics through trance.

Twenty years later, however, at the age of 60, I was longing for a deeper understanding. Despite the numerous transitions and transformative passages I had previously undergone, including the ‘mid-life crisis’ and transformation of my early 40s, I was experiencing what I can only describe as a ‘diminishing vigour’. Once reliable patterns were no longer enough to sustain me.

It was from this desire for something beyond my experiences to date, and a firm belief in the unexpected and unpredictable that I decided to embark on PhD research.

This, I hoped, would enable me to:

Consolidate my practice and examine in more philosophical depth the nature of trance and its position within contemporary art practice, especially in theatre and dance and new multi-disciplinary performance events.

Push myself into finding a voice and words to discuss the core of my trance dance practice.

Understand more deeply my idiosyncratic dance language informed by my childhood milieu of a hybrid Dao shamanism and local Malay animism, in the particular realms of trance and possession.

Investigate the importance of trance in dance and the impact of its power of transformation.

The research questions

This is a study of how we experience trance, which takes a subjective perspective to the structures of conscious experience and a first-person perspective with the intention to understand the performative experience that can be directed to the object of trance. The study analyses trance conditions involving kinaesthetics and rituals, traditional practices and language, the passive sensorial experiences of perception, as well as functions of thought, mental control, emotion, energy and action. Simply put, at the center of the investigation is ‘trance’ as the embodiment discipline contributing to theatre and performance.

A different gaze

I am refining a stylised way in which I can articulate triggers of movements, impulses, reflexes, gestures, and the gaze. In a Deborah Hay's workshop that I participated in in the early 80s, one of her instructions resonated: To see through every pore of our skin, including the soles of our feet and the whole of our back. This idea changed how I moved, and unleashed a different framework for movements and for experiencing postures – an altered presence.

I began moving, looking through the body's pore-eyes and discovered a fresh articulation of body and movement. Imagining vision and body in this way enabled a distinct dance encapsulating unexplored embodiment. Weightlessness replaced 'locked' joints, releasing multitudes of stimuli and impulses in combinations away from the usual and habitual and docile; away from an auto-stylised and predictable choreography.

At this confluence of senses and imagery to dance, the spectator may also be presented with an uncommon affect of a kinaesthetic aesthetic, whereby the spectator no longer sees the dance as an object to gaze at, but is inevitably en-twined and en-tranced in this process of gazing and dancing.

The overarching research question I explore is:

How can trance be translated from its original traditional cultural context for practical application to a contemporary dance context?

Following from this, the study can be framed by three main trajectories: trance, dance and transformation, with a broader explanation as follows.

1. A continuation of the development and study of trance dance praxis; the embodiment methodology through the lens of trance practice.
2. Non-western ideas and emerging discourses in performance practice central to trance.
3. A trance praxial platform towards a transformative dance performance.

These three themes will emerge repeatedly throughout each aspect of this study. In this context, other ways to pose my main research question can be:

What is trance in the ritualistic practices of old cultures and what is the relevance of such practices to the post-modern era?

In the creation of new paradigms in theatre how can we understand the priori of these old ritual practices and their phenomenology, and recognise the elements of these ancient practices and their relation to contemporary theatre?

And, what is 'transformation' in theatrical phenomenology?

Practice and praxis

When I refer to trance dance as concept and as practice, I offer my own practice as dancer, choreographer and trainer to the discourse of the cultural and political positioning of trance in the current performing arts.

This trance praxis in its philosophical and ethical positioning has its emphasis in a value and agency removed from any particular religious or cultural context. However, although it is aligned with secularism and is non-theistic, the line of ascendancy can be traced to a culturally ‘religious’ context. Much of the study, therefore, involves the traditional practices that are inevitably woven within particular cultural and religious beliefs of Java and Malaysia.

Beyond my own personal history in temple cultures of Malaysia, I also draw on two other praxis of particular importance: *Bantangen*, the bull trance carnivals of Batu, East Java, and *Bedoyo*, the royal court dances of Yogyakarta, Central Java in Indonesia. Both of these practices represent a dichotomy of trance practice and, through incorporating interviews and direct performance experiences with master practitioners, this thesis seeks to propagate the understanding of the agencies and affect of trance via investigating the philosophical backgrounds of these practices – that is, the epistemology constructing the practitioners’ methods of trance embodiment in order to construct concepts, thoughts, ideas, memories, emotions, logical reasoning and methods.

Theories and research were investigated in this practice through a structure of ‘dance laboratory’ and include an investigation into a pedagogical method relating to a non-Western concept of ‘deep-trance’ or ‘possession’.

These experiences and subsequent observations have been journaled and recorded in different forms – poetic anecdotes, sketches, recordings

and conversations – and are catalogued throughout this work. Alongside this has been the development and presentation of a series of performance events – an opus adopting a non-Western approach to interdisciplinary performance – and the development of a methodology for the trance praxis and training methods workshops for artists from different disciplines to understand and integrate trance to their own creative practice.

For the performance-based component of my research I have developed and present a series of choreographic performances within a platform or a neutral framework, called ‘The Great Square’ (for a detailed discussion of Lao Tzu’s ‘Great Square’ see p. 141 in the Appendix). This series of performances has involved collaboration with dancers, musicians and designers with the ultimate aim of presenting a final solo performance called, *Animal/God – The Great Square*. In total, this practice-based investigation can be understood as a presentation of a series of small-scale ‘operas’.

The Italian word opera as defined in the Oxford dictionary was initially used to portray a ‘composition in which poetry, dance, and music are combined’. Accordingly, opera is ‘work’, meaning the labour carried out with an end result, and derives from the Latin opus (also ‘work’). However, according to Lewis and Short, in ancient times opera was a singular Latin noun, whereas in Latin ‘opus is used mostly of the mechanical activity of work, as that of animals, slaves, and soldiers; opera supposes a free will and desire to serve’². It is in this latter representation that I take my performance work as an opera, a multiplex of disciplines consisting of ancient-mode libretto, trance-psycho-physical choreography and concepts of contrast (as per a Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy), all offered here with a desire to serve.

² Reference from *A Latin Dictionary*, published by Harper and Brothers of New York in 1879.

It is interesting to note that much of the present discourse around Asian trance practices is dominantly written from Western perspectives. When Antonin Artaud³ saw a trance dance from Bali, for example, it significantly opened a whole new direction and approach to theatre in the Western practice. Jerzy Grotowski⁴ developed a methodology of psycho-physicality through his encounter with Eastern approaches to dance and theatre. Both Artaud and Grotowski offered reflections on the wave of new insights to contemporary theatre and performance practices that have their genesis in concepts and precepts founded in non-Western ideas and traditional practices. I was born into and have experienced and practiced most of the cultural elements of the very cultural milieu that have provided abstracts to Western visionaries like Artaud and Grotowski. And, through my later associations, particularly with Grotowski's methods, I found myself in a cycle of learning: one that came from a Western approach to performance that was based upon a connection to the East. Given this trajectory, my intention through this research is to articulate and investigate the bridge between Eastern and Western concepts as an authentic perspective based on my own experience.

Very little insight and few perspectives have emerged from contemporary Asian performers who have the direct cultural background in trance as well as training or experience in Western performance theatre aesthetics. This links to the focal point of my thesis and perhaps summons a rethinking about the approach to contemporary choreography in a performance event, to trespassing disciplines and addressing difficulties of language.

There is great benefit in re-contextualising and re-conceptualising contemporary theatre practice from a perspective and background of a

³ Antonin Artaud: Born in Marseille, France, on September 4, 1896, Antonin Artaud worked as an actor onstage and in film with works like *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. He was involved in the surrealist movement as a writer and came up with the idea known as 'The Theater of Cruelty', which argued that drama must abandon its emphasis on text and rely on more mysterious, primal expressions of sound, movement and light. Artaud died on March 4, 1948, in Ivry-sur-Seine, France.' Cited from: <http://www.biography.com/people/antonin-artaud-9189906#synopsis>.

⁴ Jerzy Grotowski, (born August 11, 1933, Rzeszów, Poland—died January 14, 1999, Pontedera, Italy), international leader of the experimental theatre who became famous in the 1960s as the director of productions staged by the Polish Laboratory Theatre of Wrocław. During the 1960s the Laboratory Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski (whose theories and methods emphasized the nonverbal aspects of theatre) gained international acclaim. Cited from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jerzy-Grotowski>.

performer such as myself. The gap which needs filling is a subjective perspective from the East – from a fundamental position of origins – that is capable of contributing to the contemporary discourse of performance arts. Whereas the Western scholar investigates non-Western practices' impact upon the avant-garde, I, as the Eastern scholar, seek to understand the avant-garde's relationship to myself and positioning my viewpoints from inside my own cultural experience and context.

At this juncture it is worth touching on how my cultural and familial heritage and background has informed the trajectory of my practice and how it is relevant to this thesis of trance, dance and transformation.

Religio-magico background – A familiar milieu

I was born in 1956 in a small fishing village outside of Malacca, at the birth of a new nation (Malaysia). Despite this simple village environment, temple and religious trance practices and events were natural occurrences.

I recall from a very young age, perhaps about six years of age, and outside of the family's predominantly Daoist and Buddhist faith, my mother taking me to Good Friday and Easter rituals, parading statues of poignant images of Christ in death and resurrection. Other rituals she engaged in were in animism and practices of Malay magic, but regardless of any particular faith, the air of all her passionate practices was always benevolent and I eagerly looked forward to the scents of sandalwood and frankincense along with her delicious offerings of food fit for all the gods.

Included in this were the sonic realms that came with these ritualistic ceremonies; with chants, songs and drum, cymbals and trumpets,

enough to stun an innocent child into a world of wonder and awe. Intoxication to ecstasy. If I were to conjure up an image of Medea of the Greek tragedies, a role I once acted in, these swirls of religious-magico practices would be within her realms.

My mother was a shaman in two ways. It was the practice we knew in the older rural villages as a branch of animism and Malay magic where a 'spirit' was passed down through ancestry, and in this case by the lineage of women. This was a sacred and specific practice that involved protection, healing and means for empowerment. These were impressed on me at a very young age. The culture was benevolent as an ancient art of psychology. Is psychology not, after all, a study of the psyche - the soul? It was a practice of power of rituals, beliefs and placebos. The shamans create an other portal to an understanding of the sophistication of affectual relationship amongst the spirits of ancestry, nature, animals and humans. A mix in specific certain elements of nature as a potion for harmony - the genius loci as sacred spaces together with the jinns of environmental energies.

The second way my mother was a shaman was her innate motherlessness. She was adopted, never knowing her biological parents, nor did she ever speak of them. Even so, her presence was of a mother's natural stance, selfless and nurturing. My mother was one of three girls adopted by my grandmother, and her favourite. My grandmother named my mother 'Sayang' (meaning 'love' in Malay).

My father was a detective with the police and he had worked under different administrations and governments: from the Straits Settlements under the British, to the Japanese occupation during World War 2 and to independent Malaysia. When I reached adolescence my father disclosed to me that my birth had been predicted. A Daoist geomancer, my

godfather and a very close friend and colleague of my father, had read in the cosmic cauldron that I would be born seven years after the consecutive yearly birthing of my other five siblings. A late child. And, in accordance to the readings, I was from a higher spiritual level from my father. This was one reason that I could do no wrong in my father's eyes. He never punished nor instructed me; would never say 'no' to me. But perhaps this was partly because I had learnt not to ask questions for permissions or favours. I was already a favourite. One day I fell from a large tree and dislocated my left wrist. My father had the tree partly cut down. As if as a punishment to the tree. To my relief, the tree survived and continued to grow. Nonetheless, it was an affirmation of a father's love.

My father's father came from Hainan, a tropical island in south China, and had something of a mysterious history. Dad had been an only son until one day a half brother arrived, without explanation, from China. To this day, I have no knowledge of this side of the family. However, dad had mentioned that our Hainanese heritage included an indigenous peoples. They were mountain people, he said, and that explained our family tendency to strong legs. My father loved to walk and he would often take me on his morning walks around the little Melaka town. But this familial trait, this mountain walk of our ancestors, can also be seen as shading the way I dance.

Literature Review

In the last few decades, the influence of traditional and ancient rituals has been significant, especially in the avant-garde and experimental movements of theatre and dance aesthetics. This influence has offered many contemporary theatre, dance and performance arts fertile ground for diverse and exciting developments.

When Antonin Artaud first encountered the Balinese theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931⁵, theatre practice in the West would soon take a dramatic turn: a whole new theatre of affect was to emerge with meanings far beyond the era’s more common Aristotelian theatre where text and hermeneutics dominated. Artaud outlined his contribution to the Theatre of Cruelty, an avant-garde theatre firstly developed by French playwright Henry Becque with his own theatrical theories, notably via a collection of essays in *The Theatre and its Double*. Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty broke from the conventions of his time through an assault by the artists on the senses of the spectators and by the introduction of a new visceral way for them to feel subconscious emotions unexpressed. His contributions made a critical and radical impact to traditional Western theatre. Since Artaud, theatre in the West has continuously taken direction from Asian traditional theatre with its strong theme of spiritual and psychological transcendence. This study will closely model Artaud’s practices, which in turn was modeled on shamanistic rituals and their function as a method of transformative, transcendent affect.

Artaud only produced one play; however, it reflected the principles of his theories and influenced many artists and theatre makers including Jerzy Grotowski, Jean Genet and Peter Brook. These artists, along with many other contemporaries with authority in Eastern ritualistic theatre

⁵ ‘1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition’ Author(s): Nicola Savarese and Richard Fowler Source: TDR (1988-), Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 51-77;

This article interestingly also pointed out that Artaud actually made several important errors and false assumptions about what he saw, most importantly that what he was witnessing was by and large modern Balinese dance.

practices such as Performance Studies founder and theorist Richard Schechner, have contributed research and experimentations in fields such as the discourse of the Holy Theatre (which Peter Brook defined as ‘the theatre of the Invisible – Made – Visible’)⁶, to elaborate ‘etic’ research and observations from the outside when referring to Balinese and other Asian transcendental theatre practices. In contrast, my contribution incorporates the ‘emic’ approach, or observations from inside the cultural reference. The Oxford dictionary defines etic as ‘studying or describing a particular language or culture in a way that is general, non-structural, and objective in its perspective’, while emic as ‘studying or describing a particular language or culture in terms of its internal elements and their functioning rather than in terms of any existing external scheme.’ Etic research seeks to understand the common phenomena across cultures whilst an emic approach in my research posits my viewpoints from inside my own cultural experience and context. In my research both perspectives are helpful, and I believe I have a serving perspective that is emic to the often referred to as ‘Eastern ritual practices’ by western scholars. Artaud may make observations of the Asian dance (Balinese); however, I lived and am part of the cultural geography and psyche. Indeed, living in close proximity in terms of culture and practice provides a posteriori knowledge to the etic approach to the discourse.

Whilst a scientific orientation of the etic approach can have impartial interpretations, explanations and categorisations of observations (emphasising observations they choose as important), the emic perspective offers perceptions from within the practitioner’s own cultural rules and views of their own rituals and sets of meanings. Thus I believe both etic and emic understandings and observations can fill gaps in the emerging discourse around contemporary performance/aesthetics

⁶ P Brooke, *The Empty Space*, p 42.

of dance and trance praxis. As such, my position includes both approaches: firstly emic, that is, from inside the cultural reference, and later the etic via my encounter with Grotowski's tradition of psychophysical theatre which has partly driven me to re-examine the traditional Asian trance from my inherited socio-psycho-geographic milieu.

My Western counterparts might discover in their etic approach values that may be of application to more affectual theatre practices and aesthetics. I as an emic insider have my own experience in trance not only from the contemporary stage but even prior to that from the religious and cultural milieu of shamanic practices of cultures that still practice exactly these traditions – of all of which I am a product. Indeed, when the two approaches of emic and etic are combined, a more complete view of a cultural practice can be understood. My own positioning from a rural village in Malaysia to the urban environment of Melbourne, Australia, highlights this rich mélange traversing disciplines and cultures.

Holy Theatre – 'Action' as a Trance Poesis

Today, as in the past, the masses are hungry for mystery: they ask only to become aware of the laws according to which destiny is revealed and perhaps to guess the secret of its manifestations. Let us leave textual criticism to academic drudges and formal criticism to aesthetes, and recognize that what has been said need not be said again; that all words, once uttered, are dead and are effective only at the moment when they are uttered; that a form that has been used has no

function but to urge us to look for another; once made, can never be exactly duplicated. If the masses do not come to literary masterpieces it is because these masterpieces are literary, that is, fixed; and fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of the time.

– Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, p. 253

Antonin Artaud's 'Holy Theatre', a term coined by Peter Brook in his book *The Empty Space*, refers to a 'spiritual' performance in which transcendence is realised, not in sense of organised events by religious institutions, but in relation to the Latin *religio* to mean a linking back to a mythological or primitive past, to an *illo tempore*, a beginning.

In Holy Theatre, Artaud was a predecessor to Jerzy Grotowski who saw it as a way theatre demands devotion and dedication in response to the actor's sense of calling beyond the craft.

When Grotowski speaks of holiness, he is very clear that it is intended for the actor and the notion of sacrifice:

If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. He repeats the atonement; he is close to holiness.⁷

⁷ Jerzy Grotowski,
Towards a Poor Theatre,
p. 34.

Grotowski 's Holy Theatre – Art as Vehicle, Verticality, Action and Inner action

In the context of theatre, Grotowski used a term 'art as vehicle' as a laboratory for his 'ritual art' – a term he used for a short while before his manifesto (with Thomas Richards) on the staging of his experimentations as *Action*.⁸ 'Art as vehicle' presented a vision of art as something that is not an aim in itself but rather a praxis in the forming of processes for transcendence.

It was in the early 1990s, Grotowski devised the terms 'art as vehicle' and 'verticality' to describe the form of performance art he was working on while creating *Action*. He explains:

When I speak of art as vehicle, I refer to verticality. Verticality – we can see this phenomenon in categories of energy: heavy but organic energies (linked to the forces of life, to instincts, to sensuality) and other energies, more subtle. The question of verticality means to pass from a so-called coarse level – in a certain sense one could say an 'everyday level' – to a level of energy more subtle or even toward the higher connection. I simply indicate the passage, the direction. There is another passage as well: if one approaches the higher connection – that means, if we are speaking in terms of energy, if one approaches the much more subtle energy – then there is also the question of descending, while at the same time bringing this subtle work into the more common reality, which is linked to the density of the body.⁹

Grotowski saw 'verticality' as a phenomenon in the categories of energy that he described as a transcendence from the 'coarse' or the 'everyday

⁸ 'Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and Action (an information of the Workcenter occasionally given to individuals before they witness the creative opus Action)' in *TDR: The Journal for Performance Studies* 43, 2 (T162), Summer 1999, p. 13–14.

⁹ Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 125.

level' to the level of subtle energy towards a 'higher connection'. The passage between this higher connection and the subtle energetic realms of being, according by Grotowski, has also the question of descending, of bringing this to the area of reality which, he suggested, is connected to the 'density of the body'.¹⁰ Prior to Grotowski's death, his successor, Thomas Richards, continued to develop the theory of 'art as vehicle', with Grotowski, categorising it further, based on his own perception from personal experience, to their combined effort to work on their opus from the *Action* to *Inner Action*.¹¹

In my experience of trance, the levels and states of trance negotiate this level of descent and reflect an awareness of a sliding scale between organicity of natural body and a higher connection. However, to Grotowski, this line should be taut. And for Grotowski, 'awareness' meant, 'the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but presence.'¹² Hence, 'Action' to Grotowski is not a 'performance', but an opus.

These concepts of verticality and inner action are shared, important considerations to the practices of trance in rituals, dance and shamanistic events. What drives me in this trajectory is a recognition of my own process, from a 'calling' to find my own idiosyncratic dance that embodies the very nature of my being to locating my own origin of inner actions and lacunal sources, where movements lacking in formal aesthetics can manifest – my verticality. I am interested in extending the concepts of 'verticality', 'inner action' and 'art as vehicle' to create a space for a congruent trance dance praxis. To do so, I propose a precise, detailed, systematic and physical trance praxis that is set in practice beyond the theory of a postmodern discourse. It will look at concepts of luminosity, presence, and performativity.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.125.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 127.

¹² Ibid. p. 125.

My line of inquiry presents the following questions (among others): How does trance contribute to the process of achieving this verticality and higher connection? What constitutes this subtle energy and what is its intrinsic transformative nature? What are the elemental drives of this trajectory?

In the relational system between live performance and spectators there exists an aesthetic that takes its focus away from the objectification of the event. This is the activity that creates an affect between spectators and performer that loops in a collective propagation, positioning a pivotal space for inner experience. The object of making performance take a back seat to the freeing of the inner choreographic elements. Grotowski/Richard's, 'inner actions' in their final research, was illustrative of their 'art as process', and lies no longer within the objectivity of traditional theatre making. In Grotowski's reference to the actor-shaman, within the process of embodiment in trance, there is a sym-poietic relationship between performer and spectator.

In philosophy, *poiesis* (from Ancient Greek, ποίησις) is the activity in which someone creates something that was not first in existence. To use this term in a wider sense, Martin Heidegger refers to it as a 'bringing forth' (physic as emergence). Heidegger illustrated poiesis as the blooming of the blossom, the coming out of butterfly from a cocoon, the plummeting of a waterfall, when the snow begins to melt.¹³ The first two examples refer to a gateway or an inception, an ecstasis, when something transforms and moves from its original position to become another – a transformation. Poiesis is something very much 'in process' and emerging.

Likewise, trance is a vehicle and agency in poiesis; as the act of poiesis it 'brings out' a transforming power that is encountered between the

¹³<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poiesis>, February 2021.

dancer and the unfolding state of the dance. Trance dancing in its transforming can be specified to an unfolding of a state out of itself.

Thus, at a philosophical level, I believe that trance poiesis proposes a transformative force. But at a practical level, I assert that the poetic act of trance may be instrumental in its fundamental undercurrents of artistic activity, as when the dancer, the dance and the spectator are brought forward in all their features of self-presentation to the 'autoschediatic poiesis space'; a space of an integration of the mélange of multiplicity, from external and internal elements.

Dance, Trance and Theory

'But the impulse to theorise about dance continues to meet with considerable resistance, not only from dancers and choreographers, but also from many dance critics and historians who tend to dismiss theory as either an irrelevance or impertinence'. Copeland and Cohen suggested that in accordance to this view, dance writing has the tendency to be descriptive and writers who bear off from this tenet are committing an 'act of sacrilege against the art itself'. Thus it is suggested that dance should not be open to judgements or theories or products of 'pure thought'.¹⁴

In opposition to such criticism, additional lines of literature for this study include those of Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou and other thinkers in certain philosophic trajectories as they have relevance to trance – these latter two, in particular, were important for understanding the 'zoning' of deep trance induction. Jacques Rancière on the concepts of emancipation in theatre and Grotowski's work on 'actions' to negate blockages (via negativa)¹⁵ to the actors are influential threads on the

¹⁴ Roger Copeland, Marshall Cohen (editors), *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, p. viii.

liminal states of my trance zone of resonance. But perhaps more significant is Alain Badiou's 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought'. In this chapter of his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou introduced the concept of 'dance as a metaphor for thought':

'Dance as a metaphor for thought presents thought to us as devoid of relation to anything other than itself, in the nudity of its emergence. Dance is a thinking without relation, the thinking that relates nothing, that puts nothing in relation. We could say that it is the pure conflagration of thought, because it repudiates all of thought's possible ornaments'.¹⁶

The dance I refer to runs parallel to this notion of pure thought. In a space devoid of ornamental and organised choreography, the dance is pure semblance rather than a formation of resemblance. Hypothetically, this can be understood as an 'empty stage' where the dancer stands naked, exposing the unconscious. Perhaps this is similar to the a 'body without organs'. Body without organs in Artaud's original conception provided the historical momentum for philosophical threads and the post-Enlightenment development of non-Western trance in the contemporary Western theatre and performance arena. Artaud's body without organs defined the zone of trance as a methodology for improvisational dance and was later expounded upon by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The influence of shamanistic trance practice is strongly visible here, providing a distinctive trait of psycho-physicality.¹⁷

¹⁵ According to Grotowski, acting, in its relation to an immediate space of truth, requires that the actor be free from the bondage of psychological fears and limitations.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Shamanistic rituals from a variety of religious and traditional practices have acted as a vital source of inspiration for the international artist since at least the nineteenth century. The writings of US director, Richard Schechner and his peers at *TDR: The Drama Review* for example, employed models developed from studies in theatre anthropology and shamanistic

rites to influence and inspire new theatrical styles. Richard Schechner, editor of *TDR, The Drama Review*, is also the author of *Performance Studies: An Introduction, 3rd Edition* (2002, 2006, 2013 Routledge), which links anthropology and rituals to theatre. His other books include *Public Domain* (1969), *Environmental Theater* (1973), *The End of Humanism* (1982), *Performance Theory* (2003, Routledge), *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985), *The Future of Ritual* (1993, Routledge), and *Over, Under, and Around: Essays on Performance and Culture* (2004).

Acknowledgements of related scholarship

My key resources and critical scholarly perspectives pin Badiou and Nietzsche in a central position for conceptualization of my thesis and practice. Artaud, Grotowski and Brook act as unavoidable references for most of my practice in terms of the Western aesthetic in the practice and performance making.

There is also a great amount of scholarship on altered states in *anthropological* literature, and some but not all of which is based on these *neuropsychological* assumptions. The large body of work by neuropsychologists on altered states is not going to be dealt in my thesis.

I acknowledge that there are also much classic anthropological work on Balinese, Javanese and Indonesian ritual and social practices. Although my thesis is not strictly anthropological, the research entailed participant-observer fieldwork in a culture which is not entirely my own and on a topic much discussed in anthropology. Some reference to recent scholastic writings and articles include Foley's *The Dancer and the Dance: Trance Dance and Theatrical Performance in West Java*, Brakel-Papenhuyzen's *Classical Javanese Dance: The Surakarta Tradition and its Terminology*, and Kartomi's *Music and Trance in Central Java*.



Fig 1. A medium in trance at a Daoist-Buddhist ritual in a temple in Melaka. Photo: Tony Yap.

Methodology

The praxial view of art resists the suggestion that art can best be understood on the basis of some universal or absolute feature or set of features such as . . . aesthetic formalism, whether of the strict or enhanced [expressionist] variety. The attempt is made rather to understand art in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures . . .

– Dr. Philip Alperson, *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (p. 233)

The core of my thesis is the investigation of trance and its application to the performative arts, in particular, dance and the physical aesthetics in performance. Trance is considered to be a form of concentration, of intensified and focused attention. In particular reference to the performer (actor/dancer), it requires an embodiment of a totality of elements both of the interior and exterior landscapes as a model for theatre and ritual. The aim of this research is to investigate the process of traversing traditional trance dance practices – particularly those of my own Daoist-Buddhist heritage, but also of other South East Asian traditions – to a contemporary dance practice. In order to follow this process, I will initially address the concepts of trance via my own direct and empirical accounts in my three decades of theatre and dance practice with connections to my early experiences living in a Daoist temple in a rural fishing village in Melaka, Malaysia. I will then discuss the multiple concepts inherent in the western classical and modern dance traditions and how this is reflected in the postmodern contemporary dance discourse. It will also be necessary to describe how embodied trance contributes to contemporary dance culture.

From my past practice of dance, I find there to be a useful tripartite sequence of evolution and development of trance. It is reflected in the evolution of the pre-modern to the modern to the postmodern. The first sequence is the folkloric mode close to an instinctual stage where the primitive being is fused to nature. The dance is the experience of a primal aspect of life itself, cyclic, spatial and concrete. The second sequence is derived from the first and involves the discrimination of all that is raw and instinctual towards an organised split or hierarchical interpretation of choreography. The third sequence links to its own authentic state in a process of emergence, in which the previously bounded choreography of the individually-dissociated approach is questioned and recontextualised to include a multiplicity, a polyphony of inter-looping voices that becomes an abstraction beyond the choreographic narrative. For example, the rawness of the bull trance practice of East Java, whereby trancers become possessed or embody the spiritual aspects of animism, can inform the more benign contemporary choreography to evolve to a third stage – a verticality – a transcendence of the individual self, a liminality.

My contribution to performing is in mapping a system for an improvisational zone of movement through an understanding of the ranges of trance states. In so doing, I am locating the agencies of an improvisational platform, which is actually a new paradigm of trance in dance aesthetics. What I am proposing is a resurgence of Asian traditional trance to a platform of performance at a deep level, a possession of what is unknown and has little knowledge of control – the trance possession in a contemporary context. This occurs within the concepts of what Peter Brook calls the ‘Holy Theatre’ where the invisible is made visible or, perhaps similarly, a kind of ‘Holy Dance’.¹⁸

¹⁸ In his book *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook channeled his writing towards four forms of theatre that he considered as essential: deadly, holy, rough and immediate. p. 42.

In such a dance, movements must display their full range of activity as well as link their exponential possibilities to the affectivity of a multi-dimensional montage of external and internal motives. Beyond the therapeutic effects of dance, it is the Holy Dance forms that are present and luminous in their transcendent affect upon both dancer and spectators. We have to lose ourselves to the portals of wisdom within us that are often hidden from visibility. It is a wisdom that is unspeakable and unexplainable but one we know through a system of inductions can access the autoschediatic kinesthetic and the whole body in toto – without separation into any disciplinary individual or group of organs (the vocal chords, organic breathing apparatuses, the feet, skin, etc.). The embodiment of states of being becomes the *primum movens* – that which moves without being moved – for expressing the invisible.

In this practice-led research I offer a philosophical exposition of how I understand the matured state after over two decades of my current work. The experiences and observations are the base materials for the conscious and critical manner of explaining dance poetics after the fact. I offer a descriptive exposition of the logic of a practice which has translated from my own corporeal sensations into words as a practice-led research. The purpose is to emancipate or transform main stereotypes, mental habits and deeply held presumptions in modern dance and choreography by unlocking practices from Asian traditional cultures that can be employed by contemporary dance and theatre. The transformative power of this research will be in the result of the discourse of the subjective, relational, collaborative, interpretive and performative. The research is largely subjective but also relies on observations and interviews in a diversity of participation. It hopes to open the imagination and to move dance and theatre communities to new possibilities in choreographic and dramaturgical practice.

Thesis Organisation

The components of the thesis are as follow:

- 1. Three main chapters
- 2. Square Notes sections
- 3. Autobiographical sketches
- 4. The Trance Garden paradigm

1. The three main chapters:

The three chapters of this thesis are thematically a tripartite exegesis of the my trance praxis: Trance, Dance and Transformation.

>Trance:

This part of the study will look at unique and common elements as well as agencies for the various states of consciousness. I offer a detailed description of some of the general principals and observations of trance induction and exit. I shall visit trance practices in Java and interview practitioners including Agus Riyanto, the founding master of the Bantengan bull-trance practice in Batu, Indonesia as well as Ibu R. Ay Sri Kadarjati Ywandjana, master of the classical Javanese dances Bodayo and Scrimpi. The key questions examine personal experiences and perspectives as practitioners as well investigate the philosophical backgrounds of these practices – that is, the epistemology constructing the practitioners’ methods of trance embodiment in order to construct concepts, thoughts, ideas, memories, emotions, logical reasoning and methods.

> Dance:

The second part of this investigation is the relationship of trance to contemporary performing arts practice. How can trance be translated

from its original context into language for practical application to postmodern performance? This chapter focuses on the channeling and mediumship of trance practices into an extended contribution to the postmodern movements in theatre and dance arts. This chapter inquires into trance poesis that constitutes the transformative phenomenon between audience and performer within a trance performance. It inquires into the presence of the performer and presents metaphors of illumination and flight to dance, through a portal in a zone of resonance through trance.

> Transformation:

The third section of my study is a theoretical and empirical investigation into transcendence as a powerful form of physiological transformation. *Action* created and developed by Grotowski in collaboration with Thomas Richards, is a type of performance and performative structure which constitutes the fully developed concept of the total act (akt calkowity), and it is positioned outside the context of usual theatre performance. This chapter also looks at the Grotowski’s idea of verticality and how the transformative power trance in relation to the performative arts can be effective. The equilibrium of the oscillating forces in the space between the inner and the outer, the negative and the positive, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. I introduce the ‘Economy of Lethargy’ as a scaling in the balancing of these forces.

2. Square Notes:

The dance aesthetics I am describing is, in practice, emancipated in a space I call ‘The Great Square.’ The performing stage can be represented by any shape or dimension, however the square-shaped space provides a type of ‘zoning system’ for the freedom of the affective that comes from the depths of entropic kinesthetic structures – the ‘dark side’ as defined

in Butoh and Jungian psychology. This square is how I use trance in my particular journey through the performative ‘temple’. In this thesis, sections of ‘Square Notes’ reflect the ‘Great Square’ performing space and contain theories and research which have been investigated through a structure of dance laboratory. These observations have been journaled and recorded in different forms: poetic anecdotes, sketches, recordings and conversations. Similar to the performance space of ‘The Great Square’, ‘The Square Notes’ that I have designed into the main flow of thesis allow for the communication of thoughts and observations free from marked contours, beginnings and endings for a different perspective of contemplation. It is hoped that these notes permit space to wonder.

3. Autobiographical sketches

In Grotowski’s structure of theatre, ‘what takes place between spectator and actor’¹⁹ is so crucial that theatre ‘cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live’ communion’²⁰. In structuring the importance of what can be effective in performativity, he focused on this horizontal actor-spectator relationship. Grotowski created a ‘poor theatre’, a theatre stripped of all elaborate theatrical ornaments – sets, costumes, props, and make-up. Thus the term ‘poor’. He introduced the idea of removing the blockages that hinders the expressions full inner spirit through the body – via negativa. Via negativa is not a set of skills one acquires but the eradications of blockages that hinders the full spiritual flow of the body. This is opposed to the idea that an actor can achieve techniques to act through a ‘bag of tricks’. Poor theatre through the actors’ inaesthetic kinesthetics creates the ‘trans-

¹⁹ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 32.

²⁰ Ibid, p.19.

²¹ Ibid, pp.16-17.

²² Ibid, p. 196.

²³ Ibid, p. 178.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 99.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 37.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 212.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 58.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 35.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 92.

³¹ Ibid, p. 38.

lumination’ in performance in which ‘the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses’²¹. It is when the actor stands ‘naked’ and in the moment of their ‘score’ that they reveal themselves in a ‘total act’ to ‘..., reveal your most personal and closely guarded experience’²². The total act is ‘the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself... It is a serious and solemn act of revelation’²³. ‘If the actor performs in such a way, he becomes a kind of provocation for the spectator’²⁴.

I refer to Grotowski’s sacred relationship between spectator and actor as the autopoetic loop, ‘The spectator understands, consciously or unconsciously, that such an act is an invitation to him to do the same thing’.²⁵ And this loop in an empathetic one – ‘This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings’.²⁶ As in the holy theatre, the holy actor sacrificed themselves. ‘[I]t is all a question of giving oneself. One must give oneself totally, in one’s deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love’.²⁷ ‘This is both a biological and a spiritual act’ – body and spirit.²⁸ Although the references could be religious, they are meant as analogous and secular.

This ‘self-sacrifice’²⁹ of the actor’s entire being through the medium of his body in performance is, Grotowski writes, ‘the essence of [t]he actor’s vocation’.³⁰ The total act is the source of the actor’s holiness.

The sacrifice of his own self, through sharing himself completely with another human being in a complete self-revelation, is an act of love that not only challenges the spectator toward an equal act of ‘self-donation’³¹ but is also an act which saves the actor. Grotowski writes that, ‘When you achieve this [total act] you will be pure, you will be purged, you will

be without sin... It is a kind of redemption'. This spiritual experience, this total act, is at the centre of Grotowski's theatre. It operates as the Eucharistic presence in Grotowski's 'new Mass'³².

An interpretation of the 'Holy Theatre' of Grotowski where the actors have a 'calling' rather than a professional career takes the semiotic of traditional practices where a shaman's 'calling' is a call to 'serve'. Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre' is a pivotal concept of a theatre of the body. My trance praxis is my calling.

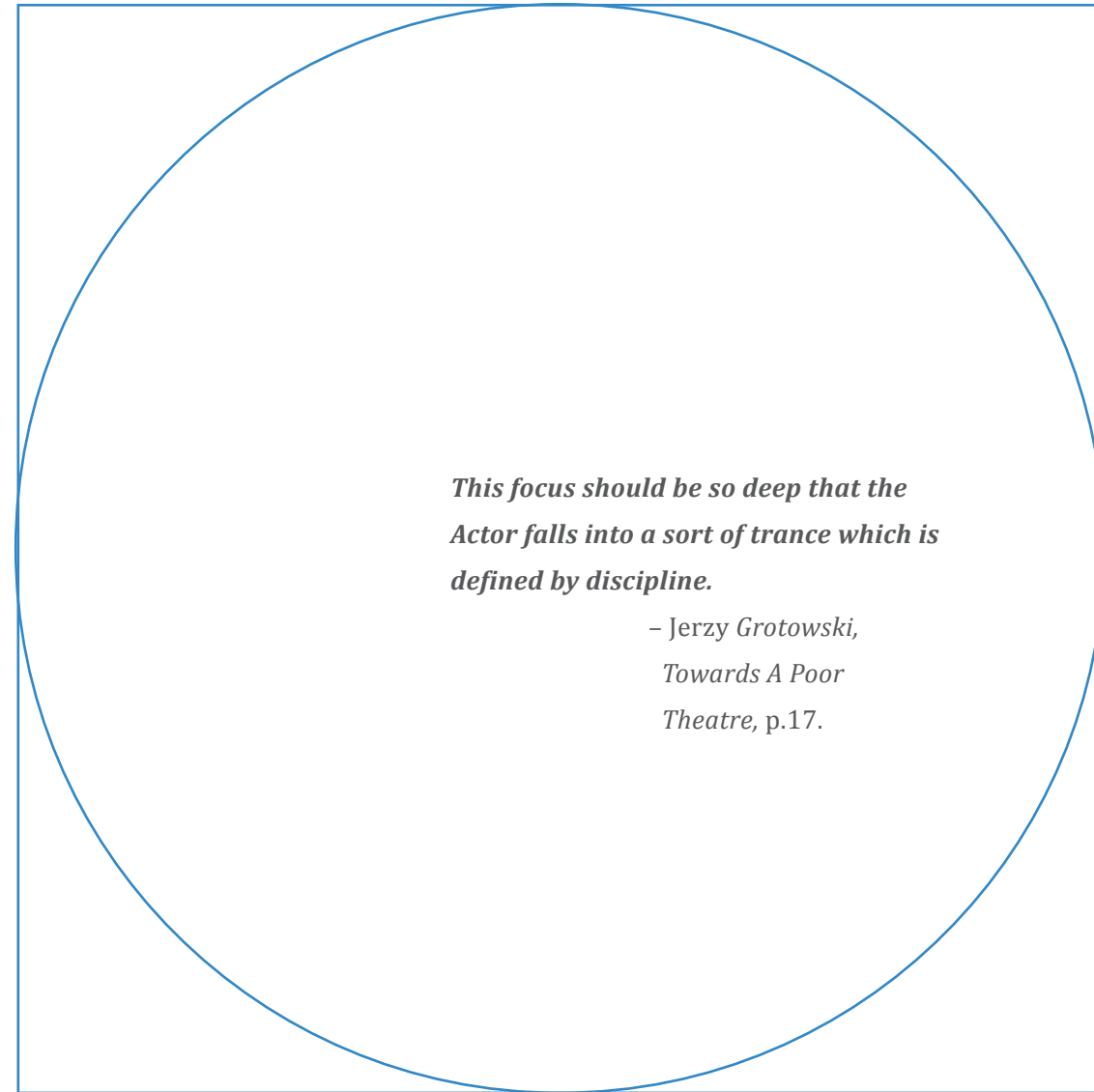
The autobiographical components of this thesis provide specific historical and empirical insights into how I see and experience this calling of trance. Both of these components are important in extricating the meaning of the actual trance platforms of my performance practice. If 'The Great Square' is how I use trance in my particular journey to the performative 'temple,' it began with my actual history and original cultural milieu, from Daoist temples and shamans to the contemporary urban arena of Western post-modernism.

4. The Trance Garden paradigm

It may be an effective alternative if I were to present to the reader a window from which to view trance as in a garden. Even though the main structures and designated boundaries might frame and define the garden with pathways, scrubs, twines, bulbs, rhizomatic species of grasses or trees, nevertheless together they grow without any moment of frozenness. Slightly off the middle, to the left, might grow a dominant tree, however the garden is one unified enchantment. Not only that, but if we look beyond the surface to also include the subterranean as well

³² Ibid, p. 192.

the air above the surface then this garden becomes many layered in its theory. The subject of trance is wide and to view it at a regular glance would do such a garden little justice. This study is therefore a window which allows for a certain level of emancipation for both the reader and the writer to view the constantly changing landscape that is the Trance Garden. Emancipation from mental limits and from habits of discerning this subject of investigation can provide a fuller understanding of this enchanted garden. Such an approach should dehabitualize us from the way we hold onto our own systems of ontology, and allow us to move beyond the linear model of analysis. Transformation is a revelation of the hidden by stealth. The Trance Garden is, for a dancer, an inquiry into life and death, into the interior and its relation to the exterior. It is a middle landscape on the surface of the earth which represents a boundary between gravity and flight.



Chapter 1: Trance

Overview and Background

This chapter on trance attempts to answer the questions, what is trance in general and what areas of trance are specific zones for accessing the depth and creative unconscious for dance and performance? The general introduction offers a wide understanding of different trance states and presents a model of the '5 pillars of trance focal modes', a system I have mapped to recognise and understand the complex range and levels of trance states, which serves to provide an understanding of trance states as a palate of utility for dance. This chapter functions as an introduction to the technicalities of trance, including how these technicalities manifest in two particularly contrasting trance practices in eastern and central Java, Indonesia: the bull-trance carnival of Batu; and the palace court-dance of Yogyakarta.

There are three sections to this chapter.

Section 1 treats my individual performer's experience in trance and presents what I call 'the Art of Trance'. It investigates the different types of trance states including my current understanding of the nature of trance states.

Section 2 introduces the '5 pillars of trance focal modes' and introduces a number of phenomena specific to the different states of consciousness associated with each trance mode.

Section 3 focuses on trance performance within traditional communities and includes observations, interviews and personal anecdotes from trance festivals of Bantengan, in east Java, as well as the Bedoyo tradition of courtly dancing in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. These two practices, Bantengan and Bedoyo, are shown to represent a dichotomy of trance practice and the aesthetics of these practices will take positions of reference throughout this thesis in order to propagate the understanding of the agencies and affect of trance.

Daoist trance-spirito mediumship

22.3.16

On writing – When a Daoist medium (spirito) goes into trance, with the elaborate preparations for induction, an evoked deity descends. It is an incarnate manifestation, a deity embodied in human form. We recognise the deity and its imminent presence. The devotees approach with humility and reserve. The medium becomes invisible as a human being, another being has taken possession of his body. We no longer approach the medium as he was and a reverence for the sacred manifests. Any incantations from this avatar now need a different deciphering. The magic powers lie in the deciphering. A sophisticated authority of metaphysics, through this intermediary the devotees are in contact to revelations and answers to their objects of personal inquiry. We can say that their personal questions are now made public to the community present or at the very least, to the translator. At the heart is the belief that a deity is present who is from a supernatural realm where the natural world may have a limited or exhausted range to grant solutions to problems.

The Techniques of Trance

Death as a metaphor for innocence

Trance and theatre connections: I was born and raised in a rural fishing village in Malaysia where temple and religious trance practices and events were natural occurrences. This childhood heritage in trance has certainly influenced and provided a distinct accent to my performance where, throughout my early performances, there was an unmistakable pervading trace of trance-tinged characters in my early roles in psychophysical theatre: a displaced ‘dead’ soldier (*Far from Where* 1989); the impassioned priestess, Medea (*Medea*, 1990); the prophetic Cassandra (*Agamemnon*, 1992); as the illusive demigod, Dionysus (*The Bacchae*, 1992, *The Bacchae – Burning by Water*, 1994); mad soldier, Woyzeck (*Woyzeck: A Good Death, a Perfect Death*, 1994).

‘First, I die. For the next hour or so, I’m dead.’ This was my experience. In the early dance theatre of the Institute of Research on the Art of the Actor (IRAA), to curb early pre-performance anxiety, I began saying this in my mind. Imagining a ‘dead state’ put me in a state of mind devoid of mental self-judgment and without the sense of being judged by others. It was my way of being absent, for the character. This was also a method of possession. And it was informed by my own personal experiences of death and grieving. Whilst I was rehearsing for the part of a ‘dead’ soldier in ‘Far from Where’, my eldest brother died. With no one in my immediate ‘Western’ milieu who knew who he was, or with any memories of our shared brotherhood, I found myself in an impossible position to effectively grieve. Over the next two decades I would also go on to experience the deaths of my father and later my mother. But how could I have a sense of death? In death, the living are in a specific liminal space for experiencing an absence of another. This absence I

encountered as a trance space and experienced it as a psychological ‘emptiness’: ‘I’ no longer exists and a void presents itself, ready to be filled.

In this encounter, a state of trance enabled me to enter the theatrical performance without distress – for the impact of these deaths had cleared some psychological obstructions in me; fear of failure gave way to an understanding of trance as a space for courage. The impact of death liberated my body to a profound sense of freedom to perform, and a strong dissociation from the living created a space that enabled me to attain a state of liminality. According to Grotowski, this is the very essence of acting: it is the phase of the theatrical ritual where the conscious ego is faced with the realities of the unconscious aesthetics. It describes the space of intimate engagement with the poetic realms of existence. This experience was the beginning of what I call ‘the art of trance.’

The Art of Trance

The American Psychology Association dictionary defines a trance state as being ‘characterised by decreased awareness of and responsiveness to stimuli and an apparent loss of voluntary power.’¹ Many forms of trance consciousness occur on a continuum of states (light, full, and deep states) that can be induced by any number of means, including fasting, hypnosis, meditation, and others. When in a trance zone, the dancing body can move in an unlimited way through the conscious organisation of choreography. It is a zone between being able to be alertness to non-alertness. In alertness there is a ‘voluntary power’, an awareness of a focus that requires energy and tension of the conscious. This level of voluntary alertness oscillates and tapers to the non-voluntary as one loses one’s attention in relaxation. In somatic terms,

¹ VandenBos, G. R., editor-in-chief, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. 2nd. Ed., Pennsylvania, G. R. Maple Press, York, 2007.

this activity would depend on conscious mental/muscular mechanisms. Alertness in a trance state is an economy of energy. We can recognise this attentiveness within the states of corporeal lax and relaxation; a softer neutrality that is ready for the spontaneous and autoschediatic impulses. As the trance is induced or ‘descended’ into, the depth of the trance and the interiority of imagination prevail from the unconscious. The trancer can access true and even inert psychological and emotional connections, linking into potentialities of the creative.

In this study, the poiesis in performance making – or the art of trance – begins by mapping a trance topography from traditional shamanistic trance practices. From the beginning of my investigation into trance during the 1990s, I have mapped a system of 5 five pillars of trance as points of reference or markers to recognise and understand the complex range and levels of trance states. These pillars predominately take eye focuses as points of reference. I created this model – 5 Pillars of Trance Focal Modes – to assist in understanding the wide spectrum of perspectives too often narrowly referred to as just ‘trance’. From this simplified key of trance states, I shall assemble recognisable internal and external elements that contribute to a total embodied presence. It must be noted from the beginning, however, that trance is beyond a rudimentary imaging at any one moment – it morphs in a life of its own in some form of holographic mutation. It is beyond simple illustrations to understand through these models of trance states. Nevertheless, they help orientate concepts and reveal trance in a choreographic poiesis.

The following model begins with eye focuses but actually seeks to understand five distinct trance states, ranging from a conscious state to a deeply possessed state. This model, in addressing each stage and eye focus, also addresses various psychological, physiological and emotional

effects particularly in the practice of dance. From this introduction to the different focus levels, I shall narrow the discussion to the areas of ‘deep trance’ aesthetics in its application to the praxis of my trance dance and theatre. Dance in the various realms and ranges of the five trance states is a theatrical event and can be characterised by the quality of the flow and movement between these states.

Ashikawa’s A & B Foci

Over two decades ago, I participated in a crucial workshop with the Butoh practitioner Yoko Ashikawa. Ashikawa was the only female member of Tatsumi Hijikata’s original generation of dancers running workshops at the time. She had developed a distinctive methodology in her own branch of Butoh after the death of Hijikata in the 1980s.

In this workshop, Ashikawa introduced two eye focuses, A and B. A focus is an external eye focus with particular points of focus; looking at particular objects with points of sharp focus. In this focus, the observational and conscious attention prevails. It would be right to say that most sports and athletics demand this focus for precise intention of actions. A focus has its attributes in the area of conscious attention. When I look at another person’s face in conversation, this focus is in the attentive mode. B focus is a wider focus, looking far into the horizon with a wide peripheral vision. Objects within short sight are blurred. In the rehearsal room we imagine looking through the walls and the audience in the immediate front. It is a look when one is seemingly stunned or in a daze, or, when on a journey, one looks out the train window at the far scenery, pensive and ‘lost in thought’. In this focus mode, the focus is not at any one object in particular; rather, it incorporates a wide vista.

The 5 Pillars of Trance Focal Modes: A-B-C-D-E Foci

Since participating in the workshop, and in the two decades of the convergence of my dance practice with trance exploration, I have expanded these initial two modes of focus to five – A, B, C, D and E. In this research, these five focal modes will frame the references of trance in dance. The research will look at the psychological, emotional, physical determinants within these focal states and levels of trance. In positioning the research thus, the imminent questions arise: Why does the dancer need to understand the states in the application to choreographic process? What are the agencies to get to these states? What are the affects for both performer and spectator?

> ‘A’ focal mode (very light trance)

- Narrow focus, sharp and precise point of focus and external vision
- High level of mental and physical control
- This state involves becoming more self-consciousness with a high level of one’s external workings. In a light trance, one is more attentive, alert and conscious of their mental and physical process. For example, in sport activities, this would be necessary for catching a ball or shooting a target.

> ‘B’ focal mode (light trance)

- Wider focus and open peripheral external vision
- Medium level of mental and physical control
- This level is recognisable by the dreamlike or meditative state. A person experiencing light trance experiences the first levels of ‘being

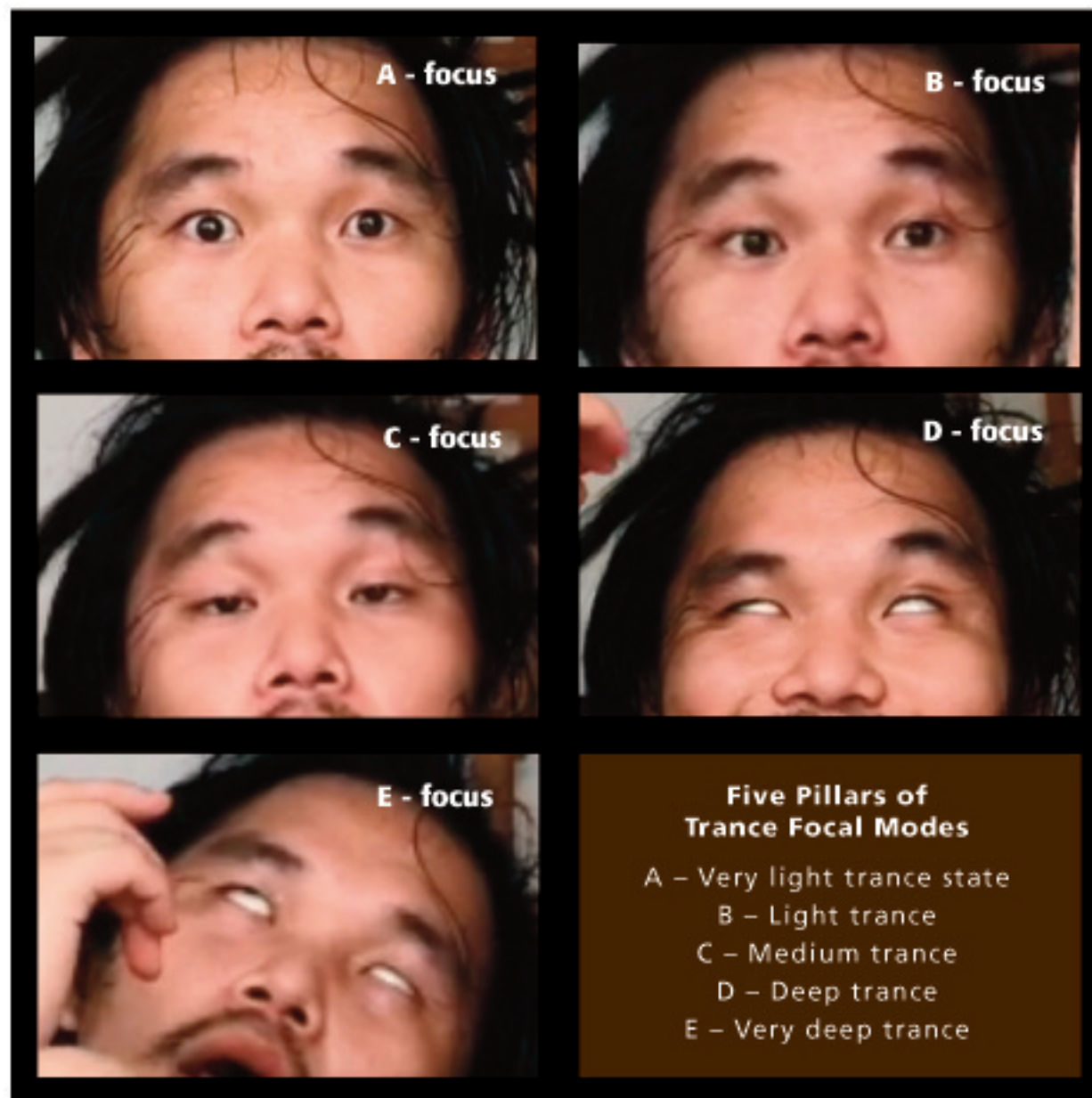


Fig 2. (left) The Five Pillars of Trance Focal Modes. Photo taken and posed by performer/student, Lee Kien Fei.

lost.'. For example, in daydreams or fantasising such as those who are absorbed looking out the window with a 'far away' look. The usual sense of chronological time is skewed, 'shortened' or compressed.

> 'C' focal mode (medium trance)

- Glazed focus and low level of blurred external vision
- Low level of mental and physical control
- This stage is the hypnogogic and hypnopompic state of close to falling asleep or just waking from deep sleep. It is characterised by feelings of losing sense of physical and mental control – also the psychophysical state in its flow. Within this zone of consciousness, one may lose awareness of one's surrounding, the sense of chronological time, and even the physical body.

> 'D' focal mode (deep trance)

- Rolled up eyes and high level of blurred external vision
- Very low level of mental and physical control
- This is a stage when one falls deeper into the sleep states drawing closer toward to the REM dream states. The drugged or drunken fall into this category. In this realm it is not uncommon to experience hallucinations, including auditory and tactile hallucinations. This state provides an open portal to the inner potential for imagination.

> 'E' focal mode (very deep trance)

- Fully rolled up eyes and no external vision
- No recollection of events
- This is the state closest to being in a total loss of consciousness. Much like the states one experiences during dreamless sleep or in a state of

coma. Of all the trance levels listed here, this state is the closest to the experience of transcendence and spiritual transformation that occurs in many traditional shamanistic practices.

In a general overview, A and B are external focuses sloping into the internal focuses of D and E. A is the modus of Ashikawa’s A focus – attentive, alert and conscious – while E is a possessed state where the performer is deep within the unconscious, eyes rolled up into the upper lids and the body exhibiting less predictable responses. C sits in the middle, a gateway between these states, the liminal between conscious and the unconscious. The eyes are half-shaded. B and D are placed in between indicating a pixilation in the gradation of the states of focuses. D, for instance, is a semi-possessed state where the actor has access to spontaneous inner psychophysical impulses and is still simultaneously congruent (images of the actors in Grotowski’s *Akropolis* come to mind). D is also a common state in many traditional trance performances where dancers and actors are seemingly in possession. An epileptic state charts the position where the person becomes lost to a level of no control of their physical or their mental impulses. The D to E state is where one moves in the direction of losing one’s consciousness; in an opposite direction (E-C) we can observe the person regaining impulses to regain control and physical congruence.

The Vertigo Superimposition of Liminality

In a trance dance, within the states of C, D and E, there exists a high level of the non-predictable where the unexpected happens. This palate, from the liminal state of C to the unconscious state of E, is what the trance choreographer refers to as a ‘glowing presence’ or ‘luminosity’ – the entrancing domain. I am referencing these three states as: C – The

Liminal Body; D – Dilated Body; E – The Empty Body. Together they represent the ‘Luminous Body’.

The dominant conscious states of A to C are more for when precision and definition is required, such as the technical precision required in the somatic area of sports and western contemporary dance. The liminal state of C is the creative pivot in the balance of the Apollonian (A) precision and Dionysian (D) ecstasy. A is focused on an external point, controlled and defined whereas D is internal in its focus and the external vision is blurred.

The Simple Empty Stage (see ‘The Great Square’, p. 141-142)

Although all of the five states are different from each other, I shall also present the typology of the autoschediastic improvisational space, where these levels can morph into each other, providing an emancipated space for ecstatic transformation – a space for an embodiment of trance in a mélange of these trance modi – a potent trance zone for poesis.

Hypnopompic/hypnagogic (C focal modes)

The middle state has a pivotal position in understanding the idea of the liminal or the portal between no trance on one end of the spectrum and deep trance/possession on the other. The hypnopompic state (or hypnopompia) is the state of consciousness leading out of sleep or a state of waking, a term coined by the psychical researcher Frederic Myers². Its opposite in the direction of sleep onset is the hypnagogic state; though often mixed, the two states are not identical.

Hypnagogic state (or hypnagogia), is the transitional state of consciousness leading from wakefulness to sleep – an opposite direction

² Myers, F.W.H., *Glossary of Terms used in Psychical Research*, Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, vol. xii, 1896-97, supplement.

to the hypnopompic state. Sometimes lucid dreaming and sleep paralysis are conditions that can be experienced in this state. Lucid thought and hallucinations (visual, aural and tactile) may also be experienced within this state of consciousness. Waking up from sleep, one can often be confused and speak nonsense, a phenomenon referred to by psychologist Peter McKeller as ‘hypnopompic speech’.³

These two states form a portal for the induction into and exiting out of trance. Induction towards deep trance (E focal mode) is generally hypnagogic while exiting out of deep trance is hypnopompic. This is evident in the trance rituals of all traditions, illustrated in this study in the East Java bull-trance ritual practices of Bantengan described in the next section of this chapter.

³ Peter McKeller, *Abnormal Psychology*, Routledge 1989.

God and Animal: Bedoyo and Bantengan

Bantengan – Agus Riyanto (Mas Agus) – Bull trance
Bedoyo – R. Ay Sri Kadarjati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar) – Royal court dance

In the Javanese traditions of Bedoyo and Bantengan, we have two excellent exemplars of traditional performance practices utilising trance. These are two very different practices from the same island of Indonesia with shared history and ancestry: Javanese regions moved from Buddhism (marked by the monumental monastery of Borobudur), to Hinduism (marked by the temple of Prambahnan) and now, to Islam and secularism. A syncretic Javanese culture – Kejawen – has held a firm underlining force throughout the waves of religious change and Kejawen’s Javanese traditions have encouraged all the religions including the current Islam in a mystical direction. Although they share this common ancestry, the Bedoyo court dance of Yogyakarta, Central Java and the Bantengan bull-trance rituals in Batu, East Java, are contrasted in many areas of disciplinary reference and provide excellent points for understanding how trance can be positioned in relation to a transcendence-effectiveness in both ancient traditions and the contemporary context. These practices of Bedoyo (highly defined and refined dance) and Bantengan (unbridled, psycho-kinetic physical rituals), are represented, respectively, by the goddess and the bull, the deity and the animal, the royal and the plebeian.

Putting these two practices side by side, the common and contrasting elements of practice and effect can be observed, especially from the lens of trance and its effectiveness for contemporary and Western avant-garde theatre. The traditional practices provide, from their specific historical, cultural and religious contexts, the ground for traversing my own context of contemporary performance – through an understanding of aesthetics, function, relationship to spectator, transformation and verticality.



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 7

Fig 3. Young woman in a Bantengan trance possession.
Photo: Lee Kien Fei

Fig 4. A typical Bullhead mask carved out of wood
embedded with real buffalo horns. Its eyes in a C-D
trance focus state. *Photo: Lee Kien Fei*

Fig 5. Two Bedoyo dancers in deep focus and
concentration. *Photo: Yogyakarta palace archive*

Fig 6. Young man in a Bantengan trance possession.
Photo: Lee Kien Fei

Fig 7. Mas Agus Riyanto, surrounded by bull trancers.
Photo courtesy of Agus Riyanto.



Fig 8



Fig 9



Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12

Fig 8. Tony Yap in a contemporary trance performance in Melaka Arts and Performance Festival 2018. *Photo: Steven Chong.*

Fig 9. Bedoyo master, R. Ay Sri Kadarjati Ywandjana, in a contemporary performance, *Shadow's Light* performed in Melbourne in collaboration with Tony Yap. *Photo: Damien Vincenci.*

Fig 10. Dancers, Tony Yap and Agung Gunawan in *Shadow's Light*. *Photo: Damien Vincenci.*

Fig 11. Dancers, Tony Yap, Agung Gunawan and Sagitama in *Shadow's Light* bringing the traditional Bantengan and Bedoyo into a contemporary context. *Photo: Damien Vincenci*

Fig 12. The ceremonial preparations for the a Bantengan trance session. *Photo courtesy of Agus Riyanto.*

Theriomorphism and Theomorphism (Animal and God):

By the means of shapeshifting, therianthropy in a mythological sense is the ability of humans to metamorphose into the forms of animals. Theomorphic is taking the form of God, or a god, or pertaining to or involving the conception of man as having the form of God or a god.

The etymology of the term ‘therianthropy’ is from the Greek *theríon*, meaning ‘wild animal’ or ‘beast’ (implicitly mammalian); and *anthrōpos*, meaning ‘human being’.⁴ It was used as early as 1901 to refer to animal transformation folklore of Europe. Theomorphism, from Greek, *theos* (God) and, *morphē* (shape or form) is the early Christian heresy that states that change in the divine nature is possible.⁵

Theriomorphism and theomorphism refers to humans, possessed or shapeshifted into deities or animals. It is about embodiment and haunting presence, spectres and transformations. This is the deep level of trance (D-E focal states), of possession and embodiment of archetypes of gods and animals.

Many traditional Asian dance forms often include the idea of dancers turning into animals or images of deities from their own traditional cultural references. It is at these points of transformation that it should be emphasised that the dancer in their embodiment of the horse or the bull is not imagining they are the form or character of horses or bulls but rather *are* these animals. Likewise, when the Bedoyo or *shanghyang dedari* ⁶ dancers lose their human persona they become possessed by or take on a total spiritual embodiment of a deity, spirit or god.

Trance is positioned here as a negation of the thinking state of imagining oneself as an animal and instead revealing the spirit of this animal through embodying psychophysical trance. Dancers drop their thinking

⁴ ‘therianthropy’, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Therianthropy>, Mar 2021.

⁵ ibid

⁶ Shangyang dedari is a Balinese dance performed by pre-pubescent girls (8-10yuears old), performd to ward off pestilence and plague. <https://www.baliaround.com/sanghyang-dance-the-sacred-dance/>, March 2021.

to embodiment through intense focus and trance. The intensity of focus in the trance state will depict this level of ‘being’ an animal or a deity rather than ‘imagining’ it. This manifestation of the animal or deity through the body and its psychophysicality of the dancer is the intensified focus of dissociation from ‘humanness’ – the way the human thinks and acts. The trance diminishes the human will to the ‘purity’ necessary for theriomorphic and theomorphic induction.

Interestingly, this notion of the possession state as found in the likes of bull trance ceremonies can also be found in the contemporary performance houses of the urban West. Not so much via the possession of deities or spirits but via a psychophysicality, an embodiment of the unconscious, an inaesthetics that is self-referential. Grotowski’s psychophysical theatre and the avant-garde dance of butoh are good examples of influences on the recent evolution of inaesthetic forms.

Introductory remarks on Bedoyo and Bantengan

This part of the study introduces key concepts such as techniques for the induction and exit of deep trance states, trance states’ significant affects and the relationship between the performer and the spectators in trance performance. In this way, the two practices of Bedoyo and Bantengan, from the perspective of trance, are useful in understanding how ‘old’ traditions inform the beginnings of performative elements realisable in contemporary dance aesthetics. It is useful to look at both practices side-by-side since, for example, the methods and systems of induction to trance are different between the two practices.

In researching Bedoyo and Bantengan, I interviewed practitioners including Ibu R.Ay Sri Kadarjati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar), master of Bodoyo in Yogyakarta, Java, and Agus Riyanto (Mas Agus), the founding

master of the Bantengan, bull trance ritual in Batu, Java. With key interview questions focused on their personal experiences and views as practitioners, we can understand how philosophical constructs and concepts were formed in their practice as well as how senses and logical reasoning, ideas and emotions can render these practices transformative and powerful. Nevertheless, my account of these two Javanese practices are in reference to trance; and on two levels, I shall present comparisons of the similarities and differences between them and relate these elemental components to my contemporary process of choreography and discourse.

The tools and techniques include physical exercises that can be drawn from these traditional Javanese dance performances, offering occasions for questioning the agency of the body in relation to memory, intention, affect and environment. The formation of my trance embodiment praxis can be drawn from such experiential events that include Bantengan and Bedoyo, then diagrammed and annotated, to be contrasted with philosophy and studies on the physiological mechanisms – muscularity in abstract poetic movements, kinaesthetic intentions and imagery. It is the study of movement semiotics, meaning-making and affective choreography. The praxis involves the study of signs and the processes of signs (semiosis) – hidden codes, metaphors, symbols and the unspeakable.

My involvement with Mas Agus and Ibu Kadar spans more than a decade. At the beginning of the revival of the ancient practice of Bantengan, Mas Agus and I met and in our conversations established a bond from our shared interest and experiences in trance – Mas Agus from a specific calling from his visions and dreams of his ancestors and myself from my childhood experience of Daoist shamanistic magico-trance practice in

my home village and, later, from the perspectives of my experiences in psychophysical theatre.

I met Ibu Kadar through a collaborative work ‘Srimpen Lost’ when I introduced the theme from my series of ‘Lost Boy’ solo performances. It was the beginning of my focus on the connections between emotional states, kinaesthetics and choreography. The early stages of my inquiry focused on the idea of grief (particularly from the death of my mother) and the sense of loss. When I related to her my story of a mother’s absence, Ibu experienced a sleepless night and wrote an ancient-style libretto (*tembang*) recounting a boy’s separation from his mother in a far-away land. With this heart-wrenching narrative, we began the many series of inter-cultural experimentations between the ancient and the new, from old Javanese forms and contemporary new works for urban Australia. The varied journeys and immersions Ibu and I experienced through living in the same region and participating in workshops and, later, through collaborative experimentation in new paradigms of contemporary work, have provided a rich resource for the investigation of how trance can inform both my practice and my thesis on ‘Trance-forming Dance’.

Bedoyo (Behhaya) - embodying the goddess

It has been said that someone watching a performance of Bedoyo forgets the bustle of modern life and is transported to the world of meditation, like the smoke of incense rising inside a temple. Association with meditation is also found in the mystical interpretations given to the formal designs of the dance, particularly as espoused by dance experts in Yogyakarta. In these interpretations, the dance is regarded as a symbolic portrayal of a person's spiritual life culminating in the experience of mystical oneness.⁷

Even though the Javanese tradition of Bedoyo adheres to strong dance principles, its impact emerges from the phenomenon of spectators being taken to a mesmerised state of trance. The Bedoyo dancers themselves are in a constant state of high concentration and mental focus because, in Bedoyo, form and choreography are precise and defined. The synchronised form and rhythm repeat in hypnotic tempo. Gestures from movements of head, hands, torso, hips, legs and feet have significant meanings and narratives. So skilled is the Bedoyo dancer that training must often begin in childhood. The personal motivations for the dancer are bound very closely to the refinement of movements, and royal ethics and dancers are held in high regard by both royalty and the general community. However, even though Bedoyo is a noble dance, the choreographic movements of every part of the body countlessly repeated in synchronised perfection take a secondary position, giving rise to a seminal spiritual nature. The inner, spiritually focused principles of the Bedoyo dancer provide a total embodied interpretation of the narrated libretto in a performance, added with the sophisticated rendition of the gamelan and choir.



Fig 13. Picture of early Bedoyo at the Royal court of Yogyakarta. Photo from the collection of the Tropen Museum.

⁷Hostetler, J, Bedhaya Semang : The Sacred Dance of Yogyakarta (article), *Archipel* 24, 1982, p. 128.

There are many myths that relate to the origin of Bedoyo. Ibu Kadar relates that today's relatively modern form contain steps that can be traced to the 3rd century. One of the myths explains how the dance was created . This was when Kangjeng Ratu Kidul (a mythical serpentine goddess from the sea) and the sultan fell deeply in love. Bedoyo was created by the mythical goddess for the sultan. Now the nine dancers in the present dance form represent the body and spirit of the goddess. The sultan was either Sultan Ageng or his grandfather, Senapati, the founder of the Mataram sultanate.⁸

Even though the eternal repetition as well as the underlying intent behind the movements in Bedoyo have been maintained, the dance has been modified over time to resonate with changing audiences. Where once the classical dance portrayed a king falling in love, today it also has resonance within a contemporary Javanese milieu. The depiction is now a metanarrative that is still full of meaning for the Javanese. The present Javanese may well be of the Islamic religion but they understand the narratives of the *Ramayana* and embrace the remnants of Hindu Indo-national relevance. Also significant is that, while the Bedoyo court dance was once performed only in the royal palace to royalty and officials, it is now open to the public. Ibu Kadar explained that ever since the 9th Sultan (Hamengkubuwono IX) declared in the 1960s that Bedoyo would no longer be confined to the palace, a social change was initiated and the dance gained popularity from many dance groups within the classical confines.

The objective of the Bedoyo dance is more than just the representation of Kangjeng Ratu Kidul – rather, Bedoyo dancers actively seek to be possessed by divinity. In order to be possessed by a deity, the Bedoyo dancer must engage in a focused preparation to induce a trance state through a form of kineasthetic concentration. The embodiment of a deity

⁸ In its etymology, the name Mataram itself was never referred as an official political state, as the Javanese often referred to their realm simply as Bhumi Jawa or Tanah Jawi or 'Land of Java'.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mataram_Sultanate, May 2021.

in Bedoyo is how the local Yogyakarta community refers to a dance where gods can manifest themselves through human form. In contrast to the unbridled Bantengan bull trancer (discussed in the next section), Bedoyo dancers do not seem to lose their sense of control and form. The nine dancers adhere strictly to a defined, refined and highly synchronised form – called *alus*. Along with the reduced number of four dancers in a similar dance form *scrimpi*, Bedoyo epitomises the finesse of the royal court. It is a strong symbol of the sultan’s power: graceful, precise, elegant, firm, grounding and with divine presence. Significantly, the Bedoyo is also a single divine presence embodied by nine dancers.

Bedoyo dancers train rigorously. The form is one of relentless repetition, slow without being tedious. Contrary to tedium, it is highly mesmerising. The dancers’ pacing and breath are suspended inside a trance state. The choir’s intoxicatingly pitched vocals are scaled to resonate with the low bass and grounding gongs of accompanying musical instruments. The drops and peaks of the energetic choreography evoke the complex and the abstract. Via the physical, this dance frames and contains psychological meanings – an interiority in a complex cartography of the Javanese cultural reference to a state of emptiness.

In a conversation with Ay Sri Kadaryati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar) we can observe a personal perspective from a master of Bedoyo, with the depth and wealth of knowledge of an accomplished performer and choreographer. Ibu Kadar learned the dance from a very young age and Bedoyo is very much a part of her way of living, her *raison d’être*, her passion. Her personal accounts and stories of her relation to Bedoyo are rare and insightful. My interview with Ibu Kadar also disclosed her accounts of the importance of the inner aspects of the Bedoyo dancer, as well as the psychological and spiritual preparations she must endure.

Bedoyo invokes the principals of specific philosophical tenets that one must practice in everyday living. For example, the concept of *Joged Mataram* consists of *sawiji* (concentration), *greged* (spirit), *sengguh* (self-confident), *ora mingkuh* (firm in principles).⁹ These form a portal for the ease of the true dancer, the *sati* or mindfulness of the performer. An open heart. Before a king or a beggar the dance remains in its true authenticity. Therefore, an understanding of *Joged Mataram* is essential in its relevance in dance practice as well as in everyday life.

The concept of *Joged Mataram* can be manifested in our concentration on something that we are working on that is based on passion, confidence, and which acts in accordance with the teachings of God. Therefore this idea can be applied to all areas of life and is not limited to the practice of dance alone, for all the references lead to the acquiring of the perfection of life (*kasampurnaning urip*) and the emphatic devotion to all beings.¹⁰ As Sunaryadi Maharsiworo described it:

The ideals of unity between ‘oneself’ (human) and the Divine are for humans to achieve *kawruh* ‘*sangkan paraning dumadi*’ i.e. *kawruh* (knowledge) about the *sangkan* (origin) of his existence and purpose in building the harmony of life. The harmony between the word, hearing, eyesight, thoughts and feelings in establishing a balance between passion and reason aims to defeat the bad and to reach the happiness of the world and the hereafter. The changes of the positions in the *bedhaya* (Bedoyo) dance, which are often made by the dancers, are a picture of imbalance that frequently occurs between the will and the logic. The conflict is described in dynamic motion, yet still looks harmonious in a constant tempo (*ajeg*), seems to contain the message that not all issues in life must be resolved with violence.¹¹

⁹ As accounted in an interview with R. Ay Sri Kadaryati Ywandjana, Yogyakarta, Central Java, Sept 2018.

¹⁰ K.R.T. Sunaryadi Maharsiworo, *Islam in the Javanese Cultural Pluralism and Keraton Performing Arts*, Indonesia Arts Institute, Yogyakarta. p. 59-60.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 59-60.

The classical dance in Java is still full of meaning for the Javanese. They may well be of the Islamic religion but they retain the narratives of the Ramayana and remnants of Indo-national relevance. The Bedoyo court dance, once performed only in the royal palace to closed echelons, is now open to the public.

The Bedoyo movements are becoming slowly modified in response to the changing spectators but the eternal repetition of the same valid meanings remain in a valid order. Once a classical dance portraying a king falling in love... now its depiction is related in terms of how the general subject in a contemporary Java can make new meanings. The depiction is now a meta narrative.

When the dancer is possessed by a deity, the dancer has taken necessary preparations to an induced state of trance. Embodiment in Bedoyo emerges strictly within the defined and *alus*, or refined form, highly synchronised by the nine dancers. Along with the *scrimpi*, Bedoyo epitomises the refined (*alus*) essence of the royal court, and thus this dance form is an important symbol of the king's power.

The dancers train rigorously, the form is manicured by masters in relentless repetition. This form in its full exposition is slowness without tedium.

The pacing and breath suspends inside a trance state. The C focus. The choir of intoxicatingly pitched vocals scales through the gamelan to the lower base resonances of the gongs. The drops and peaks of the energetic cartography of the choreography evoke framed and contained physical and psychological motions.

a slowness, a trance for unconscious thought

In the morning in old Melaka town, before the acceleration of the energetic, is a slowness I find naturally comforting. A slowness close still to the waking from sleep of the night before. A process of the dawn. A transitional moment of a trance presence from asleep to wakefulness. In the little township of Melaka with an old tag, 'a sleepy hollow', one can feel as the busyness of a bee in the morning. There is no hurry in this busyness. Efficient, slow-moving traffic, where pedestrians, cyclists, large and small vehicles all move in full awareness of each others' spaces and movements, so much so that it seems like there is no need for rules. This is how I've always remembered a slowness that is efficient; movements are within all possibilities in an unhurried, quiet speed.

In this space between the binary of fast and slow are variations of a perfect 'slowness'. The image of weightlessness of astronauts in space where the motions seem 'slow' is a levitation that has little to the reference to speed. Indeed they still dart through space like the bee. In the kinaesthetic parallel, the autoschediatic square is space free from gravity. A lightness in a range of somatic variation possibilities and

potentialities – a grace (Simone Weil on gravity). The 'flow', the movement, is without the overpowering weight of the thinking that thinks. Rancière refers this to a non-thought, a part of thinking that thinks itself. Nietzsche and Badiou expounded on dance as a metaphor for thought. The reference to this is found in Rancière's observation of the relation between works of the artist (Michelangelo) and his interpretation in a Freudian psychoanalysis of the artwork:

... if it was possible for Freud to formulate the psychoanalytical theory of the unconscious, it was because an unconscious mode of thought had already been identified outside of the clinical domain as such, and the domain is works of art and literature can be defined as the privileged ground where this 'unconscious' is at work. (Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, p.4)

Rancière linked the Freudian theory to the existing configuration of 'unconscious thought', in the idea of thought and non-thought.



Fig 14. Mas Agus Riyanto. He deciphered from dreams that his ancestors, who were custodians of the ancient practice, called upon him to revive the Bantengan. *Photo courtesy of Agus Riyanto.*

Bull-trance (Bantengan) - embodying the animal

Come together to uphold one of these rituals, the art of Bantengan is to bring to the surface the extra-ordinary. With sincerity, no projections, nothing nothing.

– Mas Agus Riyanto, Leader of *Bantengan Nuswantara*

Bantengan is a traditional folk trance ritual performance practiced in East Java, Indonesia. Now being presented annually as a carnival on the main streets of Kota Batu, in the Malang Raya, Mojokerto region of East Java, Bantengan's ritual practices combine elements of dance, music, and poetry/spells – all heavy in the realm of the mystical as a kind of magico-trance. In addition to the bull spirit possession, performers in Bantengan rituals are also possessed by the tiger and monkey spirits, among other animals and deities. The trance states vary in depth and intensity and are in the range of focus towards possession. The practitioners believe the spirit of their ancestors is represented within the possessed bull (*Dhanyangan*). Traditional Bantengan also utilises martial arts for its kinetic groundedness. The practice has gained in popularity; while it is widespread in eastern Java it can now be found across the island and has recently garnered international interest. My connection with Bantengan began in 2009 when I first met Mas Agus Riyanto, the founder of Bantengan Nuswantara, the biggest bull-trance festival in Java.

Banteng is a species of wild cattle (*bos javanicus*), and the name also describes the central features typical of the bull – the dance movements of Bantengan resemble the bull in the way it steps, butts its head and presents its power. Bantengan has developed to a form of ritual performance combining martial arts, music and vocals to form a theatrical ritualistic event. The performers often go into different levels of trance states with

the hope of being possessed by the spirit of the bulls. A Bantengan event will strike any non-initiated spectator with a profound sense of awe. It is a sonic, visual and sensorial energetic force and the impact is immensely visceral. The smell of incense and scented oil is joined with repetitious, loud music and vocal accompaniment in the intense mixture of the Bantengan performance and ritual. Spectators and marshals, including shamans, shout out as though to shepherd the untamed bulls. These shouts are accompanied with the sharp cracks of whips, an important element of shock to induce trance. Other spectacle displays include tiger, lion, some indefinable spirits and as well as feats of fire eaters. The 'bull' is carried by two people, one at the head and the other at the tail end. The head is often made with a real skull of a bull and horns are embedded into a carved piece of wood to form a fierce and ferocious look. The annual Bantengan Nusantara Carnival parades over a five-kilometre stretch on a main street in Batu. The parade attracts thousands of followers and spectators.

Ancestors play an important role in the induction of the possession of the sacred, carved bull heads. Mas Agus asserts that not just anyone can carve the bull head. The shape and ornament that is on the head of the Bantengan is 'ordered' from the ancestor's spirit. These sculptured and carved bull heads have actual horned skulls embedded in the carving. Mas Agus believes that the maker is guided in an unconscious trance, leading to the process of the carving and making of the bull head by what Mas Agus refers to as 'a power outside themselves'. Mas Agus shared an interesting difference in the evocation of spirits and the sanctification of the carved bull heads: in ancient times the bull head was first carved and the spirits were later invited from the environment (like mountains, hills, old trees, and specific sites in the natural environment) to consecrate them. However, in Mas Agus's case he is called upon, first, by spirits from different parts of the natural environment to preserve a bull's head that represents the spirit

before he even begins building a head for the spirit's abode. Mas Agus feels this change in the invocation may be due to the development of buildings cutting into the natural environment and a calling of the spirits to an urgent awareness of the diminishing natural ecology of the environment. He explained that when the natural environment is cut into by humans for intrusive constructions, a certain energetic power of the location (*genius loci*) is diminished. In this way Bantengan rituals uphold a certain eco-spiritual ethos, a heightened environmental awareness that has become the central tenet of their philosophical cosmology. A significant phenomenon of Bantengan is in the social shift toward the acceptance and understanding of the practice. Its renewed and vital practice is encouraging a radical transformation in how the practitioners understand their place as human beings in the natural world.

In Bantengan, the human-becoming-bull is the symbolic metamorphosis of turning into an animal of intense potential, and of exploiting the physical strength and power of that animal. The animal here is the untamable and the unbridled display of energy in a framed ritual of intensity as the human body and mind confront the spirit of the bull. The intoxication of the trance ritual is Bacchanalian and all the ecstasis is propelled in a centrifugal approach, from the centre out. Centrifugal dance here is not the smooth spin of the twirling dervishes, but instead, the repetitive forces swinging off the central body are formed from a physical and psychological counter restrained to avoid a total dispersion of energy. Bull trance in this reference is not so much an excess of stimuli but an intensity of a stimulus in a state of trance. Its contemplative regime lies within a visceral contemplation. Once the trance event is over, we would have witnessed a powerful catatonia that is outside of the normal level of the daily domestic or working life. This is a ritual to find balance. It is a necessary quake and dance.

Contrasting Bedoyo and Bantengan

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium; and is lost. The world will not have it. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. No artist is pleased. There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is on a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the other.¹²

– Martha Graham

During the process of my lessons in the Bedoyo form, I understood the similarity to the grounding process of the movement in other Asian somatic forms of martial arts and dances. A tension arises in an invisible cord within the core lines of the skeletal body. This provides the energetic vigor and presence within the core while the outer layer of the body is ‘softened’ to the kinaesthetics of *alus*, or refined elegance. The resulting effervescent presence is the potent palpability and the mesmeric trance affect of this dance. This quality of the *alus* comes from an opposite inner motion, a compression of the breath and energy, a centripetal anchoring. Thus, training in Bedoyo includes not only focus and concentration but also concepts of sacrificing the ego and the cultivation of restraint. The affect of *alus* is the inevitable mesmerism of a Bedoyo performance.

¹² De Mille, A., *Martha: The Life and Work Of Martha Graham A Biography*, New York : Random House, 1991, p. 264.

In contrast to the centripetal focus of Bedoyo, the Bantengan bull trance performer exudes energy and power in a centrifugal, explosive nature. The power of Bantengan is psychophysical, portraying the inert potentiality of the actual bull, often placid and docile. In the ritual-performance of Bantengan it is evident that spectators are affected with a sense of awe in response to the energy and physical force displayed. There is no fixed choreography in this performative ritual; however, like psychophysical actors in a Greek tragedy, the performers inspire catharsis through visceral aesthetics. There are displays of spontaneous surges of energetic frenzy, still within the frameworks of Bantengan aesthetics – grounded movements of martial arts and trance possession of the bull and other animal spirits. In Bantengan, the performers drop into deep trance whilst in Bedoyo the spectators are mesmerised, entranced as if the Bedoyo acts as a hypnotic device. In both forms there is an anaesthetisation through aestheticisation. Their forms sedate in order to open inner perceptions. Delineating the possibility for error, or the uncontrollable and the unspeakable in their own different approaches, Bedoyo and Bantengan both include the space for intentions and contradiction. The centripetal/centrifugal relationship is a dialectical push and pull of different forces.

I conducted the interviews with Ibu Kadaryati and Mas Agus in their place of practice. These environments were relaxed and provided a sense of ease for a natural flow to conversations, opening insights to rare personal accounts in relation to their practices. What became evident was the importance of their inner motivations in relation to their individual practices, and how pre-performance preparations were approached for their practices. Dancers in both forms often recount a transcendental affect that improves their sense of spiritual meaning and connection to their community. In Bedoyo, ‘emptiness’ is held by strong affiliations to the dance principals of *Joged Mataram* as well as a high

level of personal concentration and definition. In Bantengan, the practitioners drop into ‘emptiness’ from their devotional intentions supported by shamans.

The interviews also provided important clarifications of how both interviewees understood ‘trance’ and helped me position their understanding and definition of ‘trance’ within the Fives Pillars of Trance focuses. For both interviewees, ‘trance’ often has a deep reference to being possessed, and they both revealed in the interviews the range of dissociated states that the term ‘trance’ signifies in their practice. Ibu Kadar insisted that there is no ‘trance’ involved in the dance of Bedoyo; however, she did talk about phenomena that occurred in her performance experiences including external energies taking over her being that were beyond reasonable physical limits. Here she has clearly taken ‘trance’ to mean ‘being possessed’ (D-E focal states) by some external being, spirits or energy during the dance of Bedoyo. She emphasised the importance of concentration, focus and definition of form. She made clear in her reference to the possessed states of trance in other forms of practice such as Bantengan that these are not the same refined and defined nature of Bedoyo. Bantengan functions include intense energetic states of the ecstatic nature, with no conventional dance choreography to adhere to.

The question of the evolution and development of these distinct forms considers their positions of reverence that gives theatrical legitimacy in contemporary Javanese society and the wider world. The distinction between the refinement of Bedoyo and the intensity of Bantengan reflect the evolution and development of their distinct forms. The court dance of Bedoyo was once a practice confined to the palace grounds and performed exclusively for royalty; Bantengan, however, has been open to anyone as participant, performer or spectator, whoever has the desire to participate needs no prerequisite training or fixed choreography. The Apollonian and

Dionysian, royal and the working subjects, refined and unbridled, deities and animals, powerful and powerless, heaven and earthy, control and control-less, Bedoyo and Bantengan: the object is not so much to compare the two different performance forms or to observe how they can come from very different camps of movement arts, but how they complement each other in their affect upon and within the community and spectators.

What is the space in-between the two practices and what does it mean to performers and spectators? Can the discipline in the training of Bedoyo, which includes strict philosophical and physical principles for dancers be incorporated into the practice of Bantengan? Or vice versa? And why should such an idea even be considered? These questions are important in the understanding of the relationship between performer/participant and spectator/community particularly within the practice of Bantengan.¹³

Becoming Banteng spirits

In a forum before the 2019 Bantengan Carnival foreign artists and performers were eager to participate in the bull-trance carnival. They had reservations and wanted to understand the context of how they could participate. How can an outsider to a cultural ritual be included in the event as a performer? The artists questioned the relevance of their presence in this cultural milieu. Their questions were in relation to inclusivity, and they discussed their apprehensions, their fears, and how they understood relevant context to participate. I facilitated the forum and served as interpreter for Mas Agus. Mas Agus explained and introduced the idea of energetic spirits that drives a Bantengan trance performer to three different spirit groups: First is what he affirmed as ‘ancestral spirits’; the second ‘animal spirits’; and lastly, ‘jinns’. Whenever Agus speaks of spirits he often associates them in terms of their energetic connections to trance. These three energetic references provided me with new understandings to

¹³ The video clip of *Shadow’s Light* (p 150) is a contemporary experimental performance addressing these issues.

how one can uncover the barriers and gateway to trance inductions and exits. Understanding these three ‘energetic spirits’ helps open a channel to free the performer to a clearer context of possession and the unconscious.

Ancestral spirits: Mas Agus’s explain that these ‘spirits’ come from the souls of ancestors. In this category the spirit is found in a system of beliefs, heritage, tradition and linked to one’s own family lineage. The local community share ancestral traditions to a collection of ancestral spirits. This presents questions to the context in which foreign contemporary artists of different ancestry can encounter barriers towards a free participation in Bantengan rituals. How can they assimilate to this understanding of ‘ancestral spirits’ to their approach to the rituals? They do not share ancestry nor religious, cultural and environmental milieus. The idiosyncratic ‘spirits’ have to be from their own community, recognisable in the intensities they present in the symbolism of human spirits.

As an example of the importance of ancestral spirituality, let us take the Balinese dance of *Sanghyang Dedari*. In this dance, two prepubescent virgin girls, untrained in the dance, perform in perfect choreographic synchronicity, acquiring their power through trance possession of ancestral spirits. Accomplished dancers traditionally perform this dance, or *legong*, and the young dancers are not foreign to the form: they share the same geography, history, biology and traditions of common ancestors. They have seen the *legong* performed on many occasions and the examples of professional dancers they have seen are triggered and mirrored in their own performances. In a state of trance, with a vanquished barrier, they are able to mirror the dances they have watched without training because they believe the deities of their ancestral spirits, *Sanghyang Dedari*, can take possession of their body. The shared ancestral spirits provide the

idiosyncrasies, the base of which is the seat of emotions and character for the dance. The spectators from the community also share the heritage and have an affinity for this dance phenomenon. It is the spirit of their own mythological creation. In contrast, foreign spectators can at best understand the synopsis of the *Sanghyang Dedari*, but will lack the sympathetic competency needed to provide a spiritual engagement with the dancers. They are voyeurs and spectators in curiosity, sitting outside of the collaborative loop that makes the magical experience. The dancers in the eyes of the locals are not exotic; they all hold the dance to be sacred. There is a clear distinction for the Balinese when they perform for tourists and when they perform in an actual ritual of common ancestral spirits and sacredness. Likewise in Bantengan, the local community in shared common ancestral heritage and spirits creates the vigor, collectively propelling and looping between spectators and performers.

Animal Spirits: In Bantengan, this energetic symbol is encapsulated in the bull, often calm and passive in contrast to the power and strength it possesses. When agitated or activated, the bull displays a force that is violent and wild. Besides the Banteng bull, performers in the rituals are often possessed by spirits of tigers, lions and monkeys. In Bantengan, these are secondary possessions to the main totem of the Banteng. In the energetic steer of what is animal, this ritual event is a display of the wild, the unbridled and untamable beast.

In the old Javanese culture of ethics and behavior which includes a high level of politeness, respect and humility, Bantengan is a carnival platform, framed with a space held by shamans so the participants could ‘lose control’, become animals in their psychophysical intensity. Whilst the trancers may present themselves as symbols and characters, their intensity is very evidently human. The physical animal heads, masks and costumes

are in their representation the hidden psyche of the community. They are no longer puppets of animals but human-animals. The bull masks and costumes may have resemblance to the actual animal but the human is simultaneously unmasked. What we experience is a human state of trance in transformation, the evidence of possession. No longer is there the symbolism and characteristics of the bull, but the collective human banteng-ness and, in deep trance, their relationship to nature through becoming the bull. The force of nature is human in its possibility to be intense and also innocent. The unbridled and cathartic intensity revitalises and recovers the health of the community.

Jinn (the hidden spirits): The etymology of jinn is in its origin an ‘Arabic collective noun deriving from the Semitic root JNN (Arabic جِنّ, jinn), whose primary meaning is ‘to hide’ or ‘to adapt’. Some authors interpret the word to mean, literally, ‘that are concealed from senses’. Other cognates include Arabic *majnūn* (‘possessed’ or generally ‘insane’) or *jannah* (‘garden’ or ‘heaven’)¹⁴. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* explains ‘jinn’ as ‘In Arab and Muslim traditional stories, a magical spirit who may appear in the form of a human or an animal and can take control of a person’. Because of its resemblances in form and sense, 18th century French translators of *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, translated jinn as genie, from the Latin *genius*. In the rituals of Bantengan, performers in trance, apart from the ancestral and animal homogeneity, display a certain uniqueness of autonomous traits beyond the collective ancestral idiosyncrasies. It has an individualistic psychophysical abnormality. Through the deep state of trance, animalness is reformulated into an otherness from the collective into a personal form of the unconscious. In this reference and perhaps also through the ‘animal spirits’ mode, the foreigner can enter this ritual without any conflict with the common ancestry requirement. The foreign performer can be autonomous in their deep trance zone.

¹⁴ From the etymology of Jinn: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jinn#Etymology>, December 2020

For the foreign performer participating in the Bantengan, awareness of this context provides an emancipated space for engagement. The human-animal can have an authenticity without the necessity of conforming to immediate collective ancestry. In my observations, this understanding also enables the foreign artists to avoid cultural misappropriation while still experiencing the scale of the mass trance event. It invites them to a clearer framework whence they can lose themselves in deep trance and become intense in the ecstatic space of their own distinctive ancestry. They do not need to act or copy gestures. The contemporary performer, in the decade since the revival of the practice of Bantengan’s revival, has been encouraged by Mas Agus. He expressed in his interview that foreign participation had given the festival a legitimacy in the contemporary social and cultural milieu. It follows, therefore, to conversely apply the context for incorporating the agencies of Bantengan into new contemporary practices.

Becoming Animal / Becoming God

How can the understanding of the practices of Bantengan and Bedoyo inform my praxis? In my presentation of ‘Animal/God: The Great Square’, I recontextualise these traditional practices into a post-modern performance platform. The understanding of Bantengan and Bedoyo through immersive experimentation in performance-making provides a different perspective to Western movements of theatre and dance, especially in the context of ideas put forward by Artaud and Grotowski. The difference lies in the methods of embodiment through the understanding of trance – how trance affects a performer’s access to their unconsciousness and the affect on/with spectators.

Becoming, in a trance zone of resonance, is of the realm of the indiscernible, of the undecidable, within the C-D-E focal modes. Deleuze’s

concept of becoming describes the thing not in a fixed state but as constantly changing, as he exemplified from *Alice in Wonderland*:

When I say ‘Alice becomes larger’, I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present.¹⁵

To say that the Bantengan trancer is becoming more like a bull is to say they are becoming less like a human, and in regaining their human-ness they become less of a bull. This is like saying that the trancers in their human states simultaneously become more and less human. In the Bantengan carnival thousands of trancers and spectators get involved in the carnival as individuals, pairing to form a ‘bull’, a group with shamans, and supporting individuals from their team. No two bulls are the same in their forms as each would be sanctified with different spirits or divinities from the sacred energies of nature. In Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Memories of a Sorcerer’, the authors observe that becoming-animal always involves ‘a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity’¹⁶:

It may very well be that other agencies, moreover very different from one another, have a different appraisal of the animal. One may retain or extract from the animal certain characteristics: species and genera, forms and functions, etc. Society and the State need animal characteristics to use for classifying people; natural history and science need characteristics in order to classify the animals themselves. Serialism and structuralism either graduate characteristics according to their differences. Animal characteristics can be

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 1

¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 273.

mythic or scientific. But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. I am legion.¹⁷

In the state of possession, in deep trance of D-E focal modes, the bull trancer immerses in a zone Deleuze and Guattari describe as ‘a zone of the indiscernible, of the undecidable’. The bull-trancer is in no way a bull in its animal form, but outlines a certain bull-ness that is within the shadow of human-ness. Instead of a formalisation of the bull that is strong, with an untamable force, the bull that looks at the humans from the wild, there is the trance zone of the ‘indiscernible’ and of the ‘undecidable’. ‘Man becomes animal, but he does not become so without the animal simultaneously becoming spirit, the spirit of man, the physical spirit of man presented in the mirror as Eumenides or fate’.¹⁸

In terms of a performance it involves the audience differently in comparison to a Shakespearean theatre. The narrative and meaning does not come from the hermeneutic script but lies heavily in the semiotics of visceral symptoms of the energetic body. In neurological terms the viewer experiences the exact states of the trancer mirrored in their own neurons duplicated by witnessing. The audience feels and becomes the gods and animals themselves.

The similarities to the Bedoyo/Bantengan dichotomy provide perspectives from the philosophical and theological on how performance can be understood in their affects especially in their relationship to spectators.

‘Immanent’ is a mid-16th century word from late Latin *immanent* - ‘remaining within’, from in-‘in’ + manere ‘remain’¹⁹. The notion of immanence maintains that the divine is manifested into the material domain as a divine presence according to some philosophical and metaphysical theories. Immanence on the other hand is usually

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 239

¹⁸ Deleuze, G., ‘The Body, the Meat and the Spirit: Becoming Animal’, Lectures by Gilles Deleuze. From Tracy Warr (ed.), *The Artist’s Body*, translated by Liz Heron, Phaidon Press, London, 2000, p. 197.

Originally published as ‘Le corps, la viande et l’esprit, le devenir-animal, in Francis Bacon , Paris, *Editions de la difference*, 1981, pp. 19-22.

¹⁹ From etymology online: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/immanent>, December 2020.

suggested by the spiritual permeating the mundane world. In contrast, the theories of transcendence depict the divine presenting itself outside the material realm.

In trance-mediumship including trance dancers, it is said that the gods/deities manifest themselves through the dancer as vassals/mediums. That is immanence. The dancer, in trance, in their training to ‘empty’ themselves is creating a portal as a way of embodiment of the divine. The divine refers to a likeness of God or a god. The meanings include ‘sacredness’ when referred to the divine as it is distinguished from animal in reference to the supernatural. Bedoyo has its origins linked in particular to the mythical Queen Nyai Loro Kidul from the southern sea, the Indian Ocean, according to the Javanese mythology. The Javanese regard the mythical queen also as the spiritual consort, in addition to the human queens to the Mataram Sultans of Yogyakarta, beginning with Senopati (founder of Mataram sultanate) and continuing to the present. (See p. 53)

Becoming God / Animal: What constitutes divine and animal?

In an earlier section of this chapter I asked certain questions about the relationship between Bedoyo and Bantengan: What is the space in-between the two practices and what does it mean to performers and spectators? Can the discipline in the training of Bedoyo, which includes strict philosophical and physical principles for dancers, be incorporated into the practice of Bantengan? Or vice versa? And why should such an idea even be considered? I believe it is from within the very notion of ‘animal’ that answers to these questions can be discovered.

The English noun ‘animal’ in its etymology is derived from the Latin word *animale* meaning ‘living being, being which breathes,’ a noun use of the neuter form of the adjective *animalis*, meaning ‘animate, living; of the air,’ in

turn derived from *anima* ‘breath, soul; a current of air’. From the late 14th century, ‘animal’ was used as an adjective meaning ‘pertaining to the animal spirit of man,’ that is, ‘pertaining to the merely sentient (as distinguished from the intellectual, rational, or spiritual) qualities of a human being’.²⁰

Joged mataram affects the breath as conscious breathing affects the mind. Stress confines the breathing. In many traditional mythologies, the physical breath of the body also refers to a divine breath. It is sacred. It is ‘chi’ in Chinese and ‘prana’ in Sanskrit literally meaning ‘breath’ as well as referring to a universal life-force. In many religious traditions – Kabala, Sufi, Hindu and Christian mystics and Daoist – inner healing is connected to the understanding of this power of breath and entering to states of spiritual consciousness. Likewise, when a Bedoyo dancer, as an individual, dances and breathes within a body of nine dancers, they sacrifice their own body to become a vassal for the possession/appearance of a deity. The apparition is an affect of the training of minds and body to a breathing-to-life, enabling this phenomenon of a collective theomorphism.

It is noted that this linking energy with breath is now fairly conventional in physical training and performance praxis, extending out of 20th century Modernism, most notably Martha Graham who was quite explicit that her dance is driven through the solar plexus, and hence through breath²¹.

Although this chapter is under the banner of ‘Trance’ and the next chapter is ‘Dance’, there is an inevitable juxtapositioning as the praxis is a trance-dance. The significance of this praxis involves performativity; thus the scope of trance has to involve the poesis in the relationship between the performer (actor/dancer) and the spectator. The subjectification can exist in both parties and the effects morph in transitional ontology as an autopoietic looping.

²⁰ Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/animal>, Feb 2020.

²¹ De Mille, A., *Martha: The Life and Work Of Martha Graham A Biography*, New York : Random House, 1991, p. 264.



Fig 15. Tony Yap , Brendan O'Connor and musician, Reuben Lewis in *A Gaze* as part of *Dionysus Molecule Series*, MAP Festival 2016. Photo: Steve Chong

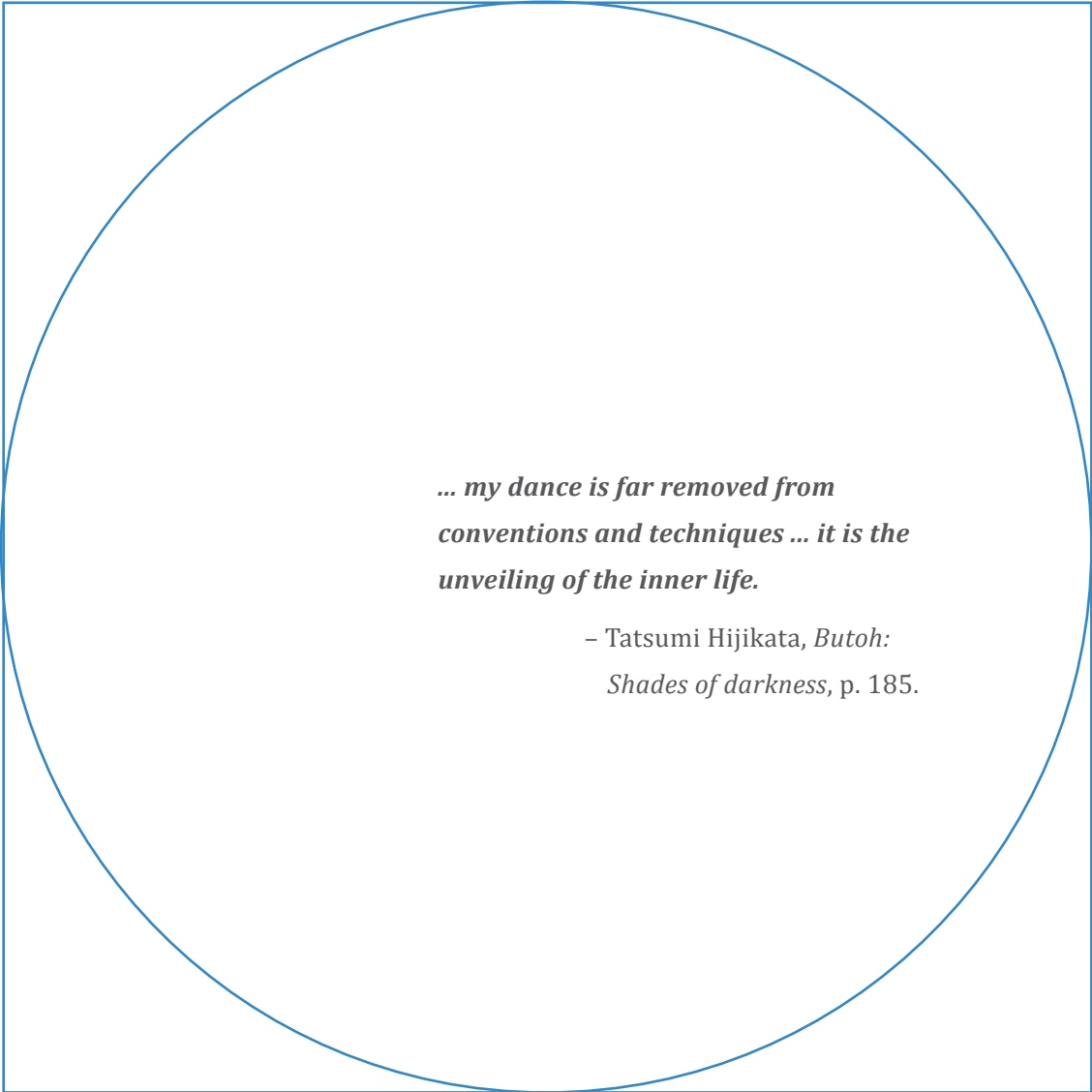
Becoming Bull, Becoming Intense (Minatour-morphosis)

In 2015, it would have been six years since Brendan and myself had participated in the annual Bantengan carnivals. In our performance trance praxis experimentations within a duet – the ‘Dionysus Molecule Series’ – which began with questions of masculinity and the contrast of age difference, racial division (East and West) and individual affects from the deaths of our fathers, we were to experience an unexpected degree and extent of trance in psychophysical intensity. We were prepared, enthusiastic for a deep immersion through the immensity of the ritual event; however, what was about to happen was beyond our expectations of somatic extremities.

Thousands of people from the hinter villages and towns lined the sides of the five-kilometre main road in Batu. Mas Agus and his group of Bantengan trances and shamans began their evocations from a spot, a kilometre from the finish. Incense, smoking caldrons of frankincense and jasmine oil intoxicated the senses to a frenzied state combined with the amplifications of drums, flutes and chants. Our necks softened, bodies limp and vision blurring, we were anesthetized, losing the feel of our bodies, whilst a tremor built in the core. The body began to quiver, and at the crack of whips, we exploded in spasms with muscles clenched and quivering to unbridled sequences of movements. Banteng bull trancers leap in the united frenzy.

Brendan and I danced the beast as our Banteng group began its last kilometre of carnival stretch towards an arena at the finish. Sporadically the group would erupt in ecstatic delirium pushing the extent of psycho-physicality to its limits. Physically exhausted from our three-hour long bull trance, we finished with the ritualistic help of shamans in ritualistic exiting our deep trance. They splashed water onto our faces, chanted mantras, and pressed and flicked our temples and foreheads, eventually taking us out of trance. We were in total exhaustion, gazing at each other, beaming with adrenaline and endorphins in a euphoric daze. The body no longer quivered and a softness returned with the exhaustion. At this moment the unexpected happened. Two shamans brought over two heavy Banteng bull heads and put them over our heads. These bull heads weigh some 30 kilograms each. Induced again into deep trance, we heaved the bull heads up with an energy so charged our breaths were audible. The bodies no longer our own, we lost sense of linear time; what went for another hour seemed much less. When the shamans exited us again out of trance to finally finish this time there was no sense of the lethargic body. I recall feeling very light and calmly exalted, sensing the return of the human body. A lightness of being. The sky seemed near, and the crowd as one entity in a defining ecstasy.

Chapter 2: Dance



*... my dance is far removed from
conventions and techniques ... it is the
unveiling of the inner life.*

– Tatsumi Hijikata, *Butoh:*
Shades of darkness, p. 185.

Overview and Background

In the previous chapter, I outlined an understanding of trance in general and presented a zone comprised of a range of trance states specifically applicable to dance choreography and performance. In close relation to trance, I introduce conceptual ideas such as luminosity, presence, and the auto-poesis that loops between performer and spectator. These are performative components of the trance zones of my practice and important in the concept of ‘The Great Square’. I introduced two traditional Javanese practices of dance and performance, Bedoyo and Bantengan, and described their relation to trance and the effects of trance. The Bedoyo and Bantengan traditions, representing a dichotomy of form and intention, provide a skeleton of psychological, physical and communal references and grids for constructing the framework of my practice. In asserting my practice via a formal performance, informed as it is by the somatic grammar of traditional trance, it is logical that I provide a definitional context for my dance and position my praxis within the arena of contemporary performance.

I address my own dance aesthetic from such historical and traditional points to practices of the contemporary. Eventually the point of this chapter is to arrive at a definition for my dance practice (seeking a place in the post-modern position as an aesthetic) – informed dominantly and originally by the traditional shamanistic trance practices within the backdrop of my childhood experiences in a Daoist temple in rural Malaysia.

Trance within a *zone of resonance*, as a chamber where I could drop into, is a morphing state triggering spectrums of movements. Dance is the term I use when I refer to my practice of movement aesthetics. This aesthetics is strongly influenced by the trance trajectories outlined in the previous chapter. The impact on performativity in relation to trance correlates to the important interconnection between performer and spectators. Peter Brook in his book *The Empty Space* states, ‘I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged’.¹ From this simple structure – movement in space + spectator = theatre – I shall build additional spectrums in the oscillating relationship between spectator and performer, from the spectator as a passive viewer to the auto-poetic loop the performer and the spectator actively create together, as well as various implications of visceral and semiotic effects.

What is dance? ... towards inner experience

Etymology shows that dance comes, c. 1300 CE, from Old French *dancier* (Modern French *danser*), which is of unknown origin, perhaps from Low Frankish **dintjan* and akin to Old Frisian *dintje* ‘tremble, quiver’.² There is, in this etymology, nothing to denote form or audience: in fact, this ‘trembling dance’ has something of the therapeutic in it, just as shivering comes from a corporal response to an external condition, as in cold temperature or a psychological fear. As such, dance is unhinged and emancipated, slave to no form and radically and irrationally violent and energetic. It is not the dance of the virtuosic and submissive, rather it is flight in a zone of trance, movement within the flow of thoughts. When you find yourself dancing your own set of movements and kinetic

¹ Brook, P., *The empty space*. 1968, London,: MacGibbon & Kee. p.9.

²A word of uncertain origin but which, through French influence in arts and society, has become the primary word for this activity from Spain to Russia (Italian *danzare*, Spanish *danzar*, Rumanian *dansa*, Swedish *dansa*, German *tanzen*).

expressions you are at your own center, and if there is an audience, they see your thoughts and soul. The dance is your feelings, emotions, thoughts that you cannot put into words. In these depths, the dance that takes form is unlike life; rather, it is akin to the shadows cast from life’s light, and so these aesthetics are darkness, embodied.

In this chapter I construct a framework in which a performer can communicate this darkness. I show how the dancer as the open body is a portal to the depth of the total flow of the unconscious illuminated. In my practice, the will and external sense of control take secondary positions as frameworks and scaffolding for the beautiful emergence of interiority. This is what Hijikata referred to as the *ankoku butoh* - dance of darkness (D-E Focal states). And yet, it is worth understanding that in the philosophical line of Butoh, it is always pointed out that for all its darkness and emphasis on death, Butoh is life-affirming.

The Great Square is my practice of a contemporary dance as a somatic aesthetics and a space for improvisation. My trajectory focuses on the power of a transformative transcendence in dance. This chapter articulates the framing of *The Great Square* as a conceptual space emancipated for the improvisation of presence in a shared community of spectators and performers. This is dance, in its locus within trance, as an autoschediatic improvisational act – a ‘tremble’ and a ‘quiver’ that transforms. (for e.g., see clip *Animal/God - The Great Square* on page 150).

In the movie *Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999)³, Galoup, an ex-Foreign Legion soldier, recollects his past wondrous life with a troop of soldiers in the Gulf of Djibouti. The soldiers, in training for no apparent war, make the daily, physical regimen more a choreography for a misplaced dance; a preparation for battle no longer necessary. Galoup’s existence in this place is complete with strict trainings and almost

³ Susan Haywood, interestbly expounded Denis’s films focusing on issues raised by the legacy of colonialism and post-colonialism in ‘Claire Denis's "Post-colonial" Films and Desiring Bodies’, *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p.39-49.

choreographic routines. However, the arrival of a new young and attractive recruit, Sentain, started an unexpected stream of jealousy in Galoup's mind and triggers his desires, impulses, tendencies, spontaneous reactions and fantasies. He was compelled to end the attention and favour the commandant, whom he admires, was directing towards Sentain. The commandant was increasingly ignoring Galoup. In the end, Galoup's jealousy led both Sentain and himself to ruin. Finally, Sentain's jealousy led Sentain and himself to ruin. At the end of the movie, driven out of the Legion into a solitary existence, Galoup, in his 'lost' state, finds himself on a dance floor. Now free, from un-regimented choreography, he dances, quivers and trembles his inner psychological state of experience – another dance with its own idiosyncratic choreography. With ecstatic twitches, Galoup dances out a troubled psyche, sans any need of intellectual analysis or blame. Through his dance, he is transformed by the resonance between the dancer and the dance. Galoup, in a trance-dance without representation, is lost in an action of the inner being, not an intended expression for spectators. Losing himself in a trance, Galoup finds himself in a dance, encountering transformation.

Anaesthesia

– Gazing and the Autopoetic Loop

We hear it often: 'I cannot dance.' Perhaps at times we may have even uttered this ourselves. A year ago a close collaborator and colleague, J, who had committed himself to learn dance practice, met me for a prearranged dance workshop. From the tone of his voice and composure of his body I could tell that something was not quite his usual self. He was sad, very sad. His eyes were glazed and pensive, in deep thought and with a distant look. The B-focus. His voice was tender, soft spoken,

'I don't think I can dance today, Tony'. Since we had scheduled and reserved a studio for this regular experimental time I decided I would practice by myself, as I often do, with my motto that any moment is the right moment for dance. In contrast, this specific moment of sadness was reason for J not to dance. This presented two possibilities for his incapacity to dance: one that he could not dance when he was emotionally distressed; and secondly, for him to dance he would require a certain energy and physicality, made inaccessible when sad or in a despondent emotional state.

Can someone sad dance? I suggested to J that he didn't need to 'dance' but for the next five minutes he could just take the time to naturally 'be' in the space, without the need to perform whilst I watched. He agreed and took stood some three metres from me. His movements began very slowly, almost motionless, but latent with an honesty that drew in my attention. He moved where effort was not required. I watched and drew my own mental and emotional meaning. J danced a new dance that required no association to his previous idea of how he should dance (in other words, his idea of a dance form that required an energy and physicality that he did not have in this state). He had to drop this idea of how he should dance. And in empathy, both our breaths were almost undetectable, slow and viscous with no tension in our bodies; an almost bodiless state, low-focused gaze and quivering inner core. With the new sense of weightlessness came an-other embodiment, a disembodiment of form, our identities separated from their physical presence. We became one entity with the dance.

Dance in performativity has to demand the attention of the viewer. The spectator engaged in their own experiencing, like the dancer, to discover, to mobilise static thoughts in their own flow of inner experience. When J

moved in his in-ability to dance the experience was an assemblage involving myself as an empathetic spectator and J as the dancer and a unity was formed: a oneness formed by autopoetic looping between dancer and spectator. In such a relationship the spectator is no longer passive as the empathetic space is depended on. As a dancer I am both dancer and spectator just as I am both author and reader and responsive in this self-loop of doer and observer. Fundamentally, the loop between audience and spectator is the same via the affect of empathy.

What resonates between the interconnecting states where two people (or more) relate in a shared trance – one performer to another performer, or one performer to the audience? In such situations, the effects of trance states are intermixed with affects of empathy and the mesmeric. The ‘autopoetic looping’ between individuals in such states exposes the inner transcendence phenomena of engagement. Such a looping is a mesmeric-trance transcendence in an auto-oscillating system. The poetic looping extends from performer-to-performer to the theatrical model of performer-to-spectator. In this shared poetic loop, who gazes at whom as the event morphs?

The Empathetic Loop:

Ovid wrote in *Metamorphosis*:

Then Father Sleep choose from among his sons,
His thronging thousand sons, one who is skill
Excelled to imitate the human form;
Morpheus his name, than whom none can present
More cunningly the features, gait and speech
Of men, their wonted clothes and turn of phrase.
He mirrors only men ...

³ Watson, B., *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings (3rd ed.)*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. p. 44.

On a Tuesday morning in April 2016, at one a.m., I was awoken with a sharp pain in my abdomen. I had appendicitis. At the emergency ward, prior to my appendectomy, I was given a dose of morphine, and then, not much later, a second dose. With this morphine now in my bloodstream I entered an altered state. The pain remained, but my perceptions and sense became suspended. Morpheus, the god of dreams had descended. I watched a close companion, Brendan, watching me, in silence, neither of us uttering words. Tony, Brendan, Brendan, Tony. Looking at one another, looking at the other.

I was reminded of the story of Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream. Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) was a disciple of Mengzi (Mencius). He is often regarded as the greatest Daoist after Laozi (Lao Tzu). The most famous of all his stories is his butterfly dream, probably the most renowned dream in the historical records of Chinese philosophy:

Once, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering about, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he awoke and there he was, solid and unmistakably Zhuangzi. But he didn’t know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuangzi. Between Zhuangzi and the butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the ‘transformation of things’. Zhuangzi’s dream shows that, although in ordinary appearance there are differences between things, in delusions or in dreams one thing can also be another. The transformation of things proves that the differences among them are not absolute. ³

Zhuangzi’s dream shows that, although in ordinary appearance there are differences between things, in delusions or in dreams one thing can also

be another. The transformation of things proves that the differences among them are not absolute.

Back in the emergency ward, Brendan was in the domain of the awakened while I, under the influence of morphine, was in a deep dissociation from that reality. I felt Brendan's emotions of care, fear and affection and watched him mesmerised by my glazed scrutiny. I was like a child, watching the surroundings with no understanding of the significance or meanings of the objects I saw, without the need or will to act with any responsibility. I responded with my eyes, activated in slow blinks or a penetrating gaze, like a slow-motion movie. Time moved in accelerated and delayed flashes, according to the waves of consciousness. I saw myself as if I were Brendan looking at me. In a similar scenario, I recalled myself two decades prior at the bedside of my dying father, looking into his eyes and wondering where he would soon be when he passed. I had imagined myself hopping over some invisible border in company with him. The roles were switched from those of the emergency ward: instead of me in the bed, my father was the one in an induced altered state and I watched from the 'outside'. In a similarly empathetic strand as Brendan felt, the bond between father and son usurped any sense of fear of death for myself.

As I watched Brendan from my altered state, entranced, I felt as pensive as he looked to be. It seemed as if Brendan, looking at me in silence, was not actively thinking but, rather, was in a passive state and that we were both looking at the invisible threads of an unrecognisable or indeterminable tapestry of the senses that was bonding us in an intimately shared space. Neither one of us had the impulse to be act. This is an 'empathetic trance', where, by stealth, the trancer uses eye contact to subtly bring the spectators' breathing to that of their own and

causes the spectators to respond to the speed and direction of the trancer's body movements. The nervous systems become biologically synchronised like that of a mother and her baby's. The urge to touch Brendan was strong. But because I was unable to move I could not reach out to him physically. This corporeal incapacitation led to the gaze where intentions and desires extended in intensity. From a repressed and restrained locus arose the gaze itself. Brendan was in effect mesmerised by me into an empathetic trance as I had been with my father. This empathy is close to shamanistic practices in healing. For a dancer to find himself in this state, that is, corporeally motionless, is a juxtaposition of counter-points. When one is in a motionless freeze, the gaze opens towards an interiority that makes apparent the palpable inner emotions. The emphatic gaze here described is a special experience of alienation in which one relinquishes the principal of 'the eyes-are-for-seeing' and submits to the gaze of another.

A Potent Passivity (B focal state)

As I watched Brendan in my morphean state, I saw the pensive person, full of thought, but this does not mean that he was thinking them. The Oxford Dictionary defines pensive as 'engaged in, involving, or reflecting deep or serious thought'. According to Rancière, 'the act of thinking seems to be encroached upon by a certain passivity'.⁴ What this means is that the notion of passivity is associated with being pensive, but that does not mean that the person is thinking their own thoughts. Brendan was looking at me silently, not actively thinking but in a passive state and devoid of the personalisation of himself. He and I were looking at something invisible together - something that consisted of the threads of an unrecognisable and undetectable tapestry of the senses. This act of pensive mesmerism bonded us both as spectator and performer in a

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 107.

private theatre. There was no wall between us, and in placing ourselves as the other a duet merged itself into a singular unity. The heightened level of passivity or the diminishing drive to be active presents us with a trance gaze between the B-C trance focal modes.

In this thinking state, Brendan and I created a poetic loop between ourselves. We were on the threshold of imagination and had access to each other's morphing thoughts and emotions, feeding and building within this loop. Thinking had taken a backseat position. The foreground was an emerging narrative of energetic exchange forged from the gaze. The intensity was tangled within thoughts that thought themselves and created their own attention.

Alain Badiou believes that there is no such a thing as a sexual relationship, as sexuality is for the pleasure of the self and not the other. Love on the other hand is putting oneself in the other's shoes, which is empathetic subjectification.⁵ When we approach our dance and trance explorations in an empathetic manner, the experience is a seminal reminder of a crucial 'openness.' In the understanding of liminality and its relation to trance, a gaze is the connection to each other as trance performers, a positioning of the focus of the eyes for accessing the available portals of an intelligible world, fundamentally abstracted and highly charged. From the experimental exercises with eye focuses along with the backgrounds in psychophysical awareness we begin to understand inner action; from impulses we begin to access the range of elasticity in psycho-kinetic actions. Muscularity and the somatic dexterity of body mechanics can gauge the extent of this elasticity in its manifestation of the intelligible world; however, instead of moving in dance via rational thought we begin to interact with this morphean gaze in motion. As we are entranced in a gaze (such as a C or D focal modes),

⁵ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, p. 18.

inner pulses trigger the body through micro-inflections of the nerves and fibres of the muscles in quivers and tremors not easily detectable but viscerally affectual. This inner intention precedes in the body as autoschediatic pulses to move. The body, from this perspective of attention, is presented with autopoiesis, triggering movements that go beyond the habitual, functional and domesticated choreography. The trance-gaze extends the movement palate with an elasticity and spectrum of inner meaning and functions – an unconscious dance.

Liminality is the gateway between the conscious and the unconscious. To be in the depths of the unconscious is to be in a deep trance close to a state of possession where one has no recollections of the actions. The narrowing of the gap happens when the dancer is no longer distinguished from the dance; they become one and the same. For the dancer/performer, the 'image' in a sense is already there, laid out for the emerging process. It exists in pre-sense. The dance is, in a sense, the vehicle for the construction of a framework for meaning.

A lot of making art is just being open and empty, and putting yourself in the right place, for things to literally come together.⁶
– Bill Viola

The Pensive Image (B-C Focal states)

The pensive image and the morphean gaze are open to poiesis – no longer holding the mental activity that forges blockages. The trance-looping of the gazes occurs on a multitude of levels between performer/performer, performer/spectator and spectator/spectator, and, in totality, the looping composite provides an immersion for all in a singular live event. The trance state presents an aesthetic beyond the need for visual stimulation or the need for interpretation in some

⁶ Rifkin, A. *Bill Viola*, Los Angeles Times, 28 January 2007. www.latimes.com/archive/s/la-xpm-2007-jan-28-tm-viola04-story.html, February 2021.

hermeneutic paradigm, just as we need to taste, smell and hear. It is not something mental, but rather something sensual.

On the stage, the trance state of the pensive or passivity in a gaze presents an aesthetic that is beyond what can be read or understood as narrative or script. What is present is beyond the need to understand through just a hermeneutical paradigm. In this trance state the external senses of taste, sonic, smell or touch mix in a combined resonance. This trance state may not be thought-driven but rather is located within the realm of non-thought. The struggle for spectators and observers is that we are pre-conditioned to the familiar and recognisable. In a non-pensive state, we have been programmed to see in the same way we have always known as individuals. But the pensive state is a shared trance loop and takes its form as a composite poiesis – an auto-poiesis looping.

The Zone of Resonance: Trance zone in my dance practice

via negativa – not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks' to full expression of the spirit through the body, leading to a 'trans-lumination' in performance in which 'the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses.

– Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p.16-17

We have, from the last section on the gaze, the interconnection between spectator and performer, as well as a gaze of the individual as a contemplative portal between exteriority and interiority. In speaking of a portal between exteriority and interiority, we are reminded that Jerzy Grotowski refers to the actor's essence of acting as a form of 'trans-lumination'. This is the presence of Grotowski's idea of the holy actor who acquires trans-lumination through the liminal pathway, or the

A Gaze

A deep cry. This tone in my throat thinly drags in a song so ancient, eternal and melancholic. It's a death's screaming for its silence, a call from the depth, a quiet spasm and colossal consolation. Hold it down and it dances the erratic ecstasy, taut and twisted body in rare forms. From a deep sense of touch with our eyes wide open, we gaze into a moment of undeniable truth; and from the deep sense of physical touch.

Then the gentle touch beneath gasping breath, a soothing so deep it's a mother's cradle after birth, a genesis of lullabies, the birth of compassion.

The pains were phantoms. Where are they now? I walk with ease. The glow remains, strong and penetrating – a blazing glow of a celestial filament.

Then we danced the wild within the grounded. Transformed every sensation to a new language. A language of the kinaesthetic lexicon; so lithe, light and firm.

In order to live one has to kill the surface fear. Put weight to the lift, length to the stretch. One must take flight, to jump, to levitate, float and fly.

– From my journal

contemplative portal of the gaze, which I have designated as the trance zone of resonance.

The zone of resonance can take a visual representation of the light. This section is about how one experiences the luminosity of the performer as an energetic affect of the experience of trance as a whole. In the thread of Grotowski's holy theatre, trans-luminosity is a glowing apparition that reveals an epiphany.

The presence of the holy actor is pivotal in establishing the understanding of the transformative effect of the inner experience. The inner experience, the ontological being, filtered through this trance zone of resonance, manifest its aesthetic. Trance here is instrumental in the aesthetics of movement in relation to the inner experience – it is a trajectory to Grotowski's 'inner actions'. The dancer in a trance zone of resonance has access to a portal in mobilising inner actions. But how can the actor be induced into this zone of liminality? George Bataille, in *Inner Experience*, attempts to expound the difficulty of how one can describe an inner experience. He writes that 'one must *live* the experience' and that there exists a space between the inner experience and the external intellectualising. To grasp any meaning from within, one must have 'lived to the point of a terror, that it appears to unify what discursive thought must separate'.⁷ Stuart Kendall in his introduction to *Inner Experience*, explains:

It is an exercise at the limits of representation that simultaneously demonstrates the collapse of representation (...) Any expression whatsoever testifies to this: the extremity is distinct from it (...) If poetry expresses it, it is distinct from it: to the point of not being poetic, for if poetry has it as an object, it does not reach it. When the extremity is there, the

⁷ George Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 9.

means that serve to reach it are no longer there (...) This is what it means to be beyond poetry, but also beyond philosophy, beyond science, and beyond religion'.⁸

By this analysis, there is no single approach to a dance form – for example, tango or ballet. The whole movement of the 'inner experience' is, in fact, contra the external dance forms in an anti-aesthetic. Here is a location, in the moment, when the composite of elements – psychological, emotional and physical – at every juncture of movement constitutes an authentic experience. According to Grotowski, 'the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses'.⁹ It is when the actor stands 'naked' and in the moment of their 'score' that they allow themselves, in a 'total act', to '... reveal your most personal and closely guarded experience'.¹⁰ The total act is 'the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorising oneself... It is a serious and solemn act of revelation'.¹¹

In the example of Bedoyo and Bantengan, Bedoyo has a strict choreographic form, an external and physical pattern of movements and the Bedoyo dancer has to drop their technical focus to a level as second nature, and then they can stand 'naked' in their total act (A-B Focal modes). The Bantengan performer moves within their range of their martial artistry to improvise in a state of trance (D-E focal modes). Both take different referential meanings to the 'act of laying oneself bare'; whilst Bedoyo remains a dance form and has a single approach in its strict adherence to choreographic forms, the Bantengan movements are unbridled. We could say that in both these forms, the body vanishes to a inner series of visible autoschediatic impulses. Both these forms adhere to the Javanese code for living *Joged Mataram*, where the code for living and inner experience sits firmly for their distinct trance forms.

⁸ Ibid, p. xv.

⁹ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towa.rds a Poor Theatre*, p.16-17

¹⁰ Ibid, p.196.

¹¹ Ibid, p.178.

Luminosity and Presence

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor bleary-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

– W.B. Yates, ‘Among School Children’

Alan Watts in *Become what you are* annotates the possibility of a position without duality or fragmented elements. He challenges the idea belonging to popular modern psychology wherein it is taught that man has an unconscious mind. ‘There is no actual division between the unconscious and the rest of the human organism (...) they are integral parts of the body, but we are not ordinarily conscious of them’.¹² He suggests a condition of ‘being unaware’ of the mental and emotional elements’ make-up (desires, impulses, tendencies, reactions and fantasies) and suggests there is a parallel to the physical – an unawareness of the many bodily organs and their processes. Following on this idea, it is possible to conceive of a space that exists via a balance between and suspension of the conscious and unconscious, the interior and the exterior, the horizontal and the vertical. This space is where the binaries link via a flow through the body.

¹²Alan Watts, *Become What You Are*, p. 93.

This liminal gateway and the agency to induce this state can be achieved through systematic training. In traditional trance practices the method of induction often involves an onslaught of the rhythmic and repetitive via trumpets, flutes and vocals. The sense of smell is also a strong element in the induction process and includes incense, perfume and essential oils. In Butoh, this trance space is the ‘dance of darkness’, where darkness is the unconscious. These dance aesthetics are often grotesque, raw and unbridled, animal attributes.

The notion of ‘possession’ is commonly misunderstood as the only trance state. It is actually just one state of trance and it differs from the other states or levels. In trance, the level of consciousness and control can indicate the levels or depths of luminosity. On one end of the spectrum, one has total or a high level of restraint and direct choices in choreography. On the other end is a deep state of possession where one remembers nothing, and, as with the sleepwalker, is not conscious of their actions.

Restraining the body at the edge of crisis (D-E Focal states)

In the psychophysical, the emotional power of ‘crisis’ (acting as a launching point to deeper intentions and motivations) can invite an unbridled state of deep trance (D-E Focal modes). When one is in trance in improvisational performance, one traverses between the different levels (A to E focuses), oscillating in multitudes of rhythms and moving between levels of luminosity and presence, thus emitting polyphonic effects and affects of the body. Such techniques are ways of restraining the unbridled impulse. Alain Badiou remarks how significant this restraint is:

In dance... movement finds its essence in what has not taken place, in what has remained either ineffective or restrained within movement itself... For the unrestrained impulse – the bodily entreaty that is immediately obeyed and manifested – is precisely what Nietzsche calls vulgarity... Accordingly, dance is defined as the movement of a body subtracted from all vulgarity.¹³

This vulgarity is not indicative in all unrestrained impulses when such an impulse still has agency to achieve luminosity and presence. However, because the liminality of trance opens an access to such impulses, it is in the restraint where lies the possibility of manifestation of the immanent purity of the dance. As Badiou explains, ‘Dance offers a metaphor for a light and subtle thought precisely because it shows the restraint immanent to movement and thereby opposes itself to the spontaneous vulgarity of the body’.¹⁴

Ibu Kadaryati in her interview on her work with Bedoyo also highlighted such a vulgarity:

For me personally, if I have to have a collaboration with people who are not on the common-ground with me, I would have to say no. This means we have to share the very important principle for dance as for life. Are there not contemporary dance practices that are vulgar? Nothing in this performance is of the ordinary, nothing of unrestrained vulgarity. In the topic of development towards the contemporary from the traditional dance, the choreography to its dance has to remain true to how we approach classical dance. For example, even in contemporary dance, a total concentration is still a must.¹⁵

¹³ Alian Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 60.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ R.Ay Sri Kadarjati Ywandjana (Ibu Kadar), interview by author, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 2018.

Ibu referred to a certain lack of concentration or focus as the ‘ordinary’. It is this ordinariness that constitutes ‘vulgarity’ in the refined performance of Bedoyo and this understanding again reflects the performer’s adherence to the principles of *Joged Mataram* (which includes being confident without arrogance, focused and in concentration, resilient and clearing self to selflessness – ‘empty’ vassal).

On every level of aesthetics and societal structure, Bedoyo represents the royal court dance, the sophisticated and the highly refined. It sits at a pinnacle of Javanese culture. It is the reverse of what could be represented in the banal, unrestrained or vulgar. Ibu Kadaryati often refers to the word ‘vulgar’ (as in English) within the teachings of *Joged Mataram*, the principals for dance and living, as their opposition or an unwillingness to aspire towards these principals. Every somatic move requires concentration and focus in the dance of Bedoyo to create the nuances of a dance aesthetic for beauty in a total embodiment, even down to where the eyes should focus or the finesse of gestures to the spiritual state of emptiness. Vulgarity here is a lack of restraint from the pull and gravitation of habitual sloth, and fineness requires focus and concentration.

Restraining and Dehabitualisation:

Similarly, in the practice of Bantengan, Mas Agus also emphasises the opposition to the vulgar, in the way the energy of the untamed animal (wild bull) is kept outside the confines of the ordinary. Mas Agus uses the term *luar biasa* (literally meaning ‘outside the ordinary’), meaning extraordinary, outside the ordinary and habitual and functional

movements. The body, in order to ‘become’ bull requires a dehabitualisation of the unrestrained body. The bull-trancers induce extra-ordinariness through dropping into a deep trance level (possession, D-E focal modes) framed by the strong energetic form of martial arts (Pencak silat¹⁶ for example). The unbridled energy of the bull is wild and it is necessary to contain or restrain it through the discipline of the martial arts to produce its dance of a powerful psycho-physicality. In this way the performer reduces the risks of injury. This powerful force, in a trancer, drops the everyday and functional movements to manifest this aesthetics of the unbridled and cathartic force to inspire awe in the spectators.

The obstacles for spectators resides in the way our habitual viewing has been conditioned toward the recognisable and the familiar. In our conditioning we have been programmed to see the way we have always known. The openness requires a dehabitualisation and in trance, induced by the performer, the spectators are drawn in to the mesmeric trance, cutting through these obstacles.

Mesmerising Trance: A Free-falling Flight

The spectrum of the mesmeric can be characterised in all the levels of trance states and focuses. For example, the mesmeric for Sufi whirling dervishes will be experienced differently from performer to performer despite the dancers doing the same choreographed whirling, much like the complex and repetitive patterning of the Javanese court dance of Bedoyo. In Bedoyo, the choreography provides the ‘scaffolding’ for the structure of the dance forms. This scaffolding is a construct to create the right space for any range of dexterity the dancer can bring to the

¹⁶ Pencak Silat is a full-body fighting form incorporating strikes, grappling and throwing in addition to weaponry. Every part of the body is used and subject to attack. Pencak silat was practiced not only for physical defense but also for psychological ends. See *Traditions of Pencak Silat*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditions-of-pencak-silat-01391>, June 2021.

performance, so the dancer can move extempore through these choreographic structures.

Bedoyo has a complex and complicated dance form and the dancers train in the form from the time they are children. A great deal of repetition is required for subconscious movement patterns. The whirling dervishes’ choreography, on the other hand, requires a simple spin. Furthermore, this ‘twirl’ suppresses any expression outwards since any centrifugal direction from the center of the form outward is suppressed by a centripetal force – restraining the outshoot force to an inwardly directed circularity. Even so, there are similarities between the two dance forms in relation to interiority and dancer impulses. For example, the euphoric sense of flight experienced by both dervish and Bedoyo dancers requires no training for facial expression – for everyone, facial expression of flight requires least effort because the euphoria of flight traverses equally into the choreographed, non-choreographed and embodied. In flight, the interior state and the psychological intention already exist before the expression.

Dennis Wier in *The Way of Trance* believes trance to be an altered state of consciousness. The person in trance has their discerning faculties disconnected, where they surrender their free choice to become open and vulnerable to become highly suggestible, falling into a realm of out-of-the ordinary experiences. He states that these trance states are the result of a cognitive looping, which in effect disable the normal sense of reasoning. He also states that the trance state is made deeper and more powerful when a secret or taboo is involved.¹⁷ Despite these claims, I believe it is also important to include a question of intention and reason for the trance – what be the function be in these trance states?

¹⁷ Wier, D., *The Way of Trance*, p. 39.

Weir suggest that the make us feel good, and they release us from the boundaries of judgement, ‘they bond us to others and – like dreams – they help us re-connect to aspects of our unconscious that might have become alienated, repressed or cut off. Traditionally, there’s been the idea that trance states connect us to the spirit world and we can draw power and healing from it – the placebo effect is basically healing through trance-suggestion.’¹⁸

This trajectory supports the independent performer, untrained in a strict form except that of their own self, emancipated within a space to express themselves to their deepest meanings, autoschediatic, impromptu, and in an open link with the spectator. For a dancer in deep trance, the impulses to move, from their genesis, stem from a mingling of internal and external elements, borne of the dancer’s sensorial and psychological experiences. As such, they present gaps or voids at their preeminent states. These voids, in improvisations relying of the impromptu, are best filled by responses and movements that provide the optimum vigor and originality. The results are movements that move themselves and are the very motivation whereby the trancer finds a meaning in the pattern of the mingled, infinite combinations of the morphing of the void. This process is a series of unfolding of the yet-to-be-known, and in this unfolding is the magnetic and the mesmeric.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Twirling Principal 25.5.18

Consider the whirling dervishes and the contemplative trance.

A workshop for a ‘flow’ in maintaining the core idea of shifting ‘middle-ness’ in embodying multi-components affecting equilibriums.

Taking a trance perspective for an understanding the rational and mental process in striving towards the negotiations of gravitational forces.

Fears of falling can cause stasis and tardy viscosity in the spin or an over striving and driving in the action of twirling, both without the state of equilibrium required for a perfect ‘flow’ in the centrifugal and mesmerising action.

Physical elasticity is developed in the training of the body and muscular mechanism. Psychological elasticity has

its core in the trance state to non-conditional response to thinking and emotional impulses.

If I have an urge to stop or slow down, I would take the flow twirling action as an observational leverage. What will be necessary for the action of twirling to continue with its frictionless momentum.

The sense of floating and levitation in mesmerism: like watching the Bedoyo dancers. The dancers all represents one body. An extension to a single twirler utilising their own solo embodiment in the spin.

The twirl is a psychophysical action in a simplest form. The particular intention is in the exponential diminutive of the sense of tedium in time - towards zero temporal time-ness.

Zone of Resonance

Becoming, in a trance zone of resonance, is of the realm of the indiscernible, of the undecidable, within the C-D-E Focal modes. A zone of indiscernibility is an ontological domain in which the phrase of a seemingly dissimilarity is perceived to be overlapping. In Deleuze's explanation, a 'zones of indiscernibility' is a location of becoming. As presented in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is in this zone that relations between humans and animals can be realised in terms of a process of becoming animal.

To say that my practice of dance is an improvisation would be accurate; however, it is accurate only within the definition of dance improvisation¹⁹ as movements free from the repeating of routine patterns and strict choreography – a choreography that adheres to sameness for every repertoire – and precise eternal forms. Trance and its induction are subjective and open to a spectrum of interpretations and levels of individual inner experience. While dance can be referred to in relation to formalised techniques, trance oscillates between techniques and autoschediastic or impromptu psychogogic non-techniques. Constantly resonating and morphing with an undefined narrative or choreography, improvisational trance in a dance reference requires responsive manoeuvring between the spontaneous and the impulsive, but this 'requirement' means that the dance is not strictly improvisational (since pure improvisation would have no 'structured' requirements). In order to make this point clearer, let's look closely at the word 'resonate,' in relation to the concept of 'zone of resonance'.

'Resonate' originates from the late 16th century: from French *résonnant* or Latin *resonant* -'resounding', from the verb *resonare*, from re- (expressing intensive force) + sonare 'to sound'. *Resonance* is from late Middle English: from Old French, from Latin *resonantia* meaning echo,

¹⁹ Curtis Carter, for example, discussed 'dance improvisation' in the 20th century. Curtis. L. (2000). *Improvisation in Dance. The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 58, no. 2, p. 181–190.

from the verb *resonare* meaning to resound.²⁰ Thus, it suggests an expression of intensive force in an echoing. What is this resonating zone I employ in my dance in trance inaesthetics? While the philosophical and empirical are being drawn on in this thesis to 'unpack' my practice in trance movement and dance, my actual performance practice is just as critical for understanding. It is multi-disciplinary and sits firmly in the area of theatre and dance disciplines, with current trajectories focusing on the body, which involves both vocal and movement aesthetics. Trance designated in a zone of deep states in relation to the thinking body will define a resonating chamber, a portal between inner and outer actions.

In reference to my model '5 Pillars of Trance Focal Modes', within this chamber of resonance, the transitioning lines or borders are blurred gradually between one mode to another. In being within one zone, for instance the D-Focus plane, one still maintains the momentums of oscillation and other modes of movement toward or from the other modes. Even in apparent 'stillness', all other focal modes can still resonate. In the transitioning and traversing between C-D-E focal modes is the vigor of the creative zone of resonance. For the dancer this zone provides a range of focal modes for a trance state of authentic spontaneity and flow.

Deleuze used the term 'body without organs' (*corps sans organes*) to refer to a deeper reality that underlines a wholeness constructed by the sum of the fully functioning corporeal parts. The term 'body without organs' originated from Antonin Artaud in his radio play 'To Have Done with the Judgment of God' (1947):

When you will have made a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom. ²¹

²⁰ Etymology of resonance: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=resonance>, December 2020.

²¹ Antonin Artaud, 'To Have Done with the Judgment of God' in *Selected Writings*, p. 571.

Everybody has their own timbre – a psycho-vibrational resonance from within, an inner space or centrum with its distinct spectrum of tones. The timbre defines the corporeal instrument, which, with regular training, is constantly tuned. This training brings the neutral body to a state of total being. Fine-tuning defines the elasticity and range for a multiplicity of corporeal impulses – from the minutest of fibres within corporeal tissues to the extensive macroscopic ranges of the muscular frame.

Dance as Flight and Light

The actor makes a total gift of himself. This is a technique of the ‘trance’ and of the integration of all the actor’s psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct, springing forth in a sort of ‘translumination’.

– Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*. p 16

Grotowski attributed illumination as an analogy to the presence that exists in the actor or performer. A light bulb glows in its intensity in accordance to the resistance of its filament; the more it resists the flow of the current the more light it emits. If the filament is too much of a resistance to the free flow of the current to illumination it will burst in its own heat. On the other hand, if it resists too little, the light dims. Again, the whirling dervishes²² model is useful here: as a movement between the heavens (positive) and the earth (negative); the spinning man is the filament. The dervish in balancing his spin determines the glow of the illumination and the liminal trance state of the dervish is the filament that emits light. The level of resistance in the filament to the

²² Barber, X. T. (1986). Four Interpretations of Mevlevi Dervish Dance, 1920-1929. *Dance Chronicle*, 9(3), 328–355. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567602>

current defines the luminosity. Too much and there will be a climatic explosion of light before a short circuit: if he spins too fast, the filament snaps.

Likewise, the dancer in trance spins within a zone of elasticity, between control and freedom, between thinking and non-thought. With no resistance there will be no light, and Alain Badiou refers to this lack of restraint as vulgar. Ibu Kadar’s reference to ‘vulgar’ to refer to a lack of concentrated restraint.

Trance-kinaesthetic engagement requires a special mode of attention in a space outside thinking associated with will and control. Trance requires an attention to an otherness. For example, a dancer in a deep state of trance who is possessed by another being (either a deity or animal) moves between the corporeal and the cerebral to become illuminated via multiple narratives – from the body’s own sculptural forms, sounds, lightness, gravity, and physical and emotional tremors. In this way, trance in dance can be understood as defying gravity and taking flight. As Badiou expounds, ‘flight’ in specific reference to dancers and the metaphor to soar from gravity is akin to the dancer emitting light in the sense of resonance and palpability. Luminosity in flight. Citing Friedrich Nietzsche’s concepts of dance as a series of forces – innocence, flight, light, verticality and silence,²³ Badiou distinguishes dance from gymnastics or the submissive, trained and virtuosic. Dance is instead simultaneously in ‘capacity’ and in ‘restraint’; it is what Badiou refers to as ‘the bodily manifestation of disobedience to an impulse’.²⁴ He points out that the space of dance could become an emancipated space of possibility or a space of limitation that is reactionary or habitual, depending on how one approaches it. Badiou’s illuminating perception of dance is highly sensual, extremely sensitive, a thinking body in

²³ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* p. 57-58.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

immanence, in an ontology through trance. The ephemeral and impermanence of what becomes visible, vanishes before us even as we look.

Badiou's series of forces are: innocence (death of ego, the neutral space), flight (flow), light (counter gravity, the grave, levitation), verticality (transcendence, calling, humility) and silence (death). We may come to some understanding of the agencies of transformation through a superimposition of these forces and their affect on dance as a metaphor for thought. For the general theories of trance practices, in particular, these forces help us reflect and find references for understanding their elemental and existential forces. For example, the state of being possessed must begin with a yearning for the unobtainable or the unpossessable (as is visible at the last moments of the video *Animal/God* on p. 148). In order to fly, one has to attain a position to levitate, defying gravity in its in-tensions for flight. The dancer's lift is limited physically, but in their essence we see them fly. They may never even spring from the ground (as the dancers of many Asian forms do not), but we see them soar nevertheless.

Icarus strived to attain the euphoria of flight from the gravitational pull of life. His longing for high flying creates the quest for achieving the euphoric. It is the potency of the desired acceptance of the nature of the effervescent experience – these fleeting moments impossible to be possessed. Death in its relation to the impossibility of immortality invites a pathway to the very grace of living. From the perception that the body is solid, weighted, locked, not only is flight impossible, dance is also impossible. Movement is possible in so much as the body defies limits of gravity and is faced with the negotiation and cultivation of somatic strength and flexibility in order to function, but dance fits into a

compact of different networks. Badiou expounds that Nietzsche's idea of dance as a metaphor for thought works because dance opposes itself to the 'Spirit of Gravity' and that 'Dance is, first and foremost, the image of a thought substracted from every spirit of heaviness'²⁵.

As Zarathustra proclaims: 'And especially bird-like is that I am the enemy to the Spirit of Gravity'²⁶. Here is an idea of dance as flight, a germination of what Badiou's 'bird within the body'.²⁷ Nietzsche's Zarathustra also says: 'He who will one day teach men to fly will have moved all boundary-stones; all boundary-stones will themselves fly into the air to him, he will baptise the earth anew – as 'the weightless'.²⁸

A Wheel That Turns Itself: Flight as Innocence

... dance frees the body from all social mimicry, from all gravity and conformity. A wheel that turns itself: This could provide a very elegant definition for dance.

– Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 58

Badiou suggested that 'Dance is what allows the earth to name itself 'aerial'²⁹. This effect of 'flight' can be found in the contrasting styles of the dances of the East (as well as the First Australians) and the inclination to 'groundedness' with the verticality of ballet and Western contemporary dance. Both, however, capture the sense of weightlessness and flight. Flight remains an appropriate metaphor in the contrasting styles of freedom from gravitas.

Trance dance in its Dionysian hysterics also locates its aesthetics in gravity, but first in the bowels of the earth as a ground for the aerial elements. Dionysian flight has a depth of the unconscious darkness and

²⁵ Ibid p. 57.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin), p. 210.

²⁷ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 57.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 57.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 58.

compressed matter. Hijikata's Butoh dwells within this realm in his 'dance of darkness'. The cry from the bowels' depth is Butoh's distinct marking for weightlessness and flight. Without concentration into the depths of darkness it is impossible to encounter weightlessness in flight and non-gravity. Here, grace is found in a variation of the grotesque and the inaesthetic.

The aesthetics of dance if not confined to the formalisation of traditional choreographic patterning can present the body in its in-ability to dance, as an 'in-aesthetic'. Similarly, certain mental processes come with a driven thought to recall, to imitate, to act from a self-conscious 'A-focus' need to control. But the lightness in flight is the freedom from that restriction. It is 'a thought that thinks itself' or a 'wheel that turns itself.'³⁰ Badiou suggests a metaphor of innocence stating, 'It should be noted that dance, which is both bird and flight, is also everything the infant designates. Dance is innocence, because it is a body before the body. It is forgetting, because it is a body that forgets its fetters, its weight.'³¹

A dance of the 'body before the body' denotes the invisible psyche made present to the temple of the physical body. This presence is manifested in a pathway for the flow between psyche and body. The *adyton* or *adytum* (Latin) was a restricted area within the cella (inner chamber) of a Greek or Roman temple³²; however, in this trance dance the *adyton* is made accessible through the innocence of the dancer. The arrival to the D-E Focus requires the dancer's induction to this metaphor of innocence. The weightless in this metaphor is in an open vacuum, a space that vaporises the heaviness, atomising solidity into spectrums of experiences.³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, p.57.

³² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adyton>, March 2021

³³ Grotowski's 'via-negativa' expounds this very same metaphor of innocence.

The Exhausted Body and the Psychological Gravity

When a dancer has exhausted themselves energetically to the point where they can no longer dance as they did before, what is left? Now what is left is a palate for a new dance – a dance that no longer relies on the usual habitual choreographic requirements. A new choreography begins here from the exhausted condition; it responds to quivers, gravity and paths of physical ease. An immanent vulnerability arises from the dissolving of physical barriers and provides access to a new psychological presence. An aesthetics that diminishes the controlled process of thinking to the state of 'a thinking that thinks itself'. Put simply, in exhaustion I cannot think. How do we perceive an experience that encompasses the 'just-was' and the 'is-about-to-be' as much as what is actually present? This new choreography born of autoschediatic pulses is tuned to present an abstraction of movements.

Thomas Richards, a performing artist and Jerzy Grotowski's assistant and essential collaborator, wrote an account of a process where he quieted his mind so that the exhausted body 'danced by itself':

At first my mind was conducting the search for the dances, I was mentally interpreting the songs. About one of them, I deduced for example, that it must be a work song, so I imitated manual work, turning these movements into a repetitive dance. Well, we danced for a long time, it seemed we must have been going for some hours, nonstop. After a certain point, as my physical exhaustion grew, my mind became tired and quiet: it was less able to tell my body how to interpret the song. Then for some short moments I felt as if my body started to dance by itself. The body led the way to move, the mind became passive. I felt Grotowski's eyes on me, a clear impression, a physical

sensation as if being touched. Then Grotowski abruptly ended the improvisation. As we walked out of the workspace he approached me and said, ‘Yes, that was in the right direction’.³⁴

Beyond Flight

There is elegance in the purity of an innocent thought or impulse to move or dance, but this innocence survives beyond the initial impulse and survives in the dance itself. For example, when I reach the level of a D-E focused trance and with induction of the concept of ‘emptiness’ I go beyond the network of the somatic. At this point, the solid body atomises to effervescence – the ether-ic body phenomenon. I like the way one trance dancer explained her experience of this effervescence:

As soon as I get to my spiritual encounters, my body reacts, and my soul starts moving. Then I am aware that I am in the correct situation. Like the moment when I took the first breaths within this dimension. Dancing never lets me go. It’s that pure action that makes me remember why I exist. When I experiment what I have been made for, going through the dance, I get the most treasured gift from my entire reincarnations. Embody the vision; it’s always what I love and my sense of connection to the non-matter. Into the non-matter, I am living forever ... dancing.³⁵

Dance, as understood in the West, is often associated with ‘flight and weightlessness’; however, Kathleen’s reference to non-matter in dance is a different aspect that extends beyond physicality and suggests a trance and an energetic kinaesthetic. This is another kind of movement that, rather than relying on an orchestration of muscles and breath, techniques

³⁴ Richards, Thomas, *At work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 22-23.

³⁵ Kathleen Gonzalez, unpublished interview. Kathleen Gonzales is both a student in methods of my trance pedagogical investigation and a collaborator in experimental dance projects.

and dexterousness, begins in stillness and the absence of any organisational mechanisms to produce mere somatic acrobatics. This stillness relates to the sense of the body being vaporised; the solid does not merely seem weightless, it vaporises to formlessness. In such a dance, movements of nerves, muscles, electro-neural impulses, and autoschediatic triggers subtract the physical form; they de-form. What appears is a dance of the unspeakable, the indefinable, an in-aesthetic of a subtraction of organised choreography. The body struggles to catch up with its impossible choreographic demands. The dance is the oscillation between the impossible demand on the body and the manifestation of the un-definable.

At the beginning of this chapter, I shared the experience of the dance student J. who was too sad for dance. For J to ‘be’ in space without the pressure to dance I created a space – a permission – to be ‘unable’. Here is an empathetic space, an empathy trance zone, and it reveals an otherness to what constitutes the habitual ‘ability’. A space for a poetic manifestation of stasis. A dance space for every semblance of afflictions. Let the body be as an organic embodiment of being. When the body has required habitual movements to function, a permission to de-function allows the body to move in an undriven flow. I held space for J. I provided a non-judgemental space with no expectation to produce. J. had, in his ‘inability’ to dance, manifested in his trance state a kinaesthetic essence which his body attuned to. J. could not dance in the paradigm he had understood as his reference for dancing, but he could un-dance, move in an-other dance.

In conclusion, then, what activity do we perceive as ‘not dance’? If one moves for functional purposes, the mechanism of the body curbs movements within the boundaries of physical limits. A human body cannot fly with its given physical attributes. Habits of movements within

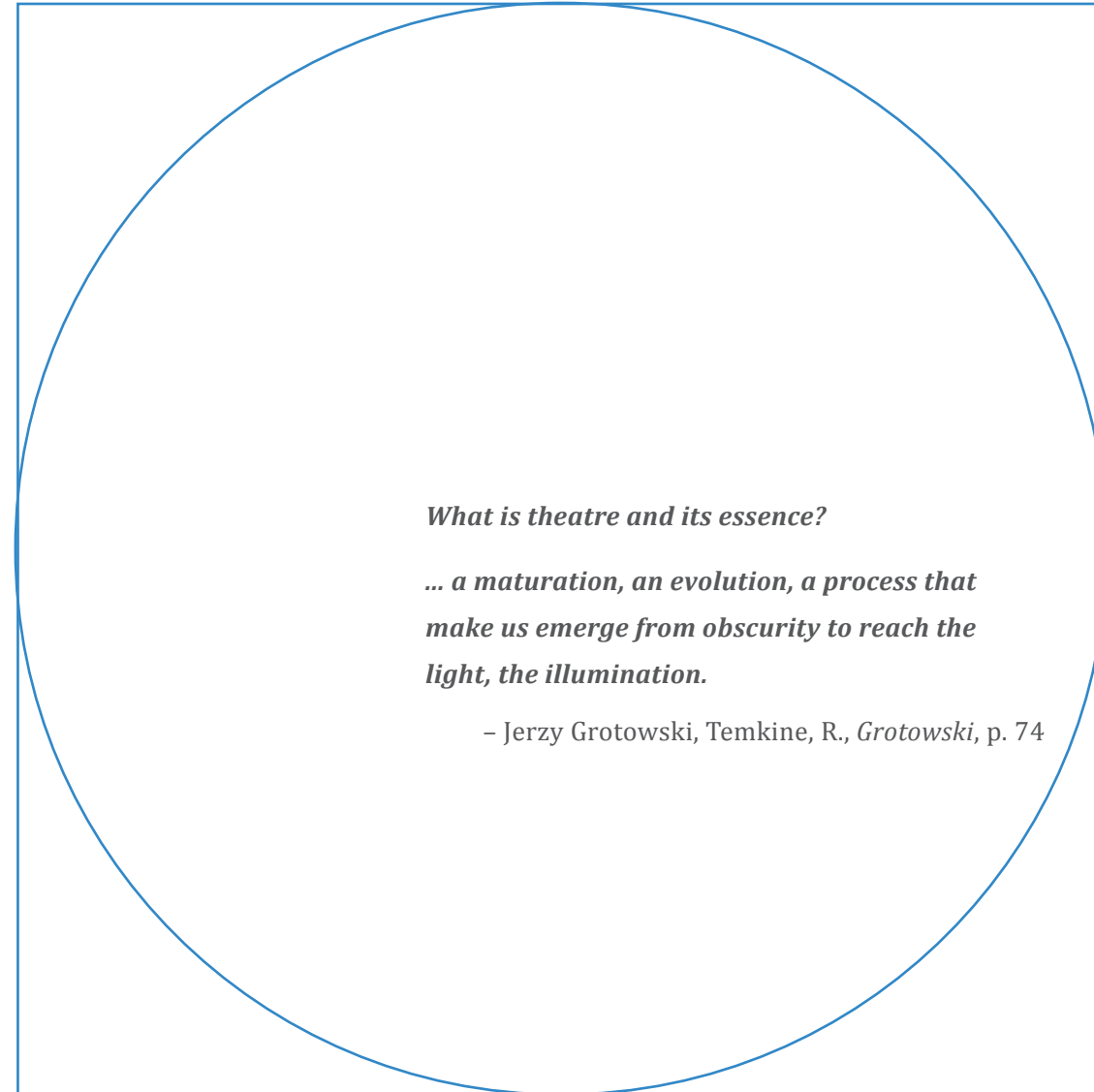
these limits of function soon sculpt the muscles due to the frequency of repetition. The rice farmer bends to plant and the labourer is accustomed to work that is heavy; certain groups of muscles eventually develop for the efficiencies of their functions. Acrobats and athletes, too, in order to achieve their somatic potentiality, train within their disciplines to achieve a heightened performance. The emphasis is on individual form and, although dance, too, takes forms, the dancer must not only transform their power to dance but, in order to find greater completion in their path towards excellence, she or he must also transform *within their own power* to dance. Dance is the art (the holy dancer) in which the inner actions created within the constraints of form (as well as forming) morph to a semblance of truth.

The dancer trances between their inner and outer consciousness and establishes a poesis between themselves and spectators; towards luminosity, flight and transcendence. As in a metaphor for thought or a 'thinking that thinks itself', the dancer in trance spins within their zone of resonance, between control and freedom, between thinking and non-thought. In a transformative liminal zone, the spirit of god or animal manifests in the body something beyond the mere bodily form: a transformation to illuminate, fly and evaporate.

Let us now take a close look at this action of transformation.



Fig 16. Evgenii Timofeev, Tony Yap and Lee Kien Fei at the original site of the beginnings of Bantengan held by Mas Agus Riyanto in Puchon, East Java. This was a contemporary improvisation added to the bull-trance ritual. *Photo courtesy of Agus Riyanto.*



Chapter 3: Transformation

Overview and Background

This chapter takes its lead from Grotowski's impact on immersive theatre through the concepts of shamanism and their parallels to his model of 'Holy Theatre'. These concepts reflex Grotowski's actor as 'shaman' as well as the immanent/transcendent qualities of trans-luminous presence in theatre performance, the relationship between spectator and actor and their relation within a state of deep trance. This discourse and contextual framing provide the agencies for the possibilities of traditional practices' traversing into contemporary abstractions, certainly, but tracing back to the dichotomy of deity possession and animal possession as represented by the two traditional Javanese forms of rituals and dance, Bantengan and Bedoyo, outlined in Chapter 1, it also extrapolates on these dance forms' potential for individual and communal transformation.¹

Just as my trance practice is driven closely by the power of its potential to transform, in order to more fully understand the potential of trance for transformation on the contemporary stage, I shall also address these two practices in specific reference to the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy and the notion of 'The Intolerable Image'. However, first it is important to understand how a traditional trance practice has the potential to transform a community.

¹ The trance zone of resonance and the deep trance state in their contributions to contemporary performativity is approached sans the traditional religious and cultural dominance in an interpretation of the transformative for the contemporary, post-enlightenment era.

Lethargy and the Intoxication of Suffering

The title of this chapter comes from a conversation between Agus Riyanto and myself on the topic of the bull-trance practices in Batu. The question was: ‘What was the main motivation for the revival of the bull-trance, Bantengan, practice?’

In the conversation, Mas Agus introduced the idea of *economi lemah* – an ‘economy of lethargy’.² When he spoke of ‘lemah’, Agus was referring to the practice of Bantengan revived for the lower rungs of the socio-economic community. In this context, ‘lemah’ infers as an inertia in the spiritual state of the community, a listlessness that calls for a natural balancing by injecting the community with vigor or enthusiasm. Mas Agus said there was an apparent lethargy that was undoubtedly growing within the youth of the community in general and the revival of Bantengan would help restore the balance. This insight was reinforced and revealed in his dreams. Agus believed these dreams to be messages from his ancestors to revive the ancient practice of Bantengan.

Here is a balancing scale, an economy, a management of the ‘home’ body. The word ‘economy’ is from the late 15th century and one of its current meanings as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* is ‘a careful management of available resources’. The Oxford Dictionary has also defined ‘lethargy’ as ‘a lack of energy and enthusiasm’. Lethargy is originally from Latin *lēthargia*, which is from Ancient Greek *lēthargía*, ‘drowsiness’, from *lēthē*, ‘forgetfulness’ + *argós*, ‘not working’. ‘Enthusiasm’ has its origin from the early 17th Century French *enthousiasme*, via late Latin from Greek *enthousiasmos*, from *enthous* ‘possessed by a god, inspired’ (based on *theos* ‘god’). Here, we have acquired listlessness by forgetting how to be possessed by a god.³ Here, we have acquired listlessness by forgetting how to be possessed by a god.

² Unpublished interview with Agus Riyanto, August 2018.

³ Oxford dictionary explanations of the origins of the words ‘lethargy’ and ‘enthusiasm’.

Since its revival by Agus Riyanto in 2008, the practice of Bantengan has seen a steep rise in popularity as well as the number of people attending and participating in the rituals. There are now over 120 Bantengan groups numbering up to about 6,000 members⁴ participating in the annual Bantengan Carnival held in the city of Batu in East Java. According to Agus, the enthusiasm has been extraordinary. But it is worth considering: what is the driving force that makes this practice extraordinary? In the decade since its inception in 2008, the practice of Bantengan has taken many new changes and transformations, especially in reference to the aesthetics of the bulls-head masks, including the actual making of the masks and the evolution of the choreography when wearing the masks. Martial arts provides a basic vocabulary for the kinaesthetics and energetic bull-dance. The participants or trancers aspire to achieve trance states to the level of being completely possessed (D-E focal modes).

This trance state of the Bantengan practice is that of dissociating oneself from the mundane and unremarkable day-to-day events to a space that Mas Agus defined as possession by the bull or the totality of a bull embodiment. It is a salient point in Mas Agus’s way of discerning the spirit world that he often refers to different spectrums of energies. The ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ considers the unconscious and the unknown within the individual and their correlation to the physical spheres. This is akin to a Dionysian theatre ritual whereby intoxication as inducement to a deep trance achieves ecstatic states. Nietzsche attributes ‘intoxication’ to the Dionysian vision of the world: “Intoxication is ‘ecstasy’ taking place under the aegis of Dionysus as *ho lysios* – the ‘liberator’ – who undoes boundaries”⁵:

⁴ The number 120 groups participating is closely accurate, from the list by Agus and his organisers for the August 2019 carnival.

⁵ Friedrich Ulfers’s introduction, ‘Dionysus and the Intoxication of Suffering’, to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, p. 6.

An art that spoke the truth in ecstatic intoxication banished the muses of the arts of seeming [*die Musen der Scheinkünste*]; in the self-forgottenness [*Selbstvergessenheit*] of the Dionysian state of being, the *individuum* – with its limits and measure – went under. A twilight of the gods stood near at hand.⁶

‘Lethargy’ in the community of Bantengan practitioners in Batu is at the deepest level a confrontation with the meaning of and value for life. In times of communal lethargy, both suicide and the will to live in their opposite positions can be observed within social conditions. He also poses an interesting juxtaposition of a good reason for living and for dying: ‘I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying).’⁷ The dissociation from domesticated realities in the bull trance through the intention to become the bull is, in this paradoxical economy, the very affirmation of life. Simone Weil states that there are two ways of ‘killing ourselves: suicide or detachment’.⁸ Weil explains her idea of detachment:

The extinction of desire (Buddhism) —or detachment—or desire for the absolute good —these all amount to the same: to empty desire, finality of all content, to desire in the void, to desire without any wishes. To detach our desire from all good things and to wait. Experience proves that this waiting is satisfied. It is then we touch the absolute good.⁹

Bull trance dissociation establishes a practice zone for detachment – a collective trance in becoming animal. Bull trance in this reference is not

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, p. 43.

⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

⁸ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 15.

⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

an excess of stimuli but an intensity of one stimulus in a state of trance as a visceral contemplative zone.

According to Byung-Chul Han, for a better understanding of beauty it is necessary to create a space for exactly this kind of detached contemplation: ‘The pleasure felt in perceiving beauty is disinterested. There is an aesthetic distance which enables a contemplative lingering with beauty. Aesthetic intuition is not consumplative but contemplative’.¹⁰ Beauty’s contemplative regime lies in a visceral contemplation, as if once over we have a sense of having witnessed a catatonic level of nature completely removed from the everyday domesticated and labored routine. This is a ritual of balancing, a necessary quake and dance.

Ecstasy and getting out of stasis

Ecstasy (from the Ancient Greek *ekstasis*, ‘standing outside oneself’, a removal to elsewhere’ from *ek-* ‘out,’ and *stasis* ‘a stand, or a standoff of forces’).¹¹ Stasis also means ‘a period or state of inactivity or equilibrium’.¹²

Enthusiasm in earlier times was to mean ‘with’ god, (en- Theo), and the lack of enthusiasm meant a state of without god - godlessness. However, the bull spirit in possession of the human trancers also embodies a rapture and an ecstatic ritual. The bull-trance is a ritual where performers and trancers aspire to be possessed by the symbolic power and energy of the bull totem. The bull, a powerful animal, unprovoked, embodies a gentle grass-eating animal. There is an air of a gentle giant with a hidden force.

¹⁰ Han Byung-Chul, *Saving Beauty*, p. 46.

¹¹ Oxford Distionary.

¹² ibid.

A trance performance would involve the audience differently in comparison to, say, a Shakespearean theatre production. For example, the narrative of the trance is not dependent on words and their meanings and interpretations but, rather, relies heavily in the semiotic and visceral symbols of the dancing body. In neurological terms, the viewer experiences the exact states of the trancer mirrored in their own neurons duplicated by witnessing.

The Balinese *Shanghyang Dedari*¹³ trancer wakes from trance and is not tired but says that she will be in the next day or two. She may even become sick. This sickness is necessary in doses for the totality of the embodiment of a collective healing. In general, the dialectics in the ‘economy of lethargy’ applies to an understanding that a system that rejects the other opens itself to the development of self-destructive traits. A community in this state can regain its balance by acquiring systems for a constructive art space that encourages a positive approach to the other. I suggest that it is trance in its contemplative zones is such a space for balancing and self-restoration. Trance becomes the resonance chamber to re-harmonise to the other. This visceral catharsis is energetic and violent.

¹³ *Shanghyang Dedari* is a Balinese dance said to be a dance to heal epidemics.

The Dionysian Vision of the World

If luminosity is the very energy of vigor, a revered violence that presents itself in situ, then it is the antithesis of the kind of dance that takes its movement pattern from imitation. In this view, the patterned and ordered imitation is, in its base of genesis, intolerable to the seeker of the transformative, the luminous and present. All violence within this framework is not to be considered something to be tolerated, rather it is essential for transformation.

In Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, he presented ‘a simultaneity of coming into being and passing away’, an aesthetic immoderation. He set out to display his aesthetic ontology, which understands the world as an ‘aesthetic phenomenon’ by stating that nature is an artist.¹⁴ He suggested an understanding of becoming of the world as an aesthetic process: ‘Nature insofar as two artistic energies, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, burst forth from nature herself *without the mediation of the human artist*’.¹⁵ The image bound the ancient Apollonian art of sculpture; painting was bound by defined and refined aesthetics of what was deemed beautiful; and the Dionysian art of music and dance were bound by the aesthetics of an unbridled and transient nature. The will of nature in between the two styles posits a heightened stage in their unity. The Apollonian approach to art ‘hides the world of becoming’ by its emphasis on and dominance of appearance and the still image. It is a question of restraint and distinguishes itself from the Dionysian which is concerned with temporariness, the transient and nature’s world in its becoming, which are matters of non-restraint.

From the juxtaposition of Bantengan and Bedoyo, the energies of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus satisfy the nature of art impulses in the

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 8.64.

¹⁵ Ibid, 2.38, cf. 4-5.

most direct ways. The contrasting elements of Bantengan and Bedoyo are reflective of Nietzsche's wide reference to the Apollonian/Dionysian duality in his highly influential philosophical and classic study, *The Birth of Tragedy* in the following ways:

1) The deeply possessive states of the devotees/participants in the bull trance rituals employ a very deep state of trance. Their possessed states are Dionysian in the reference to the unbridled force and components of passion and the non-rational that are evidently dominant. Here is the arena of awe-inspiration that is highly visceral and cathartic.

2) The court dance of Bedoyo employs the Apollonian elements of restraint and control. This form of trance has a particular mesmerising element and transports the spectators simultaneously with the dancer. The effect is an 'empty' stare where a clarity of the present has a psychological resonance, a purity. Both Bantengan and Bedoyo have strong embodiments that include the internal and deep states of consciousness; however, they employ contrasting Apollonian and Dionysian elements to attain those states.

My construction and practice of 'The Great Square' is an architecture for a spatial frame that is a negation of de-creativity, a space for the un-formed to take impromptu form, in situ. It is a specific improvisational paradigm incorporating D-focus trance that incorporates both Bantengan elements and those of Bedoyo – Dionysian and Apollonian. 'The Great Square' exerts this energetic paradox via the presence of a Dionysian vision where the very pulse of movement is simultaneously 'coming into being and passing away'; a blending in morphing movements of refined aesthetic images alongside an unbridled art of losing control. As discussed in the previous chapter, Alain Badiou in his claims to 'the unrestrained impulse', suggests that this was actually

what Nietzsche calls 'vulgarity'. Accordingly, dance could be defined as the movement of a body subtracted from all vulgarity.¹⁶ My dance is the antithesis of the impulsive body free to the impulsive habits of the body. In fact, the very immediate, dominant passages of 'everyday' gestures cut a deep groove for the flow of automatic-yet-unrestrained movements. Restraining, on the other hand, reinforces the flow to patterns outside these dominant grooves, outside of the usual habitual patterns. I see Badiou's concept of 'restraint' as equivalent to, or might be mapped onto, the Apollonian. My dance shows how an impulse can be rendered effective within movements in such a way as to be a question of restraint rather than obedience. Such a state between restraint and unbridled impulse is what might be considered a state of 'suspension' – Dionysian with Apollonian; or Dionysian with restraint; this model of a state between restraint and unbridled impulse is visible in the videos on p.150.

The Suspended (space in-between)

To illustrate a suspension, consider throwing a stone vertically upwards. The stone decelerates in its ascension until a point where it comes to a complete stillness, in zero gravity, before it begins to accelerate downwards, toward the pull of the earth's gravity. At zero gravity, we are reminded of the familiar images of astronauts in space where the body floats, moves and flies. If the body weren't propelled, it would remain suspended.

The Bedoyo dancer, in synchronised choreography with the other dancers, creates a similar sense of suspension beyond the seemingly physical – a sense of suspended animation. Suspended animation can be understood as retarding or halting of the life processes by external or internal means

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* p. 60.

without terminating life itself. The dancers of Bedoyo are the medial conduits between the opposite elements. They are in a trance, psychologically emptied of the ego and of thinking, emptying of self. They are the medians between god and humans, the heaven and the earth. The action is exactly the same as the twirling dervishes. Much like a current flowing from positive to negative, the dervishes with one hand upward directed to the heavens are a conduit for energy flow. The fulcrum that is represented by the centre of the spinning body links the flow to the other hand out-stretched, dispersing the energy as a trans-illumination – an effervescence of energy and a glow of aura.

Three points are worth noting in relation to the mesmeric suspension, in both Bedoyo and the spin of the dervishes:

1. The tension between the vertical and horizontal momentums.
2. The center restraint and suspension of forces.
3. The presence this emits.

Without the central filament in the light-globe serving as a resistance to the flow of the electricity, no light or illumination would be emitted. The dancer taking a ‘drop’ into this trance, is free from gravity. The grace is suspension, levitation, flotation, and flight – metaphors for the emancipation from physical limitations, free from gravity.

The Intolerable Image

Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts are manifesting into form. Focus only upon your desire and not upon your fears.

– Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. i/ii.

Taking the bull trance model, we can conceive a particular link between performer and spectator through the ‘cruel’ image of the body – a body that takes its physical extremes to the limits. The opposite is intolerable. What may actually be intolerable may be the image of a body far from its psychophysical limits. In such a performance the body is made ‘intolerable’ through the display of something banal.

Intolerable comes from the late 14c. from Latin *intolerabilis* ‘that cannot bear; that cannot be borne’. If a dance is banal, it is not because we don’t see a complex choreography that requires physical feats or the memorising of some compounded pattern in the choreography; it is, rather, because we are unable to connect to the essence of the dance or be affected by the humanness of the dancers. As humans we have all the faculties and abilities to create an authentic representation of our interior world of emotions and psychological realities. We are the ‘unconscious’ observer of the truth of a situation or the state that encompasses the truth of the moment; for my practice this ability is a totality of the interior and the exterior embodied in the dance act.

The system of information for the dancer’s choreography does not operate through the accessibility of the choreography but by how we can decipher a flow of information in its multiplicities, including the unidentified. What matters is concealed under the physical actions and cannot be defined within technical abilities. In terms of trance, we can

conceive that deep trance (C-D focus) is necessary for transformation in the form of possession. Consider the men in the bull-trance ritual bringing forth an energetic, unbridled, raw and even frenzied manifestation of physical extremities and almost impossible feats according to normal standards which produce an awe inspiring spectacle. The obvious and discerning feat is the seemingly impossible task of carrying the hefty bullhead – carved in wood embedded with a real pair of buffalo or bullhorns. The physical effort and strength needed to carry this bullhead in the prolonged event of the frenzied ritual is unimaginable to the spectators. This is the reflective relation the spectator has with the bull trancer – transcending the unbearable image. The physicality and strength reminds the spectator of their ordinariness, as differentiated by the extraordinariness displayed that can only be the possession of the trance performer by a bull spirit. This space that separates the spectator from the trancer, separates human from the supernatural. Spectators in such a state of witnessing are unconsciously feeding back their entranced gaze and individual inner experiences. The trancers are further propelled to an assemblage of territories in a responsive and continuing loop with the spectators. It is indeed inconceivable, in this Bantengan event, that the depth and spectrum of trance possession can be manifested without the presence of the spectator, because of the necessary auto-poetic looping of feedbacks between performer and spectator.

In his introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's book, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Marvin Carlson states that Fischer-Lichte speaks of performance as a process wherein the 'the commonplace appears transfigured and becomes conspicuous':¹⁷

¹⁷ Marvin Carlson's introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's book, *The Transformative Power of Performance* p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁹ According to the *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* by Dino Franco Felluga (www.cla.purdue.edu, April, 2021), Lacan's Real is a state from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language. The Real is impossible in so far as we cannot express it in language. It works in tension with the imaginary order and the symbolic order.

It is obviously a fundamentally different matter when we shift from the artistic experience in the course of which we are led to look with fresh eyes, exposing its 'artfulness' or one might say, its more sensual relationship with the world, to a situation in which we have an experience which causes us to gain a new, refreshed comprehension of our own situation of being in the world.¹⁸

So long as the space between performer and spectator is distinctly present and positioned as a fourth-wall, there remains the intolerable. What action is represented remains, in its act, a bad imitation. The action loses its 'acting' when the ecstatic event establishes through the inductive elements – music, stretching physical limits, level of risk of the unexpected, the close link to the entranced spectators – to a radical embodiment. The visible event then establishes itself to this radical position that claims the fact that the whole experience has been directed to something else that did not exist before. Through the state of trance and transmission, the intolerable has managed to be dissolved and replaced with an active participation of the intrinsic loop, all linking to the core intention of the whole event: to produce a new force transforming performers and spectators through ex-stasis.

The transformative power of the bull-trance ritual and its effectiveness hinges upon the diminishing of the separation and space between spectator and spectacle of the trancers. The separation remains intolerable until they establish their unity. The intolerable physicality is seen to occur as the spectators confront their potential to reconsider subjectivity, and what Lacan defines as the Real¹⁹, through experience of the event. For Sergei Eisenstein, this risk is a process which he called *ex-stasis* or, 'to go out of oneself'. Eisenstein says:

It is not the actor who must enter ecstasy, but the spectator who must ‘go out of himself’, who must, that is, transcend the limits of the direct and literal perception of what the actor is doing in order ‘to see’ behind the screen of the obvious and the known.²⁰

Antonin Artaud’s most noted offering to drama theory is his ‘theatre of cruelty’, the highly visceral and intense theatre experience where the spectators are shaken to face the elemental force of life. Artaud felt the universe is ‘cruel’ in its natural force of volatility. It is violent. This fact, he felt, we must be fundamentally aware in the process of theatre making.

But a ‘theatre of cruelty’ means theatre that is difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on the performing level, it has nothing to do with the cruelty we practice on one another, hacking at each other’s bodies, carving up our individual anatomies, ...but the far more terrible, essential objects can practice on us. We are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads. And above all else, theatre is made to teach us this.²¹

For Artaud, theatre must be *ecstatic*. Theatre has to shatter and hypnotise the spectator’s sensible state.

The body in deep trance exudes a certain raw energy into a kinaesthetic potential for an ex-tasis. This terror or wild energy can transport the spectator from the intolerable physicality of the spectator to a heightened place where they can experience the realms beyond what can be seen. The potentialities of performer and spectator are triggered by the energies generated through the psychophysical trance act of the performer. Here the spectator is presented with the potential to an

²⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, *The Secret Art of the Performer*, p. 58.

²¹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, P. 60.

empowered state for transformation through the power experienced from the performance.

The concern of the influence of the spirit in the practice of Bantengan, for instance, is not so much the demonstration of an intolerable physicality, but more specifically to understand the position of trance within a specific system as defined by a particular idea of thought and a certain psychophysical practice. Here aesthetics opens a position where an idea of thought and an idea of dance can be examined. Jacques Rancière expounds a space of ‘non-thought’ that inhabits thought and propagates, in my experience, the power of a performance such as Bantengan:

This idea of thought rests upon a fundamental affirmation: there is thought that does not think, thought at work not only in the foreign element of non-thought but in the very form of non-thought... Conversely, there is non-thought that inhabits thought and gives it a power all its own. This non-thought is not simply a form of absence of thought, it is an efficacious presence of its opposite. From whichever side we approach the equation, the identity of thought and non-thought is the source of a distinctive power.²²

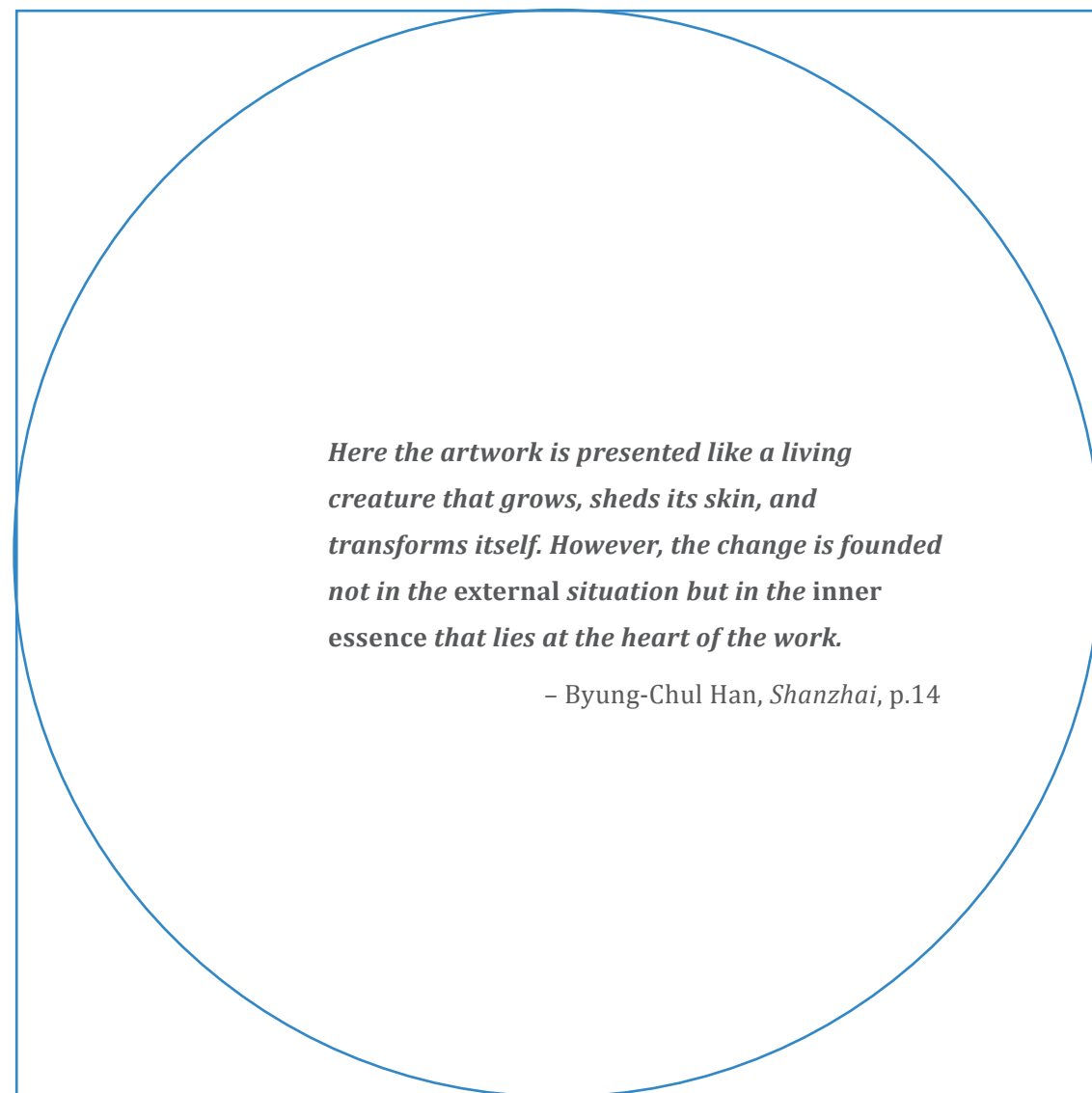
In the C-D focal range of trance dance forms, in the space of non-thought, a negated violence can take a form through a speech of the body. It removes the mundane language of the functional to be a system of unknown. Here is a choreography trained with somatic strength and dexterity for all levels of possible movements to redefine possible movements for revealing an otherness. To be strong as an ox is to expound the essence of vigor, of the strong, healthy, spirited and the

enthusiastic (with god). In a dance of catharsis this means to move with the force of intensity, ferocity and to remove the static, the lame and the diseased. In this sense, stasis is intolerable and vulgar, since stasis presents blockages and opacity without an emancipated capacity to flow. Trance and the autoschediatic space in combination allow dance to take the intolerable to the profound arena of theatre.

Dance has to demand the attention of the viewer in any way a dance should at any given time, inspiring the spectator engaged in their own experiencing, like the dancer, to discover and to mobilise static thoughts toward their own flow in thinking. Dancing in trance extends the performative experience as the core point and draws the human experience towards its full engagement between the inner and the outer consciousness.



Fig 17. Tony Yap in *Eulogy for the Living*, MAP Festival (2017). Photo: Jimm Lee



Conclusion

Furthermore, when we speak the word 'life', it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach. And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames.

– Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 13

In this thesis I evoked the notion of trance in a spectrum of states, and articulated as a zone of resonance vis a vis an approach to a body as a body-in-becoming, a liminality and portal for the representation of transformation. This dilated state of trance body beyond its technical capabilities renders a hidden and meaningful view of the dancers as artists to themselves and to their spectators. The body within this trance zone of resonance elicits in various modes of disclosure secrets of a distinct language of somatic semiotics – a dance language that deciphers the literal.

The body in this zone of trance is illuminated with an aura. If aura can be defined by the affect one gets from a performance, a dance or an image, it also suggests a presence or something visual that is continuously morphing. What colours does an aura exude and how bright is it? Yukio Mishima in his final book, 'The Decay of the Angel', he accounted from

old Buddhist scriptures that there is the idea that a diminishing aura indicates an angel is beginning to die¹. This aura, this trans-illumination, then must also have its link to life itself. In this sense, the aura can be indicative of the force of life – for example, enthusiasm – and engenders the question: Does a dance or a piece of artwork make one feel, ‘I must live?’ Or, like the aura of Rilke’s poem, ‘The Archaic Torso of Apollo’ (‘Archaischer Torso Apollos’), that in finality inspires the reader with, ‘I must change my life?’ Such an aura is a living film between the past and the immanent future – the present in tense and in essence. This aura is what we, as artists of Artaud’s Holy Theatre aspire to cultivate.

In this sense aura is the potency of any art. It is in its inevitable calling of the artist to be whole (holy) in their full response to their fellow human beings. The shamanic dancer weaves with this trans-visible thread of a glowing aura. And in its power we are struck with the awesome affect of the transformative power of life itself. This was Artaud’s first recognition of the Balinese dance performance that boldly changed the way the West practiced theatre.

In my trance practice, the *modus operandi* dominantly focuses on the emancipation of the dancer. To acquire an unbridled portal, the body has to understand and remove all obstacles that hinder access to a zone of trance and to the spontaneous dance of the yet-to-be-revealed. In my own such process, I have uncovered the following principles:

1. The dance evokes the mesmeric. The democratic attention of all humans to their body’s own language is universal; it is a visceral means of semiotics for a total meaning of experience.
2. The body in its ‘nakedness’ is the source and application of all movements in an indefinable but recognisable otherness.

¹ Mishima, Yukio, *The Decay of the Angel*, p. 52.

Movements in trance transpose the movements of the ordinary and choreographically patterned forms. Movements now call for the courageous act of ‘unknowing’: spontaneous, autoschediatic and making visible the interiority of self as an embodied relation to the exterior.

3. The autopoiesis between this inner and outer self exists also between spectators and performers in a looping in real time and space.

4. The ‘empty stage’ is a free-space for the genesis of psycho-kinaesthetics. The ‘Great Square’ (the square with no corners) is a virtual framing or a positing to emancipate the dancer/performer. The position for the negation of de-creation.

5. In these processes, the body itself becomes a codified entity for a unified, holistic embodiment. The body diverges from the idea of thought processes and is dominated instead by the impetus and propulsions for movements and actions. It is the body that dances.

As Michel Serres concluded in his book, *Variations on the Body*:

Who experiments? The Body. Who invents? It does. And who floats, runs and flies, with archangelic intoxication when the blessed intuition bathes it and makes it levitate? The body, yes, the body again. Naked. Steeped in logic and memory, both mechanical – so leave them to the machines – intelligence remains stupid and heavy without it, winged. Ascension: it has just cast off.²

² Michel Serres, *Variations on the Body*, p. 151.

Adjustment to the performance due to Covid-19

The intended live presentation of 'Animal/God – The Great Square' was cancelled at the advent of the coronavirus (Covid-19). During the span of 2020, I produced a series of dance on videos in response to the confined conditions during lockdowns. These series of videos became a practice in coping with the psychological and physical stressful conditions from lockdowns. These videos were exhibited through to the digital media portal. I presented performances in 4 online festivals (India's Art on Click Festival; MAP Experimentum 2020, 2020 Victoria's Seniors Festival Reimagined, and 'Move 2021' Malaysia).

'Animal/God', a short video as a perfect replacement and an example of the autoschediastic thread of my intended cancelled original performance attracted 67,200 viewers worldwide (to this date of August 2021).

The following notes to the spectator still applies within my thesis of trance performance. The camera became the portal for the spectator. The video dance was unedited and taken on a single spot, a symbolic space to concept of 'The Great Square'.

Performance synopsis: *Animal/God – The Great Square*

a n i m a l / g o d

t h e g r e a t s q u a r e

Introduction

This is an outline to accompany the performance presentation, 'animal/god', a component of my research on how trance from a traditional ritual and performance context can impact contemporary dance performance. Central to my trance practice and pedagogy is a focus towards the development of a dance event – a work embodying choreographic idiosyncrasies and their relation to trance. Such a work is, in application, a morphing, mutating and shape-shifting series of on-going performances – a choreographic peregrination or ontological journey. I, as the actor and dancer, stand as the paradigm of Grotowski's 'holy actor' in a pilgrimage of on-going performances. This performance is thus a devotional ritual. It will be performed within a certain conceptual construct for a physical space – The Great Square. This synopsis provides a context to my trance praxis, a zone of resonance and the intention for the theme of 'animal/god'.

In close relation to trance, I introduced in my thesis conceptual markers of what we could understand as luminosity and presence, the auto-poetic loop between performer and spectator with the trance performative components occupying 'zones of resonance' in my practice

to create my contemporary exploration of ‘The Great Square’. Also in my thesis, I introduced two traditional Javanese practices of dance and performance, *Bedoyo* and *Bantengan*, and described their relation to trance and the affects of trance. The *Bedoyo* and *Bantengan* traditions, representing a dichotomy of form and intention, provide a skeleton of psychological, physical and communal references and grids for constructing the framework of my practice. In asserting my practice via a formal performance, informed as it is by the somatic grammar of traditional trance, it is logical that I provide a definitional context for my dance and position my praxis within the arena of contemporary performance. I have attempted to provide such a definitional context in my thesis, and now in this short proposal I will explain the specific intentions and design of my performance piece, entitled ‘animal/god.’

Trance and the Zone of Resonance

Denis Weir, in *The Way of Trance*, defines the trance state as an altered state of consciousness in which one’s critical faculties are disabled, one surrenders free will and becomes highly suggestible, one’s mind makes strange associations, and one can feel like one has gone beyond the ordinary self and ordinary reality. He affirms that trance states are usually created by some sort of cognitive loop which works to disable ordinary reasoning, and that the trance is more powerful if it involves some sort of secret or taboo.¹ Despite these claims, I believe it is also important to ask what’s the functions of these trance states?

Weir suggests that trance make us feel good, and they release us from the boundaries of judgement, ‘they bond us to others and – like dreams – they help us re-connect to aspects of our unconscious that might have become alienated, repressed or cut off. Traditionally, there’s been the

¹ Dennis Weir, *The Way of Trance*, p.16-40.

idea that trance states connect us to the spirit world and we can draw power and healing from it – the placebo effect is basically healing through trance-suggestion.’²

This latter trajectory supports the independent, self-trained performer, who seeks to freely explore deeper meanings within an emancipated, autoschediastic space, and with an open link to the spectators. For such a dancer in deep trance, the impulses to move, from their beginnings, are a mingling of internal and external elements. These internal and external elements come from the dancer’s sensorial and psychological experiences and they present gaps or voids at their preeminent states. These voids are best filled by spontaneous responses and movements (that move themselves) and which provide the optimum potential for vigor and originality. In this autoschediastic movement, the trancer finds meaning in the pattern of the mingled, infinite combinations of internal and external stimuli. This process is a series of unfolding of the yet-to-be-known, and in this unfolding is the magnetic and the mesmeric.

Alain Badiou, in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, introduced the concept of dance as a metaphor for thought: ‘Dance as a metaphor for thought, presents thought to us as devoid of relation to anything other than itself, in the nudity of its emergence. Dance is a thinking without relation, the thinking that relates nothing, that puts nothing in relation. We could say that it is the pure conflagration of thought, because it repudiates all of thought’s possible ornaments’.³ I posit that in a space devoid of ornamental and organised choreography, the dance is pure semblance rather than a formation of resemblance. Hypothetically, this can be understood as an ‘empty stage’ where the dancer stands naked, exposing the unconscious.

In Jacques Rancière’s *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, the essay ‘The Two Forms of Mute Speech’ links thought and insight to the understanding of

² Ibid.

³ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 66.

aesthetics: ‘The idea of thought rests upon a fundamental affirmation: there is thought that does not think, the thought at work not only in the foreign element of the non-thought but in the very form of non-thought’.⁴

Zone of Resonance:

To say that this event will be an improvisation would be accurate; however, it is accurate only within the definition of dance improvisation as movements free from the repeating of routine patterns and strict choreography – a choreography that adheres to sameness for every repertoire – and precise eternal forms. Trance and its induction are subjective and open a spectrum of interpretations and levels of individual inner experience. While dance can be referred to in relation to formalised techniques, trance oscillates between techniques and autoschediastic or impromptu psychogogic non-techniques. Constantly resonating and morphing with an undefined narrative or choreography, improvisational trance in a dance reference requires responsive maneuvering between the spontaneous and the impulsive, but this ‘requirement’ means that the dance is not strictly improvisational (since pure improvisation would have no ‘structured’ requirements). In order to make this point clearer, let’s look closely at the word ‘resonate,’ in relation to the concept of ‘zone of resonance’.

The word *resonate* originates in the late 16th century from French *résonnant* or Latin *resonant* - ‘resounding’, from the verb *resonare*, from re- (expressing intensive force) + sonare ‘to sound’. *Resonance* is from late Middle English: from Old French, from Latin *resonantia* meaning echo, from the verb *resonare* meaning to resound.⁵ *Resonate*, then, suggests an expression of intensive force in an echoing. Trance occurring within an ontological state of deep focus (such as *D-E-focus*) –

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* p. 31.

⁵ Oxford dictionary etymology definition on *resonant*.

particularly in relation to the body (which is awake and, in the case of the dancer, moving) – defines a resonating zone, a portal between inner and outer actions. It is this ontological chamber that I call the ‘zone of resonance’. And the trance inasesthetics I employ within this zone is articulated through philosophical and empirical referencing of my practice in trance movement and the body. For my performance, the physical space I call The Great Square is where I allow the zone of resonance to manifest. I’d like to explain now what I mean by The Great Square and why such a space is significant for my practice.

The Great Square

‘*The Great Square has no corners*’– Lao Tzu, *Dai De Jing*

Lao Tzu’ phrase speaks to my core development in addressing the paradox of presence in performance. The phrase is found in chapter 41 of Lao Tzu’s *Dai De Jing* and aligns the concept of how one can make visible the invisible through *dao*, the Chinese word signifying ‘the way’. Quoting from chapter 41, we can explore further the ways in which the term ‘emptiness’ is understood in Daoism:

The great square has no corners

The great vessel is late in completion

The great music is imperceptible in sound

The great image has no form

The Dao is hidden and nameless

Yet it is only the Dao

That excels in giving and completing everything.

The Great Square is my *modus operandi*. The theme of *animal/god* is the body in a performative spectrum of trance resonance. A neutral

framework, 'The Great Square' is an on-going series of performances. This platform, as a *modus operandi*, involves collaboration with performers, musicians and designers, with the aim of presenting this performance, *animal/god*, as part of the series.

In trance, what is the empty body? The empty body, in its relation to references from different disciplinary perspectives, suggests the 'body without organs', the 'empty' body, the 'dead' body or the state devoid of the ego. The zone of resonance presents the abstract oscillation of modes as inductions to transformation. Artaud had actors challenge their audiences' sensibilities by offering the audience access to their own unexpressed emotions of the subconscious. The space from which the actors did this was through the portal of the empty body, or the zone of resonance.

The aesthetics of dance, if not confined to the formalisation of traditional choreographic patterning, can present the body in its 'in-ability' to dance – an in-aesthetic. In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook writes: 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.'⁶ For a dancer to 'be' in a performance space without the pressure to perform in dance (The Great Square is just such a space) is a permission to be 'unable', as it reveals an otherness of that which constitutes the habitual 'ability'. The Great Square becomes an emphetic space, an empathy trance zone, and a space for a poetic manifestation of stasis. It is a dance space for every semblance of affliction. Let the body be free – this is an organic embodiment of being. When the body requires habitual movements to function (as in traditional dance), a permission to de-function allows the body to move in an un-driven flow.

⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 9.

This performance space, a symbolic, autoschediastic 'square' – The Great Square – is a probe for meaning and dance kinesthetics that I understand through a Buddhist sense of self-annulling 'emptiness'. The performance is a probe for a space for the makings of a trance dance aesthetic that is addressed with a series of schisms – between performer and spectator, form and matter, and trance and the will – and giving width and depth to affect through trance dance aesthetic.

How is a dancer free? Byung-Chul Han, in his book *Shanzhai*, which propounds the idea of a freedom from ownership or pure authorship in the perspective of dealing with morals or ethics in creativity in relation to copying and authenticity, suggests it was Hegel who accused the Chinese of 'great immorality'; and of being 'notorious for deceiving whenever they can'. According to Han, Hegel also submits that no one in China resents this even if the 'deception' is exposed. Hegel found no logical explanation for this 'consciousness of moral abandonment', but traced it back to Buddhism, which is regarded 'as the highest and absolute – as God – pure nothingness', which explains the 'contempt for individuality as the highest perfection'.⁷ Han explains, 'Hegel assumes a nihilistic nothingness in the negativity of the Buddhist notion of emptiness. For example, he holds it responsible for the great immorality of the Chinese. Hegel clearly thinks that nihilistic nothingness accepts no reliability, no finality, no consistency. According to Hegel, the opposite of this nihilistic nothingness is the god who stands for truth and truthfulness'.⁸

In Hans' view, emptiness in Chinese Buddhism means 'the negation of decreation'.⁹ The question of creativity arises in light of this modular of production. This is reminiscent of Grotowski's concept of accessing the actor's potentiality through '*via negativa*'. In my practice, 'the negation

⁷ Han Byun-Chul, *Shanzhai* p. 2.

⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

⁹ Ibid, p. 2.

of decreation’ demands two elements to understand it: characteristics and objectives:

Characteristics:

1. Do not block the creative forces by criticising them or hindering them from one’s self or from collaborators. This is a fundamental principle of improvisational performance art.
2. Do not revert back to habitual performance practices or a ‘bag of tricks’.
3. Do not expect virtuosic performance achievements; however, do not hinder them either. Whatever occurs is acceptable.

Objectives:

The objective is to achieve the flow within the zone of resonance, ‘the thought that thinks itself’, ‘the movement that moves itself’, ‘the dance that dances itself’.

‘The Great Square’ is this notion of an empty space – a space not full in potentiality but rather a negated space of decreativity. It empties out and de-substantialises Being.

But what exactly happens in this space during a trance-dance performance? In my experience, there is a relationship between something that is less than human (animal) and something that is more than human (god), and that relationship finds its various manifestations in The Great Square. Let us look closely at the notions of becoming animal and becoming god.

Becoming animal/becoming god

The greater the similarity between people, the greater the production, this is the current logic. Capitalism needs all of us to be the same, including tourists. Neoliberalism would not work if people were different... returning to the inner animal, which doesn’t consume or communicate unfortunately. I don’t have concrete solutions. In the end the system might implode by itself... In whatever case, we are living in a radically conformist time... the world is at the limit of its capacities, perhaps it will short circuit and we will recover this inner animal’.¹⁰

The Javanese traditions of *Bedoyo* and *Bantengan* are two excellent exemplars of traditional performance practices utilising trance. *Bedoyo* is a court dance from the Yogyakarta Royal Palace in which dancers hope to be possessed by the divine, and *Bantengan* is a trance practice in East Java in which performers hope to be possessed by animal spirits, particularly bulls. In my presentation of ‘animal’, I recontextualise both of these traditional practices into a contemporary performance platform. The understanding of *Bantengan* and *Bedoyo* through immersive experimentation in performance-making provides a different perspective to Western movements of theatre and dance. The difference lies in the methods of embodiment through the understanding of trance – how trance affects a performer’s access to their unconsciousness and the affect on/with spectators. Furthermore, the similarities between *Bedoyo* and *Bantengan* provide perspectives from philosophy and theology concerning how performances can be understood not only in their affects upon the performers but especially in their relationship to spectators. The notion of ‘immanence’ is a good example.

¹⁰ Han, Byung-Chul, in a lecture, “In Orwell’s ‘1984’ society knew it was being dominated. Not today”, in Baelona, Feb 2018, published by Institute of the Black World 21st Century (IBW.21). <https://ibw21.org/commentary/orwells-1984-society-knew-dominated-not-today/>

‘Immanent’ is a mid-16th century word from Late Latin immanent - ‘remaining within’, from in-‘in’ + manere ‘remain’.¹¹ The notion of immanence maintains that the divine is manifested into the material domain as a divine presence according to some philosophical and metaphysical theories. Immanence on the other hand is usually suggested by the spiritual permeating the mundane world. In contrast, the theories of transcendence depict the divine presenting itself outside the material realm.

In trance-mediumship including *Bedoyo* trance dancers, it is said that the gods/deities manifest themselves through the dancer as vassals/mediums. That is immanence. The *Bedoyo* dancers, in their training to ‘empty’ themselves, create a portal as a way of embodiment of the divine, where the divine refers to a likeness of God or a god.¹² The meanings include ‘sacredness’ when referring to the divine as distinguished from animal and in reference to the supernatural. In *Bedoyo*, the dancer consciously strives to become more like the divine.

Similarly, to say that the *Bantengan* trancer is becoming more like a bull is to say they are becoming less like a human, and in regaining their human-ness becoming less of a bull. In the *Bantengan* carnival thousands of trancers and spectators get involved in the carnival, pairing to form a ‘bull’ or a group with shamans or supporting other individuals from their team. No two bulls are the same in form as each would be sanctified with different spirits or divinities from the sacred energies of nature. In Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Memories of a Sorcerer’, the authors observe that becoming-animal always involves ‘a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity’:

¹¹ Oxford dictionary etymology of *immanent*.

¹² *Bedoyo* has its origins linked in particular to the mythical Queen Nyai Loro Kidul from the Southern Sea (Indian Ocean) in Javanese and Sundanese mythology.

It may very well be that other agencies, moreover very different from one another, have a different appraisal of the animal. One may retain or extract from the animal certain characteristics: species and genera, forms and functions, etc. Society and the State need animal characteristics to use for classifying people; natural history and science need characteristics in order to classify the animals themselves. Serialism and structuralism either graduate characteristics according to their differences, or order them according to their differences. Animal characteristics can be mythic or scientific But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. I am legion.¹³

In the state of possession, in deep trance of D-E focal modes (See ‘Five Pillars of Trance Focal Modes’), the bull trancer immerses in a zone Deleuze and Guattari describe as ‘a zone of the indiscernible, of the undecidable’. The bull-trancer is in no way a bull in its animal form, but outlines a certain bull-ness that is within the shadow of human-ness. Instead of a formalisation of the bull that is strong, with an untamable force – the bull that looks at the humans from the wild – there is in the trance zone the ‘indiscernible’ and the ‘undecidable’ bull. As Deleuze explains: ‘Man becomes animal, but he does not become so without the animal simultaneously becoming spirit, the spirit of man, the physical spirit of man presented in the mirror as Eumenides or fate.’¹⁴

Becoming, in a trance zone of resonance such as The Great Square, is the realm of the indiscernible, of the undecidable, within the C-D-E Focal modes.

In terms of performance, ‘becoming animal’ also involves the audience differently in comparison to traditional theatre. The narrative and

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 273.

¹⁴ Tracy Warr (ed.), *The Artist’s Body*, translated by Liz Heron, Phaidon Press, London, 2000, p. 197. Originally published as ‘*Le corps, la viande et l’esprit, le devenir-animal*’, in *Francis Bacon*, Paris, Editions de la difference, 1981, p. 19-22.

meaning do not come from a hermeneutic script but lie heavily in the semiotics of visceral symptoms of the energetic body. In neurological terms the viewer experiences the exact states of the trancer mirrored in their own neurons duplicated by witnessing. The audience members feel and become gods and animals themselves.

In my performance, I am induced to trance in techniques similar to both *Bedoyo* and *Bantengan*. I find transformed inside of myself, an animal, just as I would find inside something divine. In is maneuvering through my trance these two sides emerge – sometimes simultaneously. The apparition is of the animal/god.

Animal/God – The Great Square

Video version (see p. 150) - June 2020

This video was filmed with the camera fixed in one spot.

Dance/music trajectory: The music was composed and played by the late **Ezio Bosso**. Ezio and I met in a series of productions – *Amleto* (1997) and *Un Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* (1996) in Turin working with Teatro di Dioniso directed by Valter Molosti. We later performed as a duet, *The Body and the Double Base* (1998) in Melbourne. Ezio Bosso and I were passionate at the time about the idea of trance states utilised in the improvisation of music and dance. This piece of music, *Unconditioned: Following a bird* is one of Ezio's final pieces before he died on the same month this video was made. In my state of trance I had a glimpse of a lost being taking the flight of a little bird for a guide out of darkness. I, too, followed that bird in the dance to *Animal/God*. 'Unconditioned' pointed to a love without condition.

Filmed by Alex Cardy & Rhys Graham.

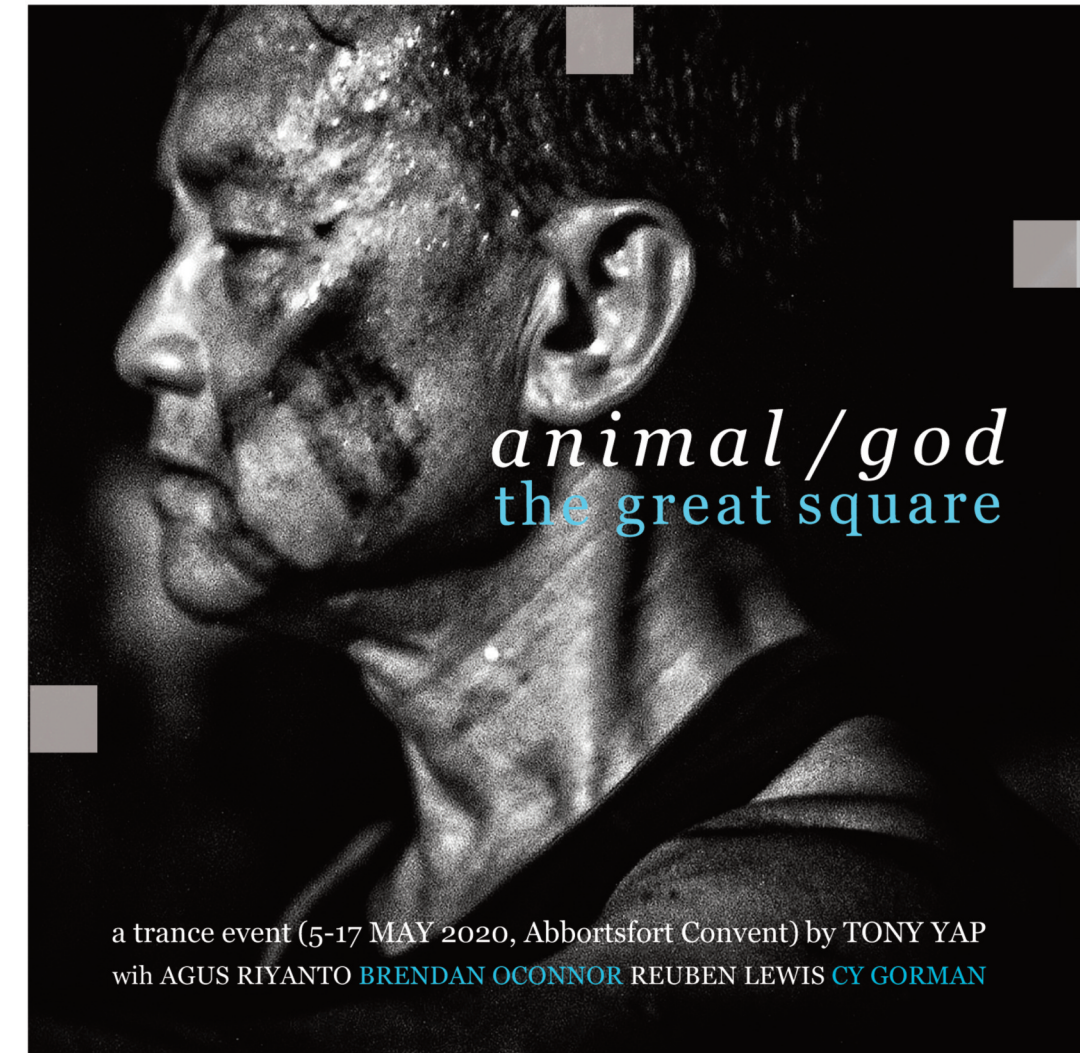


Fig 18. Poster of the original proposed performance.

Links to the online video performances

Click on links to access videos



> **Animal/God – The Great Square** (See Performance Synopsis p. 135), (video: 6:14 minutes – unedited) :
<https://vimeo.com/443242584>



> **Shadow's Light** (Video: 8:21 minutes – edited):
<https://youtu.be/2RWv965QLZg>



> **Trance forms experimentations**
– Psycho-vocality/activity/physicality,
(Video: 2:41 minutes – edited)
<https://vimeo.com/599921854>

Shadow's Light - December 2018

Tony Yap Company (Melbourne) and Surya Kencana (Java, Indonesia) join forces to create powerful contemporary trance ritual, for one night only. Arresting and uncompromising, 'Shadow's Light' is also a deep meditation on basic elements for living – quietude alongside the ecstatic.

Shadow's Light draws on traditional Javanese trance practices from the royal court of Central Java ('Scrimpi/Bedoyo') and the unbridled ecstatic trance practices of East Java ('Bantengan', bull-trance) and a hybrid of disciplines including contemporary dance and improvised music.

Artistic Director/performer - Tony Yap

Master vocalist, dancer - R. Ay Sri Kadaryati Ywandjana

Featured guest performers - Agung Gunawan & Sagitama Krisnandaru

Shaman, performer - Agus Riyanto

Dancers, TYC: Brendan O'Connor, Kathleen Gonzalez, Takashi Takiguchi, Adam Forbes, Rodrigo Calderon, Lee Kien Fei

Musicians: Rueben Lewis (trumpet) & Scott McConnachie (saxophone)

Venue: Testing Grounds, Melbourne

Supported by The City of Melbourne

Trance forms experimentations - January 2021

An exploration of autoschediatic psycho-vocality/activity/physicality

At the Abbotsford Convent, Melbourne, Australia

Performer: Tony Yap

Musician & sound artist: Reuben Lewis

Supported by Abbotsford Convent - PIVOT space grant



Fig 19. Images from *Animal/God – The Great Square*.

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