

Excerpt from
FINDING THE BONE IN THE WIND:
A Journey with Suprpto Suryadarmo in Bali, Indonesia
By Susan M. Bauer

This excerpt, from a longer article, represents a much larger body of work based on my ongoing investigations into the interface of dance improvisation, Authentic Movement, Balinese dance practices, masked dance, meditation, and performance. After making two trips to Bali, Indonesia, during 1995 and 1996, I was awarded a Fulbright grant to continue my studies of Balinese dance and mask making. My grant topic, "Intercultural Collaborations in Contemporary Topeng" (masked dance), also allowed me to continue my artistic work with Balinese and other international artists with whom I had worked on previous trips.

With a strong dedication to inter-cultural work, I had been collaborating with artists from Indonesia, India, Japan, and Thailand. I also had the opportunity to study and perform with the renowned Javanese choreographer Sardono Kusumo while a graduate student at UCLA in 1999. I found that Sardono's approach shares a similar philosophical base with Authentic Movement, a form I have been involved in for 20 years. Sardono also seemed to understand and to take a particular interest in my masked dancing. I wrote an article about my work with him called "Must to the Mountain, Sardono Kusumo at UCLA." (Contact Quarterly, May 1998). My subsequent work with Suprpto Suryadarmo in 2000-2001 was a rich and inspirational continuation of this exploration into contemporary Indonesian movement and performance practices. My interest in the relationship between Authentic Movement and masked dance continues to be a central focus of my work as well. While the masked dancing is touched upon here, the fuller context of creating the masks, and performing with them, is beyond the scope of this article.

During my Fulbright year living in Bali (2000-2001), I was fortunate to begin work with Suprpto (Prapto) Suryodarmo as part of a workshop called "Creation of the Light" that was held in Bali. Suprpto calls his movement practice, "Amerta Movement," an approach based on developing sensitivity and inner attentiveness. I found that my ongoing practice of Authentic Movement gave me a framework and experiential base to understand Suprpto's approach. Suprpto, likewise, took an interest in my mask work, and invited me to include my masked dancing in several performance events during and after the workshop.

The contemporary masks I work with are made in collaboration with Balinese mask-maker Ida Bagus Oka, yet are not traditional Balinese characters. Rather, they are my own designs based on characters or archetypes and are blessed for performance in a special Balinese ceremony to render them sacred performing masks. The concept of masks as vehicles for spiritual or archetypal energies is not new to Indonesian culture (or to many other native cultures for that matter), and approaches to dance that honor this interconnection between the realms of spirit and human are evident in Balinese culture, as well as in my work with Suprpto. As in Authentic Movement, however, his approach begins with focus on the inner movement realm of the individual.

Suprpto (Prapto) Suryodarmo was born in 1945 and was first introduced to Javanese mysticism as a child through visiting the temples and dukuns (shamans) in Central Java with his parents. Since 1970, Suprpto has studied free movement, Vipassana meditation and Sumarah (Javanese meditation techniques,) placing these practices in nature, in temples, and in villages. In 1974 he was initiated into the Javanese sect of Buddhism and created Wayang Buddha (The Buddha's Puppet). In the early 1980s, Suprpto started to work with professional artists from Europe. Many of these artists were already exploring the interface of movement, psychology, medicine, dance therapy, and ritual theater. As such, there was a natural convergence between their interests and Suprpto's own artistic journey that further influenced his practice.

In 1986, Suprpto established his own school called Padepokan Lemah Putih, centered in his extraordinary landscaped garden, Mojosongo, on the outskirts of Solo, Java. Workshops at his school include practice sessions there, as well as excursions to sacred sites such as Wonogiri Hill, Sukuh Temple, Borobudur Temple, and Parangtritis beach. At each site, participants explore the energies of the landscape through movement. Prapto also works internationally as a movement teacher and performing artist.

(The above two paragraphs are adapted from program notes at the Sharing Art and Religiosity Conference, Bali, January 2001).

A Modern Shaman

In his work as a teacher and performer, Suprpto (Prapto) Suryodarmo, derives his training from nature and spiritual practice rather than from the world of classical dance. Scholar Paul Stange notes:

As a modern shaman he [Suprpto] takes lessons directly from the elements...He declared that his knowledge came from nature and through a commitment to openness and spontaneity he had learned from Sudarno, his meditation teacher, rather than through any formal performance practices... (Stange, 218).

Suprpto's work developed within the elements of nature, and his performances are generally presented in a ritual context in a natural setting. His approaches to teaching similarly reflect a commitment to interaction with the natural world through outdoor practice sessions:

Suprpto calls his method, both of guidance and movement, 'reading.' He directs people to attune to the 'inner movement' in the body and to distinguish it from 'thought.' One student described Suprpto as functioning like a mirror, one in which students see themselves more clearly...

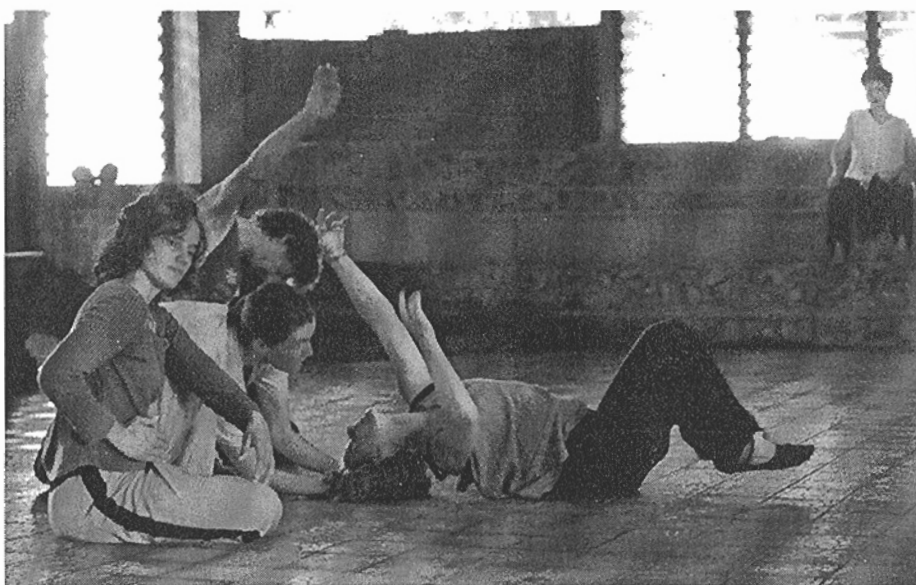
In each context, movement meditation is practiced so that individuals learn to respond to the energies of nature, as received in their bodies. Usually each student follows a different rhythm, 'listening' to the powers they feel within their bodies in the places they move through. (Stange, 219).

In 2001, during the workshop with Suprpto in Bali, I kept a journal as a new student to this process. These entries document some of my experiences as I began a fascinating and inspirational journey of working with Suprpto and performing together in his field of "art human nature."

"Shall we just move?"

This simple question begins our warm-up and our time together in Bali. Seven of us have gathered—from England, Germany, America, and the Netherlands—to work with Prapto for three weeks. Today we meet each other as I enjoy most, in movement.

At first we each move on our own, exploring this ancient temple ground we find ourselves in—the old gray brick steps, the temple gates, the dirt floor, the few trees nestled around the side-slope of grass, dotted with white flowers fallen to the ground. We also meet



Group practice, Samuan Tiga (Susan Bauer on floor arching backward)

the local cows, which gather on the field above to watch, joined by a few young Balinese children who squat in the tall grass to get a glimpse of us as well.

At some point in this solitary exploration, Prapto begins to move us toward each other, leading first one by the arm, then another by the waist, one by one gently shifting us into a group for the first time. We begin to move together in the morning sunshine of this day.

Will one person please come?

Now, Prapto dances with each of us in turn. During each duet, the rest of us sit, lie down, smoke a cigarette, even chat. There seems to be plenty of time for this moment, each of us meeting Prapto in a dance.

Bowing from the Center

My duet with Prapto started like this: just as I begin moving forward, I get a feeling to turn back around. I do this slowly, just in time to see the leaf Prapto is handing to me from behind, as he heads off in the opposite direction. I take the leaf and continue to move on my own. We each move separately, yet with the energy of our leaf between us. Later the leaf is passed back to Prapto in some energetic moment of swiftness that is beyond memory, but now he has it.

When we end we are each on the ground, suddenly together again, in stillness now and looking up at the cows on the hill, the leaf on the floor between us.

After a moment of this stillness, we rise and face each other, and Prapto makes a series of gestures like a prayer before bowing with hands together: Thank you, he says to me simply. Yet in this simple bow I learn a great deal.

Prapto has suddenly pulled back, gone deeply and calmly into himself, as if returning to neutral. Perhaps this is a way to disengage. As I realize this, I feel very

American, in the forward and outgoing way of my own bow: simultaneously nodding and smiling my "thank you."

Later, as I watch this same ritual at the end of each duet, I see each person tacitly learn this way of bowing from their center.

Only Being

Dancing outside, it starts to rain. Prapto moves us inside, to another space near the outdoor temple we have been moving in. This indoor space is dark and dusty, huge and has not been cleared or swept for ages. The rain is pounding down loudly now, mixing the dusty air with humid heat.

Later in the day, the rain stops and we move back out to the dampened temple floor.

Four people please come. A group of four begin to move. As we move, Prapto begins to comment. To one: *Find your own space. Don't be greedy for her space.* To another: *Remember, please, your legs are long. Feel your walk, now, good!*

Then to me: *Don't be only waiting.*

Hmmm..., I am moving, engaged, why does he feel me waiting? I ignore the comment.

Don't wait. When you wait, you become a victim.

Now I am curious again, let go a bit more in my dancing. Where am I waiting, I ask myself?

No victim in there, can you just do it?

I continue dancing, what is shifting? Less composing, less sensing, more action, entering more deeply the free-flow waterfall of my impulses to move, my energy opening up. I find that my body actually has a lot of energy to express! Slow at first, then gathering speed, I am creating and 'along for the ride' at once now.

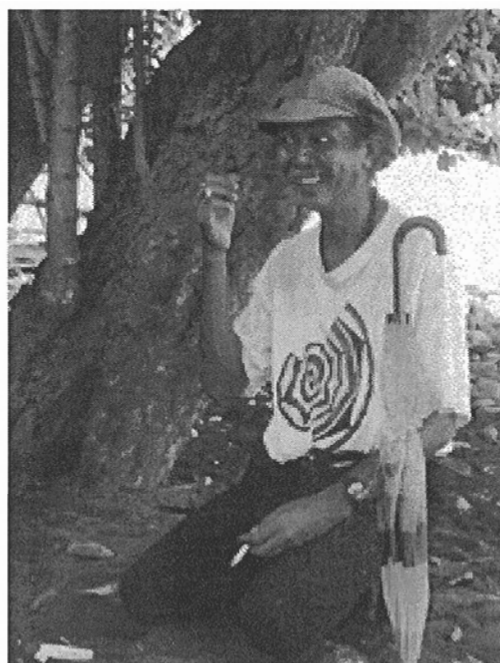
Amidst this I hear a cascade of encouragement from Prapto: *OK, right! Yes, now you are not only victim! Yes, more like this, no waiting! Only being!*

The dance ends. My clothes are now wet and dirty from my contact with the rain drenched earth and bricks. The sun is lower in the sky and our day is over.

What had shifted? Perhaps, I had been influenced by Prapto's movement, unconsciously using him as a model for the "look" of how to do this practice. In my experience of him so far, much of his movement has a slow, deliberate, grounded, and sustained quality—reminiscent of classical Javanese court dance. I had noticed other participants sometimes taking on a similar style as well. In this last dance, I felt pushed out of this style to reclaim more of the varied dynamics of my own style of moving.

Tonight I was reading an article Paul Stange gave me that he wrote about Prapto. In it was this passage by one of Prapto's students, Helen Poyner:

This work has no form in the sense that Tai Chi, ballet, or highly stylized classical Javanese dance has form. How



Prapto on the beach in Tejakula, Bali

you do something, the quality of your presence and authenticity in a movement is more important than the form of the movement. (Stange, 220)

Yes, and from my experience today, I see that this underlying philosophy is directly related to that of Authentic Movement. He is delving deeply, beneath the world of "looks like" and into the world of presence, of beingness.

The Witness

Today we explore "active and passive" in duets. But first, we discuss the concepts: *Passive is more simple, just being. Active is more complex, involved in the doing.*

How to have an internal witness in both the active and the passive: the witness inside is very important. Like in Vipassana meditation—it is a state of Pure Attention. In the dancing when I keep this pure attention, I can see my mind in my reaction, in my body. Like the one is the microcosm and the other the macrocosm. Yes?

He is still awhile, pondering this, looking down, then around, and then down again.

We can have this kind of awareness in both the active and the passive. But, to be a witness we don't need to be active in there. Like at Borobodor, there are so many Buddha's, have you been there?

Someone replies: "Yes, in Jogja and there are so many stuppas ..."

Yes, so many stuppas and so many Buddha's, each being the witness, right? he says, smiling. *The Buddha is always the witness.* Then, after a pause: *Also, our*

father and our mother, always our witness.

He looks directly at us now: *So, we should try to practice how to have the witnessing in both the passive and the active. Then of course we also witness each other—*

Someone laughs, “And that’s where I get stuck—paying so much attention to the other dancers or my partner and then I get lost...”

Yes, yes, that’s right! Getting caught up in the environment around me can be like a trap. But I must also witness what’s going on in the environment in me.

And he demonstrates:

What’s going on, Prapto? he says, looking eagerly all around him. We all laugh and nod in agreement.

Then, stopping himself abruptly and sitting squarely, *Yeah, what’s going on Prapto?*

You see, then I have to remember to witness for myself. Really to see and be in here! By this you find your position.

So you try this with yourself and one other. Two people please come.

And we begin this practice of finding our position.

My Feet as an Anchor

Very good work with Prapto today, as he dances with our group. This morning I am really in my mind, so many thoughts and emotions and I can’t step out of it. I’m uncomfortable in my movement for the first time in so long—where to be? Where am I? Then, I can’t relate with another because my own center is not clear. How to find my position?

At one point in this struggle, Prapto “finds” me in the group, takes my hand, and starts to walk, slowly at first and then briskly around in a swift curve, then fast straight across the room, then a few slow steps. This goes on for a few minutes. As I start this walking I feel my feet, my pelvis underneath me, supporting my walk, my body alive again and present. When he leaves I am moving, full and free and relieved.

I realize he has put me back in my body. Or more accurately, the walking and attending to only walking shifted me away from the business of my mind, and back to the business of my movement. Again, I remember my feet as an anchor.

Later, Prapto gathers us together.

So you can see, I don’t like to teach. I don’t want to teach, I want to work, in the practice itself.

Through the creative work of moving, we learn.

The Mover

Today Prapto talks to us about the Sharing Art and Religiosity Conference that will be here in SamuanTiga. The list of participants shows there will be 51 of us, from 7 countries! We are painters, multimedia artists, actors, photographers, healing artists, musicians,

dancers, choreographers, and scholars. I look under Prapto’s name, and see he has written simply: “mover.” Again, I find Prapto using the language of Authentic Movement.

Mask Dancing

Today I bring my mask, the Grace mask. It is the first one I made and the one I had danced with in my work with Sardono. Prapto invited me to work with my masks during our practice time this week, and this seemed like a good way to begin.

He introduces this idea to the group. *This can add another element to our work here, like really expand of the consciousness. I invite her to join it with us in the practice.* He invites me to show the mask to the group, but I would prefer to introduce it through the dancing. Prapto agrees this is a better idea.

After we dance for some time in the outer courtyard by the temple walls, I gather my mask bundle and light some incense, open the mask from its cloth, and circle the incense over the mask before putting it on. Entering the space, I begin in stillness. I take in the smell of the incense and the light on the trees on the hill, feeling the breeze. I am opening, now moving in the space. Though I have danced with this one mask many times, this moment has a newness to it. As if the earth and air are more solid in the presence of my being, the connection to nature around and within me more palpable. The mask seems to emphasize the qualities that are evolving for me from this dancing in nature with Prapto. The spirit of the mask itself is guiding me in a new way, leading me more forcefully onward in my movement.

Prapto is singing and this begins to enter my dance as well. A deep chanting and then a high pitched drone, back and forth, encircling me with sound.

At the end of our day Prapto comments simply: *Thank you, Susan, you work with your mask here today.*

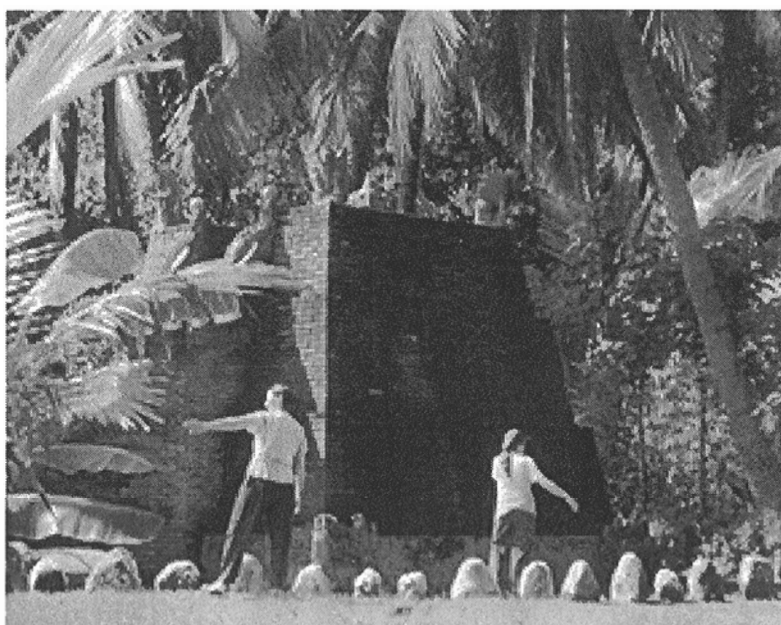
The Face Beneath the Mask

I bring another mask, but not to dance with in the group. I am planning a dance for the Art and Religiosity Conference, using the gold Buddha mask I have recently finished making with Oka. I have an idea to do this performance right here, in the outdoor space we’ve been dancing in, and want to rehearse after our group practice.

At the end of the day, I talk with Prapto about my idea, and he works with me on my movement.

Your face, it is too sharp. Relax your face, your brow, then you can shining. . . Yes, right, now too sharp again, your breath, breathe, no thinking, only relax and then shining. OK, yes, good.

As I take off the mask, I realize that he was actually



Moving at Temple Teja Amerta

commenting on my own facial expressions beneath the mask. His observations felt accurate to me. This is a Balinese concept, that the face beneath the mask—and ultimately the whole intention of the self, the body, as revealed in the face—must support the expression of the character of the mask itself. Every intention is seen, perceived, in the interface of self and mask.

And again I remember that this authenticity and “only being” applies with the mask as well, that there is no hiding behind the mask.

Mask Ritual

Performance tonight here in the village of Samuan Tiga, which means “meeting of three points.” I call the piece “Mask Ritual.” In the program notes I wrote:

“This dance is born of an inner collaboration between my American dance background, my experience in Indonesian dance, and my practice of meditation and Buddhism—my own ‘Samuan Tiga.’ I offer this dance tonight to invoke the Buddha nature in each of us.”

Waiting on the steps, candles lit, the crowd emerges from the indoor space. They move toward the temple grounds. I am there already, lying on my side on the steps with my mask. Slowly people begin to sit on the side on the terraced steps of the grassy slope. When they are settled, Prapto enters and sits high up on the hill by the tree. The flute music begins. Slowly the music is raising me up; I begin moving. I find the mask and music, night and candle-light. Everywhere alive in each mudra, each stance. Prapto begins to chant, softly at first and then more loudly, the flute music still in the background. This begins to initiate a new flow of movement and mudras as I make my way up the steps, along the ridge, to the tree. Later, a deep stillness. I think I am kneeling. The flute music has stopped, Prapto is

silent. Candles in the trees still light the night sky and the white flower-covered steps.

As people disperse, Prapto and I sit in silence. A long time passes. I end and stand, take off the mask; Prapto and I bow to each other.

This marked the close of the festival. Tomorrow we will all go to Temple Teja Amerta—Prapto’s temple in Tejakula, a small fishing village on the northeast coast of Bali, to continue our practice.

Temple Teja Amerta

This morning, sitting on the beach, Prapto tells us about this temple by the sea that he built. Then he introduces us to the male and female spaces.

Each side of the temple, it is different. This side, it is more of female space. The other side, it is more male space. You will see how I make conscious in there to be different in the design.

Now we will do half the group go to the female space, half the group to the male space, then later we can switch when you like to. You see, how do I relate in there? What is the energy from the land there, the trees or the rocks or whatever? And from your inner expression too? Really take time, let it speak to you!

This is our only instruction for our next three hours of practice. We all begin, spreading to one side or the other, accepting this process of discovery for ourselves.

Clear Embracing: the Bone in the Wind

Practicing again in the grass by the sea.

Two people please come.

As I enter the space, I am drawn to the sound of the ocean, the fluid motion, and the gentle breeze blowing in with the morning sunrise. All this enters my movement, and feels soft and familiar. Slowly another man, one of the Indonesian artists who has joined us this week, enters the space and we begin to dance.

After making a few comments to my dance partner, Prapto turns his attention to me: *Where are you Susan? I see the space and the air, now can you find the bone in the wind of your dancing?*

I really don’t know what he is talking about, and by now I am lost in an attempted duet I am finding quite awkward. This man has a particular earthy and grounded quality that I have felt drawn toward. Now I am dancing with him but avoiding him at the same time. Somehow Prapto seems to see all this, as he says, *Yes, can you relate in the earth together, not hiding in the wind?*

Perhaps I wish he would just leave me alone, as I say, “And how am I supposed to do that, Prapto?”

Can you be clear that you would embrace? By that,

you would find the bone in the wind.

We continue dancing through this conversation.
"What do you mean, Prapto?"

I mean now I see that you are already embracing in there, but how to bring more clarity.

"And how do I do that?"

Just don't be in your fear, is his only response.

Slowly I enter the duet more fully again, with my defensiveness diffused and no recourse but to consider what he has said. I begin by centering in a strength in my core, still feeling the sea and wind in my body as well. For now I find it best to ignore my partner.

Yes, yes, right... but now you are more clear embracing, but with closed, what about the other?

As I begin to bring my partner back into my awareness, I notice that I start to go back to my floating movement on my own.

Now don't be in your fear Susan.

Our duet continues... *now good, you are embracing, like embracing with open, that's better. But you are still not clear in there...* And as I dance, I begin to move from this place of strength and centeredness, yet still gentle in myself, and somehow comfortable now with dancing in a duet. I have found a meeting ground between us of earth and wind...

Yes, yes, that's right, good... exactly Susan, ... he mutters while exhaling from his cigarette.

At the end of our duet, my partner and I have ended facing each other, he smiling at me as if respectful of the strength and courage I have found in my body.

Right, this is now embracing with open, but also clear embracing, with intention, and no fear in there. This is a beginning. Still, this will be your challenge: to find the bone in the wind of your dancing.

And I see that this really has nothing to do with the person I was dancing with, but rather has served as a mirror for my seeing of myself and my movement.

On to Solo

The workshop in Bali has ended; the rest of the group has continued on to Solo in Java for another week of practice there. Spoke to Oka last week, and he told me that we really must begin carving this next mask on the new moon, which is in five days, so I am staying in Bali to continue my work. Prapto will return from the Solo program, and has mentioned that he will participate in several events in Bali. He would like me to join with my masked dancing.

Group Ritual Performance

Today we have all met here in the village of Bedulu—the students from the Naropa Bali group and several other artists who have been invited. After a full day of practicing together on this land, we all gather in

the grassy field high above the stream. The sun is setting and a gentle breeze has begun. Prapto turns to me and another artist: *Dusk, this is really powerful time. We go now?*

"Yes, OK," we both agree.

Good, you go tell the others.

But first, I remind him, I have to go put on my costume and get my mask.

Yes, that's good, you go now and we begin. Then when you are ready you just join with us.

The changing rooms are down by the stream, so I head down the hill. After changing, I do some meditation and movement preparation as I usually do, then head back up the hill. Instead of using the path, I have decided to walk up the back way so I can emerge into the group from behind the stone steps.

Later in the grass, I am moved to lie down: the reclining Buddha image. It takes a few moments for me to really notice, and by then it's too late. Ants from everywhere are crawling all over my body. I lie here, still and meditative, feeling these ants going by. I feel that I am being tested by the presence of these small beings: have I entered the depth of this mask or not?

By some blessing, when I finally do get up, most have crawled away, and as I continue moving in the grass, closer to the audience now, only a few last ants are gracing my sweating body. I see Prapto moving in the field along with the others.

Later, when the sun has set and our dance has ended, we all go down by the river for a Balinese dinner that has been prepared for us. After dinner we will have one more event, an evening of improvised offerings for us all to share in.

Finding the Bone in the Wind

The moon has risen, and its bright light joins us in our final performance spot, the stage just overlooking the stream. Prapto announces: *Please come, whoever would like, and then we just all do like that, like whatever we want to offer, OK?*

Prapto and a few others join in an improvised dance. Then I dance in a trio we improvise as well. After a few more improvised dances, there is a stillness for some time. Then a few musicians begin to play.

It is a beautiful flute sound, with Rina playing—and Prapto drumming and chanting along. A perfect end to our day of dancing together, I think, as I sit listening. The moon is shining and the night is clear. Then I see it: an image of myself standing, in a deep lunge, reaching one arm back and one up toward the moon. Feel it in my body.

I sit in stillness, listen to the music. There it is again, this image, this impulse toward moving in my body. I begin to get tense: I don't want to start to dance now, when the night is ending so perfectly. Everyone is

just fine, enjoying the music, I remind myself, just sit down!

Yet in the next moment, I can tell the impulse is too strong, beyond my thinking mind, and before I know it I am there, out in the center of the space and finding the deep lunge and extending my arms out, one behind me and one up toward the bright moon. This movement expands lusciously throughout my body and deep down into the earth. Planted here. Then from there, a wave of movement begins to evolve, flows, tumbles as the musicians respond to me and I to them, transforming my "solo" into a group improvisation of dance and music, earth and moon. An inner pulse is driving me now and I have lost all self-consciousness, my movement strong and grounded, direct and yet free. Prapto is chanting loudly and fully, and I engage with this as well. Breathing hard and living, alive and present in this night dance.

This becomes, in fact, the last dance that night.

As we head back to the cars, I stop, see Prapto up the hill waiting. When I get there, I stop in front of him and he looks at me, nods. He is still looking directly at me in silence, when the thought arrives: I've found it. In that last dance, yes, I found it!

Prapto smiles. Yes, *good*, he says, and nods. Then he turns to walk to his car.

And somehow I am certain that he knows this too, that at last, I had found the bone in the wind of my dancing. ○

Susan Bauer (MFA, MA) is a dancer and dance/somatics educator who has taught in both college and community settings for the past 20 years, informed by her extensive background in dance improvisation, Authentic Movement, and Body-Mind Centering (TM). She is currently on the faculty at Moving On Center School in Oakland, CA, where she teaches Authentic Movement and Experiential Anatomy. s1bauer@aol.com

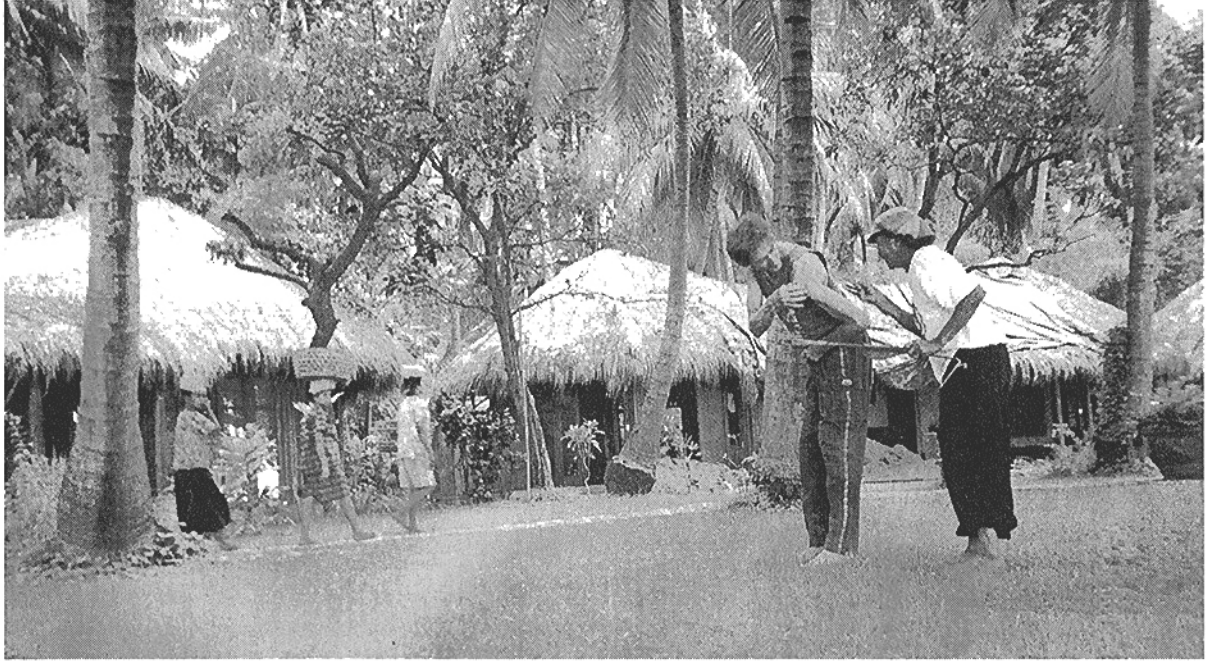
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Special thanks to Naropa University, the Naropa Bali program (2001) and director Diane Butler, and Suprpto Suryodarmo and his school for sponsoring the conference and related events. This article was written with Suprpto's permission. To contact Suprpto (Prapto) Suryodarmo's school, Padepokan Lemah Putih in Solo, Indonesia: amerta@lycos.com or amerta@solonet.co.id



Suprpto (Prpto) Suryodarmo and participant during "Creation of the Light" workshop in Bali.

"You see, how you relate in there...? What is the energy from the land, the trees or the rocks? And from your inner expression too? Really take time, let it speak to you!"

—Suprpto Suryadarmo

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Providence, Rhode Island
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