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Embodying Topeng: Gender, Training and Intercultural Encounters

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**Embodying *Topeng*: Gender, Training and
Intercultural Encounters**

Tiffany Strawson

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University

in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Arts & Humanities Doctoral Training Centre

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee. Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

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- 'Actions speak louder than words; the contradictory comedic success of *Grup Gedebong Goyang in Bali, Indonesia*' for 'Continuity and Change' SEASUK (South East Asian Studies UK), Durham University. September 2012
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Abstract

Embodying *Topeng*: Gender, Training and Intercultural

Encounters

Tiffany Strawson

This research centres on the Balinese performance tradition known as *topeng* which translates as Balinese masked dance-drama. In Bali this genre is performed traditionally in spaces reserved for religious ceremonies. The research questions the extent to which, and how, it may be possible for a non-Balinese person to embody a culturally coded, sacred object (the mask) and how a woman is able to make meaning and express herself within a genre which is traditionally the preserve of men. The research has therefore sought to develop an individual and intercultural approach to both the design of new masks and their performance.

The thesis critiques modes of cultural understanding in relation to notions of balance, based on colonial and dualistic trajectories between Bali and the UK. Alternative modes of exchange explore in-between and hybrid space that is informed by Lo and Gilbert's dynamic model of intercultural practice which they visualise as a 'spinning disc held by an elastic band' (Gilbert and Lo 2002: 45). The key issues explored are notions of training; the relocation of ritual and the cultural

specificities of 'home'; mask-making and design; non-Balinese stories on which to base alternative performances of *topeng*, ones that more strongly position female characters; and finally the embodiment of Balinese masks from a traditional and also a somatic perspective. The practical form the research takes is through making masks and devising performances, the outcomes of which form a part of the thesis.

The thesis both discusses and practically demonstrates how particular modes of embodiment, for instance cakra work, somatics and experiential anatomy may serve as strategies to communicate to a Western perspective how to bring 'life' to the mask, how to make it 'work' from a Balinese position and how these modes can assist in the process of intercultural (self) translation.

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Where masks appear in performance, they are given a contextual description.

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Preface

Mask work unifies a passion for craft with performance, two activities that have always inspired me. In my twenties, I was working for professional mask theatre companies as a mask-maker and for various physical theatre companies as a performer. Later, when the funding ceased and contracts were not extended, I sought out an opportunity to explore a different genre where mask work was still vibrant and included in popular performance practices: *topeng*. I first went to Bali in 1999 with the intention of gathering some new and different skills for my 'toolbox'. At that time, I was also involved in the delivery of creative and performance-based workshops in a variety of professional community and youth theatre settings and I hoped that a new skill set would improve my employability whilst feeding my desire to travel. Initially it was the theatricality of the mask that attracted me to Bali and the opportunity to explore new places; I did not anticipate at the time forming such a connection with the culture that is then expressed through performance. Nor did I ever imagine that this initial trip would lead me to many extended periods of living in Bali which has initiated a life time pursuit and curiosity in this art form.

Prior to 2010, the start of my PhD, I had already experienced training in the Ubud area, South Bali, which is predominantly renowned as the arts 'capital' of Bali. The majority of this training had been as a mask maker - learning how to carve - and my principal teacher in this respect was Ida Bagus Anom from the village of Mas

with whom I made a mixed collection of masks; traditional, post-traditional and contemporary¹. I first studied with him for two months and then returned to Bali in early 2000 for a period of eighteen months to resume training as a mask carver.

When I returned to Bali three years later in 2005, I was introduced to Ida Bagus Alit Wiadnyana from the Village of Lod Tunduh. With Ida Bagus Alit I gained experience as a dancer. His teaching approach was based on the belief that, to be a better carver, I needed to understand how the mask moved and more importantly, how it is brought to 'life'. , much of my interest over the years, including this thesis, has been motivated by a desire to gain a fuller understanding of what Ida Bagus Alit, Eight, Kakul and others describe.

Meeting Ida Bagus Alit and being embraced slowly by his family as a student and, eventually, as an extended family member, encouraged and inspired me to commit on a deeper level to training, and to engage in several 'intercultural' and cross-cultural collaborations. In 2008, I was the artistic director of a project called 'Bali Un-Masked' that facilitated a troupe of performers headed by Ida Bagus Alit to visit the U.K for a debut, month long tour of performances and exhibitions that

¹ Traditional masks, by a Balinese definition, would include all those designs that are prescribed by notions of religion and culture. Occasionally new designs are created by leading artists with the intention of being performed in traditional ceremonial settings and these are referred to as "*topeng kreasi baru* (literally meaning 'new creation traditional masks')". These masks are what I refer to as post-traditional. Contemporary masks are those that do not have any particular character, or more poignantly, do not have any function within the narrative structure of the *topeng* genre.

took place in collaboration with the Sherman Theatre Cymru Cardiff and the Centre for Performance Research in Aberystwyth. Because of this project I was invited by the Indonesian government to be the first British recipient of the *tiga bulan dharmasiswa*, a scholarship that enabled me to travel to Bali and train in dance at the Performing Arts Academy in Denpasar known as *Institute Seni Indonesia (ISI)* for three months. My teachers there were women; principally *maestro*² Ni Ketut Arini Alit and Ida Ayu Madé Diastini. These experiences were prior to any doctoral research but they inevitably have significantly influenced my knowledge base.

Prior to the commencement of my PhD, Bali had been my main country of residence for three years. I would travel back and forth for a period of never shorter than four months, often much longer as part of my training and performing lifestyle. I funded this 'yo-yo' existence by working as a free-lance director for theatre companies in Bali and England, and by running and managing my own community theatre in Devon, with the support of associate artists. Realising that this lifestyle in two different parts of the world was unsustainable and that I was not reaching the full potential of either aspect of my work, I decided to focus and further explore *topeng* under the umbrella of a doctoral research. Motivated by a mixture of love and perplexity, this PhD thesis and the masks and performances that it includes, chart these explorations.

² In the Indonesian context the word *maestro* implies that the performer/teacher is established in a multitude of different dance forms and genres

Introduction

This introduction is in two parts. The first foregrounds the nature of the research and includes a basic discussion of the aims, objectives and methodology of the thesis. Also included are descriptions of how and where this research sits contextually, and how it was generated.

In part two of the introduction I contextualise specific aspects of Balinese culture that are central to the thesis. Each chapter then further includes relevant information that allows the research themes and argument to unfold. To disrupt the pendulum swing between Bali and England and borrowing the term 'interweaving' (Fischer-Lichte *et al*, 2014), the structure of each chapter attempts to balance and integrate a range of cultural contextual information. As an example, Chapter 2 where I discuss my performance called *home* I integrate cultural context, theory and practice from Bali and England throughout the chapter.

Part One

What is *topeng*?

Bali is home to a wide range of performance forms, most of which transcend Western categories of convention. There are many forms of masked performance in Bali, but *topeng* is certainly one of the most popular and, according to Dibia and Ballinger, 'is the richest in its variety of masks and movements' (2004: 64). The word '*topeng*' literally means 'on the face' and 'comes from the verb '*tup*, meaning

cover, and refers to something pressed against the face' (Bandem and de Boer 1995: 144). In addition, the word also refers to both the carved wooden mask as an object, the genre as a whole and to an individual performance. Evidence indicates that this form of masked performance has been in existence since at least the ninth or tenth century BCE (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 64) and part of its success in survival has been its inherent ability to change, evolve and reinvent itself within traditional codified parameters.

Referred to as the masked dance-drama of Bali, *topeng* is based on the *babad* which are the chronicles of Balinese history and which tell the stories of Balinese ancestors and heroes of the past. One reason that the Balinese enjoy *topeng* so much 'is that it tells the history of their own people through movement, song, and dialogue/monologue' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 64). There are different ways of performing *topeng* according to the number of performers involved. Most of the research from the West suggests that it is *topeng pajegan* that is of interest (Emigh 1996, Coldiron 2004, Ruben and Sedana 2007, Dibia and Ballinger 2004, to name but a few). This is where a solo performer inhabits all the masks and there can be 'as many as twenty different mask characters to perform' (Coldiron 2004: 65). The masks are both full and half masks to 're-present the human face [...] to reveal a wide range of attitudes toward human life' (Emigh 1996: 103).

Traditionally the genre is the preserve of men, dominated by both male performers and mask carvers, yet the characters are both male and female, 'noble

and ignoble, tragic and comic, past and present, human, demonic and divine' (Emigh 1996: 103). In this way, the multiplicities that the masks show represent a great challenge to the performer's skill and ability. As Rubin and Sedana assert,

Topeng Pajegan, the one-man form of *topeng*, is a full demonstration of the virtuoso performer at work, as a single male actor/dancer moves between traditionally structured limits and boundaries on the one hand and improvisation on the other [...] He must also deal with an interesting actor-audience relationship as he subtly blends a serious ceremonial function with entertainment. (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 103)

It is widely established amongst the Balinese that *topeng* is an important part of sacred "*upacara* (meaning 'ceremony')". This is the space reserved for traditional performance. Henceforth, all reference to 'ritual', which is loaded anthropologically with certain histories and schools of thought,³ is to *upacara* in recognition that in Balinese language the word 'ritual' does not exist. In the realm of performance however, which is fundamentally what I am dealing with, the word 'ritual' is commonly accepted (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 64, Coldiron 2004: 170, Emigh 1996: 105, Rubin and Sedana 2007: 103).

Topeng is important within sacred proceedings as the last mask to be performed, Sidhakarya, completes the ritual and his⁴ appearance makes the entire ceremony

³ Anthropologist Mark Hobart, a specialist in Bali, and his students from the School of Oriental and African Studies, Natalia Theodoridou and Richard Fox, all support a view that the Balinese are misrepresented unless the researchers speak the Balinese language, as was evident on their panel 'Bali: Representation of Culture' in the 2012 IAS conference 'Bali in Global Asia: Between Modernization and Heritage Formation' in Denpasar.

⁴ Often masked performers, especially those who have the close connection of making and carving their masks, become one with their mask or talk as if the mask is alive and has a persona of their

a success (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 65). Whilst performers the world over have individual rituals that are uniquely personal to them, the *topeng* performer has culturally specific ritual activities in preparation for performance. These are carried out before, immediately before and during the performance and these constitute part of a greater ritual ceremony. In describing these activities as ritual, I am using the following definition:

A sequence of behaviour that; (1) is structured and patterned; (2) is rhythmic and repeatable (to some degree at least), and that, tends to recur in the same or nearly the same for with some regularity; (3) acts to synchronise affective, perceptual-cognitive, and motor processes within the central nervous system of individual participants; and (4) most particularly, synchronises these processes among the various individual participants. (d'Aquili and Newberg, 1999: 89- 90)

The elements identified by d'Aquili and Newberg are evident within the ritual practices of a *topeng* performance which are performed in either a house temple ceremony or in the village temple as part of a bigger, communal effort. The ceremony could be anything from a tooth filing, the blessing of a new building's foundations, a house temple "*odalan* (meaning 'birthday')" performed every six months to bigger, more serious rite of passage such as a "*nygaben* (meaning 'funeral')". These performances are performed in a space within the village temple called the "*jeroan*" and the "*jaba tengah* (meaning respectively the 'inner temple' and the 'outer-middle part of the temple compound')". Religion in Bali is *Agama Hindu Bali* and whilst most Balinese people describe themselves as Hindu, this

own. As I attempt to bring the mask to 'life' my belief in the potency of the mask becomes embodied and what was an inanimate object becomes a 'him' with whom I am in dialogue.

Balinese hybrid is a 'blend of ancestral worship, animism Hinduism and Buddhism' (Dibia and Ballinger 2006: 8).

All of these features that describe *topeng* can be most usefully seen in the seven-minute film *Topeng and Temple Ceremonies* (Appendix 1) which I invite my reader to watch at this juncture by watching the accompanying DVD listed as Appendix 1.

Research Aims and Questions

Whether in Bali or in England, when I am performing *topeng* I have always been aware of tangible cultural differences which manifest as absences, for me, of either a political dimension or an understanding of the embodiment of the mask. The overarching aim of this thesis therefore attempts to address these challenges and reconcile the obstacles that I faced specifically relating to gender and bringing the mask 'to life'.

- My research questions are; How is it possible to create a new set of female masks alongside the creation of new interpretations for women-centred characters and stories?
- What strategies are available to bring the mask to 'life'? As a non-Balinese person, what modes of performance or embodiment might be appropriate in attempting to animate the mask in view of its consideration as a sacred object?

- How may we engage and apply *topeng*, Balinese masked dance-drama, its related traditions and performance techniques and/or rituals to contemporary performance training and performance?

Following a Practice-as-Research mode of research I have generated knowledge that addresses, if only partially, these questions and they are presented as a written thesis, as a body of masks and as two different performances. Both performances were devised and were performed by myself; one is an intimate performance called *home* that takes place in the house where I live; this will be shown as part of my *viva voce*. The other is a contemporary English *topeng version* of *Little Red Riding Hood* and this has been performed at various locations, including the *Indonesia Kontempore* festival at SOAS in 2013.

Practice-as-Research: the embodiment of knowledge through 'doing'

At the time of my first doctoral research trip to Bali in January 2011 I was already involved in 'familiar' activities, those being training and performing in house temple ceremonies. As I embarked on my doctoral studies and tuned into a more scholarly review of *topeng*, the actual activities themselves did not change; it was more a question of *how* I was reframing and articulating knowledge within my increasing embodied understanding. I was investing deeply into 'know-how' as opposed to 'know-that' (Nelson 2006:107). As Zarrilli remarks in relation to knowledge generation, 'the concern is not with an essentialist 'what', but with

questions of 'how', 'from what perspective', 'through what process' (Zarrilli 2001: 37). In my training there was a shift from a purely embodied practice into an academic structural framework and this was mutable, flexible and responded to different demands of negotiating and responding to theory and practice.

The determining factor in the decision to frame the research as 'Practice-as-Research' was because this supports an understanding that although practice can be based on and through research it is in the *doing* that constitutes 'as' research. This is particularly valid when the body is engaged in embodiment processes and as a student of *topeng* I am in a continual process of re-integrating knowledge and experience. From this on-going position, I have never experienced a sense of 'arrival'; more a continual 'arriving' *towards* the embodiment of the mask.

As a practitioner-researcher the methodologies of this study are rigorously worked through 'a range of multi-modal practices' (Nelson 2013: 99). As a Practice-as-Research doctoral study the structure of my studies connects to Robin Nelson's dynamic model of PaR as identified in his article '*Practice-as-Research and the Problem of Knowledge*' (2006) which describes the legitimacy of a different sense of knowing and understanding research as a 'doing-knowing' paradigm. The model shows the flow between practitioner knowledge, critical reflection and the conceptual framework (Nelson 2006: 114) and aligns with Zarrilli in his pursuit of 'knowledge 'in'; knowledge 'for' an 'ever-deepening relationship to the art of practice'; and 'knowledge about (this) engagement' (Zarrilli 2001: 36).

Performance 'constitutes a repertoire of embodied knowledge, learning in and through the body, as well as a means of creating, perceiving and transmitting knowledge' (Taylor 2003: 36). My practical methods represent a 'know-how' through an embodied, experiential and relational set of practices that together have enabled me to interrogate my research questions and produce a range of hard outcomes. These constitute both 'products' (in terms of this written thesis, performances and the wooden masks that accompany them) and also processual research outcomes, such as training journals, interviews, filmed documentation, writings and sketches. All clarify the workings of this research methodology and show that each stage is knowledge-producing through a variety of different lens, which as Nelson articulates may be 'tacit, embodied, phenomenological, traditional, theoretical, explicit or cognitive-academic' (Nelson 2006: 114).

Issues of Embodiment and Culture

As I am establishing a firm foundation that research is a 'doing' activity some explanation of the term 'embodiment' is necessary to clarify my understanding and use. In a manner of speaking, as all things are experienced through the body, all states (and all stimuli) are by definition, fully embodied. Our whole lives are embodied in specific standpoints, and even the most recalcitrant and pure cognitive events are in themselves, fully embodied. What I am referring to, when I speak of embodiment is something different and that is, an embodied state which aims to engage the sensorial, kinetic, motor neuron, and psychological aspects of an individual in which a state of flow is achieved.

My chosen methodology is based upon an understanding of the embodiment of *topeng* from a psychophysical perspective. Zarrilli has written extensively about the evolution of the compound term 'psychophysical' in his approach to performance practice, including 'the actor-as-practitioner inside the embodied process, phenomenon, and experience of acting...that equally engages the 'inner' (psycho-) and 'outer' (physical) dimensions of experience and embodiment' (Zarrilli et al, 2013: viii). Zarrilli has foregrounded and pioneered the scholarship of this discourse which has blossomed with the advent of intercultural performance as emphasized by Zarrilli's practice of *kalarippayatu*. Zarrilli asserts that:

An intercultural perspective on acting invites us to re-frame discussions of contemporary acting by displacing psychology from its primary explanatory position and replacing it with alternative paradigms for understanding the interior/inner processes and possibility of acting as an embodied phenomenon and process. (Zarrilli 2013: 36)

The umbrella term psychophysical is generally understood to cover a diverse range of relationships within the embodiment process which include but are not limited to connections between the inner and outer, mind and body which include thoughts, feelings, perceptions, memory and imagination.

Matthew Cohen's states that there is little analysis about the embodiment of South East Asian dance practices, from either the perspective of the source-culture dancer or the foreigner attempting those dances. He claims that:

In more recent years there has been a deeply felt dissatisfaction with the lack of consistent engagement with the epistemologies of the body, among those engaged in the study of Indonesian performance - and more specifically dance performance making

- and the lack of a scholarship grounded in the physicality of the body. (Cohen 2006:7)

Despite this statement being made nine years ago, the argument still holds as there has been little research in this area. In the many conversations that I had with Ida Bagus Alit about the experience of dancing I would attempt to draw nearer towards defining the feelings and qualities of 'embodying' the mask. The term embodiment is generic and can range from meanings which may include (but are not limited to) 'the sense of being in a body or having a body, a conscious engagement with the materiality of sensing bodies, or the experience of practices that are physically manifested' (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 212). Every culture that includes masks in its traditional or heritage performances has its own culturally specific means of masking. In Indonesia, as Foley suggests, 'because principles of "*ilmu gaib* (meaning 'secret mystical knowledge')" and "*kabatinan* (meaning 'spiritual practice')" are involved with most traditional performance, the conversations that surrounds verbalisations about it are charged' (Foley 1990: 77). This might be one of the reasons why initially Ida Bagus Alit would side track in responding to my questions, as the dissemination of a teacher's knowledge may have karmic repercussions which could affect him or his family, so extreme caution is taken in how and to whom knowledge is shared. Ida Bagus Alit became more willing to share information, but would struggle to articulate and summarise by saying that his entire being was immersed in a feeling that was connected to his belief system and the mask for him, was entirely about that and not about himself.

Throughout a *topeng* training, the phrase that one constantly hears, as both a carver and a dancer, is 'bring life to the mask'. My research has aimed to understand and seek different ways of asking 'what does that mean?' My logic suggests that Ida Bagus Alit is referring to a sense of 'live-ness' or an elusive 'presence'; my instinct compels me to think that Ida Bagus Alit is alluding to the notion of the performer as a vessel of the 'sacred', but either way I appreciate that what he is talking about is harnessing 'energy' and that 'bringing the mask to life' involves learning how to hold and identify energy. This is a much-contested term (Murray 2015: 46, 50 – 51) and one to which I will refer later.

Previous Research

Much of scholarly attention to the Balinese performing arts has been contributed by the work of Eugenio Barba who has focussed on the articulation of energy in the actor's body; he has collaborated with several Balinese dancers during various ISTA training events including *I Madé Pasek Tempo* (Volterra ISTA 1981), *Swasti Widjaja Bandem* (Holstebro, 1986) and *I Madé Bandem* (Salento 1987) among others (Barba and Savarese 2006: 11, 136, 199). Barba's interest was in balance, opposition and equivalence as the universal or transculturally similar principles of performance (Barba and Savarese 2006: 32 -51). Barba explores cross-cultural combinations of technique and content although his attention is limited to technique. There is no attempt to engage with cultural concepts and integrate Balinese meanings of the source tradition within the movements.

John Emigh, Carmencita Palermo and Margaret 'Jiggs' Coldiron have been a positive influence on my work in a variety of ways which will unfold throughout the thesis. Emigh, described by the Chairperson of the Association for Asian Performance as a 'Balinese mask wizard' (Brandon 2011: 292), was the first performer to make Little Red Riding Hood a *topeng* project. The work of Coldiron is poignant to the present research in the sense that she is also a woman and we have professionally collaborated on a variety of different projects. I invited Coldiron to lead workshops for the 2008 project Bali Unmasked and to co-perform Little Red Riding Hood on one occasion. Together with Carmencita Palermo we co-presented a panel for the 'Women in Asia' conference (2013) at Lincoln University and, as a result of that panel, I co-authored an article for Asian Theatre Journal called '*Women in Balinese Topeng: Voices, Reflections and Interactions*' (Coldiron *et al* 2015). What sets me apart in practical terms is that whilst both Emigh, Palermo and Coldiron have trained in Bali, they have not had extensive experience making masks and would not claim, as I do, to also be a mask maker.

Autoethnography

My training and performing in Bali forms the foundation of my data collection. In this sense, it is an example of how a methodological approach may be teased out of the 'familiar [and] enculturated through formal and informal education' (Nelson 2013: 98). I encounter ethnography, firstly, through performance as 'most simply, how culture is done in the body' (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 225), and secondly, through a discursive, context-specific 'research- driven participatory

practice' (Matthews 2011: 25). Disciplines such as cultural anthropology, ethnology and human geography endorse a 'participant observation' methodological approach and this proved useful to an extent. However, my research trajectory was, for better or worse, part of my life story. This narrative is not purely autobiographical, not mainly or indulgently about my 'life' (my bios) but explores an 'understanding of self as something innately relational' (Dobie 2010: 184) and concerned with people (ethnos). These ideas are explored by James Frank Dobie in 'Heuristic Research; Immediacy and Self-Reflexivity' who asserts that:

Autoethnography is a way of researching and writing that seeks to connect the personal to the cultural, placing self at all times within a social context. [...] Autoethnographical reports are often presented as stories of experience [where] personal histories [are] implicated in larger socio-cultural frameworks and take steps to make their own experiences a lens through which other experiences can be pulled into focus. (Dobie 2010: 181)

My general experiences of Balinese *topeng* and my specific research around my imperative questions were interwoven. An autoethnographic approach is a 'first-person methodology' (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 214) and, as such, follows the suggestion that methods aim to 'encourage subjective accounts through the experience, perception and observation of the self that are useful in accessing and constructing knowledges of the body' (Varela and Shear quoted in Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 225). Borrowing the title of Damasio's book I frame my methodologies to a degree around *The Feeling of What Happens* (2000) as a way of subjectively foregrounding any academic endeavour. However, a dynamic response to the consequent introspective and quiet modes of training that inevitably occur with an embodied practice, it is important to see one's position in

relation to others. Indeed, it is the ability to be 'open to inter-subjective validation' (Parker- Starbuck and Mock 2011: 225) that promotes better practice within an autoethnographic field.

Methodological Approaches in Bali

My understanding of *topeng* and my data for this doctoral study has mainly been sourced from the professional relationship I have developed with Ida Bagus Alit Wiadnyana from Lod Tunduh, his colleagues and family members. Although I have trained in the Balinese 'class room' environment, the majority of my experience lies with the traditional 'village style' of training, both of which I will later explain. Obviously, I was not following this system traditionally; the actions were the same, but the politics, economics and power relations were not. The intercultural tensions and embodied critical issues that emerge within the realm of training demand interrogation, revealing issues that are loaded with ideological, theoretical, cultural, artistic and ethical challenges. Consideration of the definitions of interculturalism alongside their accompanying issues will also follow in this introduction. As a result of these training experiences I published an article, during my PhD studies, in *Theatre Dance Performance Training* called 'Dance training in Bali: intercultural and globalised encounters' which is submitted as Appendix 4.

The position of student, foreigner and woman in a male-dominated carving workshop, granted me autonomy as I blended into the background. From this position, I had a unique and prolonged insight into the stream of activities within the household. These activities were artistic, domestic, private and public in terms of “*banjar* (meaning ‘community’)” meetings which centred around aspects of sacred life and the village temples. Eventually the training, including all aspects of “*pahat* (meaning ‘carving’), “*menhari* (meaning ‘dancing’), “*ikut upacara* (meaning ‘accompanying to ceremonies’)” and “*tinggal di rumah* (meaning ‘living at home’)” generally developed to include learning the mantra and prayer rituals involved before and after performances. This training also involved learning the culturally specific meanings relevant for the *topeng* artist in terms of how they relate to a lifestyle choice that centres on divine service.

The experience of training firstly involved carving and only after many years, dancing and then after many years again, beginning to understand the deeper philosophies of being a *topeng* artist in its fullest articulation. These different but extremely complementary disciplines have deepened my understanding of *topeng* and its cultural context in preparation for performance within a house temple ceremony context.

As I grew to understand more about Balinese culture, I realised that loyalty to one’s teacher is of paramount importance as a ‘permanent bond’ (Kodi quoted in

Foley and Sedana 2005: 200) is established. However, from a Western research perspective, dedication to one teacher became limiting and I needed to expand my training as part of this thesis' methodological approach. Therefore, I engaged in a process of training with Í Madé Djimat from Batuan between November 2011 and June 2012. In Bali, Djimat is one of the most famous dancers and is also referred to as a *maestro*.⁵ Within the realm of *topeng*, Djimat is renowned for his performances of *topeng Dalam*, the king. Djimat is also the choreographer and lead performer of a new female mask called *topeng "Sugara Manis* (meaning 'The Sweet Ocean')" also referred to as *topeng tua perempuan*. This is a new stock character and the first female mask to appear in Bali for many years. I had the opportunity to be the first person to document and the first Western woman to train with the mask *Sugara Manis*. I was eventually allowed to learn the choreography of this mask but as I was coming from and continue my tutelage with another teacher, this was a delicate experience to negotiate.

Finally, on my last research trip to Bali, between March and July 2012, I became involved with an established performance company who use comedy as a way of empowering Balinese women and repositioning the status of the "*tamu* (meaning 'foreigner' or 'guest')" and the "*bulé* (meaning 'whitie')". The company is called *Grup Gedebong Goyang* and what is unusual about this group is that it is made up

⁵ As an example of Djimat's international reputation, he and his family collaborated with Eugenio Barba for the 1996 ISTA in Copenhagen and they have since performed all over the world.

of four ex-patriate women⁶ who are long term residents of Bali, fluent speakers of Indonesian and Balinese, an impressive feat as the latter is an incredibly complex language to master. Combining song, dance and comedy sketches, a format that is typical within the *topeng* genre (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 103), is employed as a way to socially engage the Balinese audience from a woman centred perspective. As a guest artist, originally my role was as dramaturge but as the process and creation of their performance evolved I also took on a small performing part in a performance called "*Suud Merjorjoran* (meaning 'stop fighting')".⁷ This show premiered in June at the National Bali Arts Festival in Denpasar 2012 and then toured around South Bali at fund raising events, community fayres and in an entertainment capacity (as opposed to fulfilling any sacred function) at temple ceremonies.

Training in Bali was my principal methodological approach through which I have filtered my understanding of *topeng*, however as an intercultural performer I also practiced a range of embodiment practices from the West such as somatic body work, experiential anatomy and *cakra*⁸ embodiment which became complementary in my understanding of what it means to embody a Balinese *topeng* mask.

⁶ These women are Rucina Ballinger, Antonella Desanti, Suzan Kohlik and Alex Ryan; they have experience in Balinese performing arts, and are extremely knowledgeable foreigners.

⁷ This collaboration led to the forthcoming publication of an article about their work called 'Grup Gedebong Goyang; Female, Funny and Foreign' in *Asian Theatre Journal* (See Appendix 6).

⁸In Balinese the Sanskrit word 'cakra' is spelt 'cakra', but in all other cases the meanings, symbols and mantras of this system are the same.

I brought together these methods to systematically pursue research questions so that I could review the critical frame through which I was conducting research. On the one hand, to position myself in the world of traditional *topeng* already shows a degree of intercultural involvement. However, to also work non-traditionally, by working with two teachers, and post-traditionally, as with *Grup Gedebong Goyang* for example and with alternative modes of embodiment that complemented *topeng*, what this offers the research is a twice filtered process of interculturalism that allows for more reflection in and between cultures.

Embodiment Practices from the West

In the process of relocating from Bali to England a slow, deep and penetrative body-work started as I commenced my doctoral research in 2010. This was initially so that I could articulate with greater clarity the physical sensations that I was experiencing in my dancing body, using language and references from within my own culture and embodied understanding. Perhaps for a more experienced dancer, these impulses are second nature, but I was new to dance when I started it at the age of thirty-five. The initial struggles I faced were inflexibility, lack of fitness, an untrained eye to separate out portions of choreography and of identifying where one gesture finished and another one started. It was an entirely new language so when I started to notice shifts and changes in my body when I started dancing *topeng*, I sought out strategies to translate, or filter through more relevant modes of understanding, what I was experiencing. As a way of making

sense of the experience and communicating or transmitting knowledge through the body, I practised somatic bodywork through the on-going work of Rosalyn Maynard, director of the School of Experiential Learning (SoEL) based in Buckfastleigh and Dartmoor National Park, Devon. This body work focuses on the practice of somatics, a term first coined by Thomas Hanna, who claims that ‘somatics is the field which studies the soma; namely the body as perceived from within by the first–person perception (Hanna 1995:342). Somatic engagement is crucially unique to each person and expressed in the whole sense of one’s physiology through the conscious process of simultaneously “receiving oneself” and “being received”; an expression of physical presence that is in constant flux; a dynamic ‘eventing’ (Maynard 2015), embodying the flow of change deeply and personally within our biological sense of (what Maynard often coins) ‘of self, of other and of place’. The soma provides a ‘dual talent’; an ability to self-regulate, change, adapt and feedback, constantly influencing the perceivable actions of the external body, creating a ‘unified experience of self-sensing and self-moving’ (Hanna 1995: 344).

My experience of somatic body work practice has been almost entirely framed by the practice of Body Mind Centring, or BMC, as this is a practice that Maynard⁹ is

⁹⁹ A Maynard workshop is an eclectic mix of different practices including Gindler and other somatic approaches, however my understanding is that the work is predominantly informed by BMC.

trained in. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the founder of BMC, describes the process of embodiment which entails:

Initiating breath, movement, voice, awareness, and touch from any cell and/or collection of cells...and to witness what arises; the qualities of breath, movement, voice, touch; the mindfulness, such as the feelings, sensations, emotions, memories, dreams, thoughts, images and insights; and the physiological effects. (Bainbridge Cohen 2008: 158)

Over a period of five years I have attended regular workshops throughout the year. In contrast to learning on a one-to-one basis as with *topeng*, my experience of learning somatics has generally been practised in community with other participants where the shared experience of bodywork accelerates one's learning ability. Within this community all artist practitioners are pursuing a casual but deep inquiry in somatic body work. These meetings take various formats; there are sessions that are usually framed by an investigation into a specific organ or system for example the 'fluid systems of the body, ligaments, fascia and connective tissue' (Maynard 2015) and these are conducted typically over the course of a three-day weekend workshop and these workshops happen five times a year.

During Maynard's sessions participants are reminded of some of the very basic premises of the approach which significantly affect the ways participants engage with their bodies. For example, whereas an 'exercise' implies that there may be an outcome, and that it involves logic or thinking, somatic bodywork is best referred to as an 'exploration' because it is completely a sensorial activity. It can be

considered more of an invitation with no right or wrong way of apprehending how to move. There are some general principles of working in somatic practice that are useful within this context. The adage 'less is more' certainly holds true. Doing as little as possible is often the most fruitful way of apprehending the work. This in my experience has developed an ability to sit with patience, as opposed to being or becoming patient, and the ability to critique how I listen

I also studied with movement master artist and teacher, Suprpto (Prpto) Suryodarmo during an Amerta Movement Workshop in May 2011 on Dartmoor which was organised by Daniela Coronelli, who is one of Suryodarmo's students in the UK. Based in Java, Indonesia, Suryodarmo has developed his practice known as *Joged Amerta*, 'Amerta Movement' which is based on Javanese Sumarah meditation; there is no choreography other than the individual's sense of movement in relation to 'other', especially to the natural environment. Whilst conceptually and choreographically this dance form is vastly different to the codification of *topeng*, culturally and philosophically Prpto is working within a range of perspectives that are similar to *topeng*. For example, it was useful to explore the connection of the dancer to the environment, and to be in a state of 'active prayer' which I will later clarify and align this performance in service of the 'divine'.

Interculturalism

Ric Knowles uses the term 'intercultural' to focus on 'the contested unsettling spaces between cultures' (Knowles 2010: 4). This understanding of interculturalism appreciates that there are complexities and challenges which are made manifest in a complex variety of exchanges between two or more participating cultures. These may be social, political, ethical, economic or aesthetic in relation to class, language and in my case, particularly to gender and caste. The prefix 'inter' suggests an in-between space, where something has the 'potential' (Zarrilli 2013: 30) to happen. This in-between space has been emphasized in a number of critical discussions surrounding interculturalism, most notably by Homi K. Bhabha who suggested that the 'interstices [become] the overlap and displacement of domains of difference' (Bhabha 1994: 1). Interculturalism at best, promotes the notion of dynamic hybridity, one that recognises that cultural identities can inhabit mutable, unfixed dimensions that can be a celebration of difference. Indeed, as Fischer-Lichte describes:

Cultures constantly undergo processes of change and exchange, which can become difficult to untangle from each other. Yet, the aim is also not to erase difference. Rather, the differences in and between cultures are dynamic and permanently shifting. (Fischer-Lichte 2014: 7)

Gottowik comments that Western views focus on imagined and/or real borders using categories to divide nations, cultures, and religions into strictly separate groups (Gottowik 2010: 182) and this is not necessarily a South East Asian trope. From the Balinese perspective, it is recognised that cultures continually interconnect and change as Bali is a hybrid fusion of Hindu-Balinese with ancestors

from Java, religion from India, and cultural traits from China. A significant degree of cultural mixing is taken for granted in Bali, both historically and in a contemporary context, as it is also a place that is extremely international with inhabitants from all over the world. Nevertheless, the acceptance of being a product of a series of 'multicultural' encounters is dramatically counterpoised by the fact that Balinese culture is the most dominant and therefore discussions regarding multiculturalism rarely take place.

There are many scholars who have made considerable contributions to understanding the terrain of interculturalism by offering either models or conditions of useful practice. In *'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis'*, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert create the seed bed for a new paradigm of knowledge exchange through intercultural theatre, which they define as 'a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions' (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 36). For them the term intercultural suggests 'an exploration of the interstice between cultures; it draws our attention to the hyphenated third space separating and connecting different people' (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 44). For Lo and Gilbert, the reasons and difficulties of grafting a grounded theory of interculturalism foreground a critique of Pavis's hour glass model of exchange¹⁰ which they and others claim is 'uni-linear' (Lo and Gilbert

¹⁰ In the 'hourglass model' there is a shift from the foreign culture, which is defined as the 'source' culture to the 'target' culture of the audience. The 'source' culture is represented as sand which metaphorically 'must pass through a narrow neck' (Pavis 1992: 4) which moves through various stages of negotiation to include cultural modelling, adaptation, readability and theatrical representation to name but a few. (For further reading see Pavis 1992: 4-7).

2002: 44, Knowles 2010: 26). They argue that in his model there is a 'reduction to aesthetic essentialism rather than political equality' (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 44). In their alternative model, which they describe as a 'spinning disc held by an elastic band', they propose a dynamic, two-way flow of traffic which 'serves not only to foreground the inseparability of artistic endeavours from the socio-political relations but also to remind us that the theory and reading strategies are themselves deeply imbricated in specific histories and politics' (Gilbert and Lo 2002: 45).

Lo and Gilbert's model creates space for movement in either direction, negotiated collaboration in which both partners are considered cultural sources while the target culture is positioned along the continuum between them. Of key importance, here is the contextualisation of agency where power relations are defined alongside cultural specificity (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 31). In the case of this research project there are various specificities under scrutiny for example, those between nation and culture (of Bali and England) and between the particular locales of Ubud in the Gianyar regency of Southern Bali and Devon, in the South West of England. Ultimately this intercultural exchange rests on the (inter)subjectivity of individual people; myself and my Balinese sources, most notably Ida Bagus Alit. Interculturalism is both a processual strategy of working and linked to a 'world view that is a state of mind as much as a way of working' (Marranca 1991: 11). Culture, location and identity all feature within this discourse.

Historically, interculturalism has been the privilege of Western imperialism and consumption, so issues of power and control are hard to dispel: often it is hard to appreciate what the 'source'¹¹ culture gains or is left with and ultimately if not explicitly, the greatest (material) question is 'who benefits?' (Knowles 2010: 41). This issue has been addressed to an extent by Emer O'Toole who suggests that intercultural debates could be framed in terms of rights of representation of Othered people and cultures. Practices can be strengthened through four basic measures which include the 'involvement of members of all represented cultures, equality and creative agency of all collaborators, advantageousness of a given project to all involved and positive socio-political effects of a production within its performance contexts' (O'Toole 2012). Craig Latrell (2000) proposes a reappraisal of some of the issues relating to power which are applicable to the current situation within the Balinese performing arts. Far from being a victim of the intercultural exchange, Bali might emerge as a strong player as a result of a process of cross-fertilisation. Latrell suggests that interculturalism should not be perceived as a 'victim-victimiser narrative' and asks:

Why not start with the assumption that other cultures are *not* just passive receivers of Western ideas and images, but active manipulators of such influences, and that interesting intercultural borrowing is not simply a one-way process, but something far more interestingly dialogic?' (Latrell 2000: 46. italics in original).

¹¹ In the discussion of exchange between cultures, the concepts of 'source' and 'target' cultures are useful, but also problematic, so there is a sense of complexity and limitation in regards to the terms use. In a postcolonial landscape, the notion that there is a 'target' and a 'source' is considered to be problematic as it reifies a linear, colonialist and essentialist approach (e.g. it treats the notion of culture as a homogenous and a stable repository that can be defined).

Yet, there are still many obstacles that prevent ethical practice. Historical issues of universalism, essentialism and accuracy in representation have predominated the debate,¹² where the specificities of the 'source' culture have been reduced by focusing on their 'readability' within the 'target' or 'home' culture. As Edward Said articulates in his book *Orientalism* '(c)ultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving them not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be' (Said 2003: 76).

Zarrilli notes that many of the challenges of contemporary theatre practices 'are shaped within the crucible of a global, (largely) urban, cosmopolitan context, which is inherently multicultural and intercultural' (Zarrilli 2013: 35). At the core of many artistic and creative challenges between Bali and England are issues most usefully viewed from a post-colonial perspective that designate 'both a historical and a discursive relationship to imperialism, where the agency, power and a sense of history are central to the debate' (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 35-36). As much as intercultural practice has 'moved on' within a globally mediated world, the issues surrounding the ethics of practice are just as paramount as they ever were. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins claim that post-colonialism is an 'engagement with the contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies' (1996: 2) and so there is an understanding that 'post' does not imply that we are completely past a colonial period and that these attitudes do not

¹² For example, critics such as Bharucha (1993:34) represent some of the early, and arguably still relevant, criticisms of Brook's production of the *Mahabharata*.

linger. Questions of who is mobilising and what is being articulated about the past, 'deploying what identities, identifications, and representations, and in the name of what political vision and goals' (Shohat 2000: 136) are still important as interculturalism rarely operates on equal terrain (despite one's best efforts and intentions). Indeed, in *Notes on the "Post-Colonial"*, Shohat suggests that better phrases, such as '*post-First/Third Worlds theory or post anti-colonial critique*' (Shohat 2000: 134 italics in original) would realign power relations beyond a 'relatively binastic, fixed and stable mapping [...] between colonizer/colonized and centre/periphery' (Shohat 2000.134). It is more fruitful to reconsider this use of the prefix 'post' as a means of moving through a previously colonial phase. Indeed, Fischer-Lichte has suggested, the term 'Interweaving of Performance Cultures' is perhaps more appropriate semantically as interculturalism is associated with the post-colonial, and she and others suggest that we have now moved 'beyond' (Fischer-Lichte *et al* 2014).

Whilst discussions within the intercultural theatre debate have focused on text and more traditional notions of hierarchical theatre, there has been little to represent those practitioners who devise performance, using their own life experiences as content material and who are engaged in practices of embodiment. For this reason, the critical framework of 'new interculturalism' which embraces both aspects is a useful lens in which to situate this research. The notion of 'new interculturalism' is pioneered by Royona Mitra who critically frames this revised term entirely through the work of dance artist Akram Khan (Mitra 2015). From a

theoretical perspective, I propose that the features of new interculturalism are found across disciplines and that can be applied in a variety of contexts. Six key factors of 'new interculturalism' are identified through Khan's practice, of which my work fits several. Examples of some of the features of new interculturalism that Mitra identifies that are concurrent in my practice include an 'embodied corporeal language with a conscious rejection of text [and] a sense of auto-ethnography and real life experience, in-betweenness be that of nations, disciplines, culture; a disruption of the concept of othering'. (Mitra 2015: 29) The 'new' prefix in a broad sense challenges ideas and assumptions of the 70s and 80s interculturalism that have been dominated by considerations of unethical practice and inappropriate borrowings. It is a fitting term and more accurately reflective of contemporary issues concerning performance practice within the twenty first century of globalisation and a capitalist economy, which on a pragmatic level affects how, where and with whom artists can generate their work.

To conclude this introductory discussion of interculturalism and intercultural translation of performance, I return to Zarrilli, who warns that '(t)oo often the individual [...] may be naïve about what has influenced them, that is, an individual may have little or no in-depth knowledge of the specific cultural, socio-political, and/or historical context that has shaped the content'. (Zarrilli 2013: 34). I am aware of many issues that colour and influence my praxis and attitudes towards mask work in Bali within a sphere of cultural, social and political perspectives. Whilst I am still a student of these practices, the purpose of this thesis is to explore

how one might respectfully engage and communicate a process of intercultural transfer of knowledge.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter One I focus on traditional 'deep' training (Murray 2015: 53) and offer an analysis of not only how the 'village style' differs from other mixed or hybrid alternatives, but also how *topeng* training is imbued with cultural identifiers of *kebalian* or Balinese-ness. By splitting this chapter into two parts I separate out those activities that take place in Bali and those that do not rely on the specificities of place but rather involve new relationships with and understandings of my body. This provides a clearer strategy of how ultimately these approaches can integrate. These activities combine to encapsulate the emergence of a personal and hybridised training. As issues of any performer training are interwoven with notions of time, this chapter specifically offers a broad foundation of how over many years a context specific training has changed, and continued, shifting from an adopted traditional Balinese view to incorporate hybrid and intercultural approaches to training. Specific notions of training are opened and questioned in relation to age, maturity and reflection versus youth, virtuosity and skill. The chapter offers a rational and platform of ideas from where all the other research is launched and made manifest in either masks, or performance outcomes.

In Chapter Two, I analyse how I attempted to 'home' my practice within an English context. This 'homing' involves exploring the sacred and numinous aspects of the *topeng* mask from a non-religious, non-Balinese perspective and seeking strategies of coherent and appropriate filtration through modes of embodiment. I employ Heddon's term, 'autotopography' (2007: 15) alongside cultural geographical and ritual theories, to discuss the re-location and re-enactment of certain rituals primarily those pertaining to house temple ceremonies. Whilst this is a deeply reflexive process, the themes of homing are relevant to practitioners and scholars in the clearly identified spheres and disciplines of intercultural practice as often the 'work' is situated in and between cultures, where often the practitioner straddles two culturally embodied identities.

Chapter Three documents and discusses the creation of a set of new masks that I made during my doctoral research in Bali. The masks interrogate notions of an essentialised female beauty and, whilst the discussion is principally framed around a Balinese aesthetic of "*kecantikaan* (meaning 'beauty')", it recognises the global reach of patriarchal cultural frameworks. By looking within the Balinese culture, and critically adopting an idea of similarity 'plus' difference, a strategy of resistance is explored whereby the female masks are given new and different identities than those within the limited traditional sphere. This offers a Western feminist a cross- and intercultural approach in apprehending and creating more female masks within genres that are dominated by male masks. The notion of similarity 'plus' difference is applicable in a variety of South East Asian and

particularly Indonesian masked dance contexts and lays the foundation for more development and research. Most notably the chapter also introduces for the first time, documentation of the new female mask *Sugara Manis*.

Chapter Four explores the way and means to both occupy the masks and create the platform to facilitate this exploration through performance. This aspect of research involves an ongoing devised *topeng* style performance; the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. The chapter identifies through an analysis of the structure of a *topeng* performance or what Zarrilli refers to as 'structural units' (Zarrilli 2009: 113), how it is possible to reconfigure the narrative order of the story by presenting these 'units' in the traditionally correct order of masks. I refer to Emigh's performance of *Little Red Riding Shawl* as a way of further exploring the mobility of *topeng* within an intercultural perspective whilst at the same time, exploring the potential of creating more female *topeng*. As with the performance of 'home' the performance that this chapter documents will be performed as part of the thesis, and a recording of both performances will be included in a final version.

Finally, in Chapter Five I describe how I engaged with a somatic body work practice, principally inspired by Rosalyn Maynard and her work with Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, founder of 'Body Mind Centring' (BMC), as a way of animating the female masks that I had made. I suggest that this process invites many new

possibilities of understanding some of the deeper philosophical cultural assumptions of Balinese masks from a subjective position that moves further towards an understanding of how to animate the masks, from one's own body in an attempt to give 'life' to the masks. My research is intimately in relation to my individual, female body and within the specificity of *topeng* genre, however the research has wider implications and a broader reach within intercultural mask work generally and particularly Indonesian and Southeast Asian approaches to performing art form

Table One.

<u>Time:</u>	<u>Method of Practical Research:</u>	<u>Chapter:</u>
January 2011 – March 2011 (Bali)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dance training with Ida Bagus Alit and I Madé Djimat.</i> • <i>Carving with Ida Bagus Alit.</i> • <i>Performing in ceremonies with Ida Bagus Alit.</i> • <i>Other ‘freelance’ opportunities to perform topeng in temple ceremonies.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One</i> • <i>Three</i> • <i>One</i>
April 2011 – December 2011 (England)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Somatic Body work with SoEL.</i> • <i>Amerta Movement Workshop with Suryodarmo</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One and Five.</i>
January 2012 – March 2012 (Bali)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dance training with Ida Bagus Alit and I Madé Djimat.</i> • <i>Carving with Ida Bagus Alit.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One</i> • <i>Three</i>
April 2012 – November 2012 (England)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Devising and (Autumnal) Performances of ‘home’.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Two</i>
<i>December 2012 - Aug 2012</i> (Bali)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Performances of ‘home’.</i> • <i>Dance training with Ida Bagus Alit and I Madé Djimat.</i> • <i>Other ‘freelance’ opportunities to perform with Grup Gedebong Goyang.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Two</i> • <i>Two, Four</i>
<i>September 2012 – February 2013</i> (England)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Performances of ‘Topeng Little Red Riding Hood’.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Four</i>
<i>March 2013 – April 2014</i> (Maternity leave) England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Somatic Body work with SoEL.</i> • <i>Performances of individual masks within the community of SoEL.</i> • <i>Performances of ‘Topeng Little Red Riding Hood’</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Five</i> • <i>Five</i> • <i>Four</i>
<i>May 2014 – September 2015</i> <i>Writing up thesis.</i> England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Somatic Body work with SoEL.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Five</i>

Part Two

Complementary Balance and the Performance of *Rwa Bhenida*

The Balinese have a special understanding of balance which is referred to as *rwa bhenida*. The cultural specificities of *rwa bhenida* express cyclic, harmonious balance, the unification of disparate opposites and the dynamic play and interaction which exist between juxtaposing forces. According to Jenkins and Catra, *rwa bhenida* reflects ‘the interdependence of dialectical contradictions’ (2008: 11) and it is a system of practice that underlies many aspects of Hindu Balinese life and forms the backbone to many cultural activities and spiritual beliefs. This sense of balance is integrated into the mask and the dance and the entire staging of *topeng*. Much of the choreography mirrors a communication with *Niskala*, the ‘un-seen’ world,¹³ which accommodates both a Hindu perspective of gods and goddesses as well as animist and ancestral notions of numinosity. Because *Agama Hindu Bali* is a fusion of animism, ancestral worship, Hinduism and Buddhism, this notion of balance may stem from the possibility that:

What Buddhists seek to do is not to opt for one or the other, not to try to prove that one is true and the other false but somehow find a position which does not occupy one end to the exclusion of the other, nor denies that they are opposites, but tries to transcend or suspend their contradiction.’ (George 1999: 55)

¹³ For further reading, see Fred B. Eiseman’s *Nyatuwayang Pakeneh Anak Bali, How Balinese People Express Ideas* (2010).

This idea of non-exclusivity offers a degree of flexibility in negotiating a sense of balance, which is a definite feature in the Balinese religion.

In Bali, like elsewhere in South East Asia, there is an understanding of a complementary relationship between all opposites, including the duality of male and female. Coldiron (2013) cites Jane Belo's discussion of the 'complementariness' of male and female in Southeast Asia arguing that:

Male and female together making up an entity, completing each other. Like the Chinese yin and yang, the theme male and female (*loeh-moewani*) is endlessly repeated and recurrent in every context from the description of the gods to the terms for a carpenter's joining. (Belo 1949: 14)

This concept of masculine/feminine duality is incorporated into almost all aspects of Balinese dance. Movements are either "*alus*¹⁴ (meaning 'refined, benevolent, noble, delicate and restrained')"; or "*keras* (meaning 'powerful, strong and loud')". There is also a third factor "*kasar* (meaning 'rough, coarse, hairy, fat, spray footed and generally animalistic'). Within any dance, there are elements of both *alus* and *keras* qualities and this play between soft and powerful is said to represent the dynamic play of opposites within the cosmos. According to I Wayan Dibia, the *baris* dance, which is a strong male warrior dance, features a "*milpil* (meaning a 'soft, turning gesture')", so that the dance does not get 'too hot' (Dibia 1990: 10). He claims that one way to achieve balance in the dance is to project these codes of power and softness onto the one body (Dibia 1990:10) and this also helps to

¹⁴ The Balinese words *halus* and *alus* are interchangeable and mean the same.

sustain cosmic balance. This playful interaction has created an interesting arena for the portrayal of gender in Bali since, as Emigh and Hunt explain, the *alus/keras* continuum figures prominently in the gendered aesthetics of dance roles and is frequently disrupted. They state that:

Alongside and intermingling with, the binaries of pure/impure, godlike/animalistic, high status, low status and the more problematic male/female, the *halus/keras* antimony provides the Balinese a means for ordering the world and structuring personal interaction. (Emigh and Hunt 1992: 204)

From a Balinese perspective, this structural framework for interaction holistically fits into a macro view of life that is centred on balance. Dibia and Ballinger confirm that 'the arts express the values that the Balinese hold dear, such as balance and harmony' (2004: 8).

The Micro Body as part of the Macro Cosmos

Eugenio Barba argues that balance, opposition and equivalence are fundamental principles in all codified performance forms (Barba and Savarese 2006: 32) and in the Balinese dancer's *agem* or basic stance we see an example of what Barba calls 'luxury balance' that is essentially based on:

An alteration of balance. Its purpose is to create a condition of permanently unstable balance. (Barba and Savarese 2006: 32)

Balance is of fundamental importance to the Balinese and 'in dance, the basic position is a mastery over imbalance' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 9). Rubin and

Sedana explain that '[t]The actor is at the centre of the Balinese universe, standing in for the symbol of the swastika as each character moves from imbalance to imbalance... in a continual movement that seems to search for that elusive balance' (Rubin and Sedana 2007:107)

However, to achieve the aesthetic balance that is desired, one has to keep moving however subtly. Further investigation into and beyond the technique of dancing reveals a distinct link with cultural and spiritual beliefs. For example, not only the *nawa sanga*, as I have demonstrated, but also *rwa bhenida*, which as I have explained, is the unification of opposites and the dynamic play and interaction which exist between juxtaposing forces. Also, visually evident in the basic *agem* is the three-fold division of the body; 'the *utama* or the highest part (the head where the mask goes), *madya* or the middle part and *nista* or the lowest part (the feet)' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 10). Balancing these levels proportionally is important in service to the "*bhatara*, (meaning 'the gods above')" and "*kala/buta*, (meaning 'the more demonic spirits below')". This balance is also evident in the architecture of the house, as well as the body so, for example, all the functional rooms such as the kitchen, toilet and washing spaces are at the furthest end to the sacred temple spaces; an area which every household (large or small) maintains.

The Crafting Process of Mask Making

Continuing a discussion of balance, in Bali it is understood that the two activities of mask-making and mask dancing, although they can be separated, are in fact entwined. Later in the thesis, I will reflect on how their differing qualities and skills, as well as promoting a general approach to splitting one's time and focus, complement and balance one's training. As much as it is necessary to offer details on mask performance training, so too is a discussion on the process of mask making needed in order to understand the unique contribution to knowledge that this thesis is making.

There is a specific process to carving a mask (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 67). The wood is from the *pule* tree used for carving masks because it is light, absorbs sweat with ease and is similar to balsam, therefore soft to carve. Practical aspects aside, *pule* is believed to be magical, both medicinally and from a sacred perspective. The wood is both pregnant in its literal ripeness and readiness to be made into a mask (Hobart 1997: 132) and also made pregnant from the sperm of Siwa (Coldiron 2004: 78- 79). Once this wood has been ritually blessed, the tree is cut on an auspicious day and left to season. Then starting with a small log, first one has to strip away the bark using a small axe. Like all tools, this axe needs to be extremely comfortable and weighted perfectly for the hand that uses it. Axing away bark, like the whole process, demands a strong seated position; most carvers squat with the axe, as opposed to sitting. Using the axe is the most active and noisy task of the whole process, but it is not in any way less meditative. In the early stages of making a mask the purpose is to see the wood, to see what one

has been given and to start reading it and seeing what mask is possible. Holding the log in the left hand, the right hand chops out some basic functional lines with the axe. It is tempting, but far too early in the process to think about the nose, the brow or any detail. An amateur carver would focus on these aspects too hastily, but with the axe, it is all about the initial form of the mask and not about the detail.¹⁵ Taking away wood to create the jaw line is more useful and it is advisable to create the angle of the forehead. These are structural cuts and build the foundation of what will later follow.

Working on the front of the mask simultaneously as hollowing out its back is vital; otherwise the mask will structurally weaken and break. The mask maker fluidly rotates the mask in the hand, constantly seeing it from all angles as if it is out of balance at any stage it will break. When the wood is a small lump but still unrecognizable as a face, one uses a large set of chisels and a small hammer to remove large pieces of wood in the direction of the body. If the wood is not firmly held by the feet, this generally sends vibrations into the pelvis, which is unnerving as the chisel is sharp. One needs to confidently grip the wood with the feet whilst focusing on the direction of chisel blade and giving it a hearty bang with the hammer. At this stage, the chiselling is still concerned with form but slowly a shape is emerging and the mask maker starts to identify the nature of the wood: its condition, knots and general suitability for the proposed mask. If the wood is

¹⁵ The description of this process is partly based on my own experience as a mask maker and partly derived from informal conversations held with Ida Bagus Anom in 2002 and with Ida Bagus Alit in 2011.

not suitable at this stage, it could be put aside for another mask. As Ida Bagus Anom expresses, 'you see the mask during the process from the block of wood' (quoted in Coldiron 2004: 196). Using curved chisels, the carver finally focuses on the size of the nose, the brow and chin are orientated, followed by their shape as these two specifics need to be considered separately. It is always surprising how much *more* wood there is to take away so that finally all these separate processes integrate as a whole. Finally using the small knife set, both straight and curved, once again these features are refined and the details take shape and then the mask is finally sanded.

In a traditional mask design, careful attention is paid to composing the detail of features and this is the task of any mask maker. As Napier explains 'it is helpful in this regard to examine the sensory organs of the face as individual iconographic elements and then to consider the composite face as a complete expression' (Napier 1986: 199). Chin, cheek, nose, brow, and mouth: all must fit together and each design choice must be complementary. From my observations of Balinese masks, this is achieved by one, subtle element being slightly discordant. So, for instance, the decorative flower or the beauty spot is just off centre. In generic terms, Emigh notes that in assessing a mask, 'studies of visual tracking indicate that the eye focuses obsessively on the mouth, nose, and eyes to "read" a human face, perhaps to glean the disposition of the other' (Emigh 2011: 126).

It is through this process of form, shape and detail that a Balinese wooden mask is carved. A skilled Balinese mask maker could make a tourist quality mask

overnight, but at the height of my technical ability it would take me a minimum of five days working many hours a day to complete one. There is no upper limit as to how long a mask may take. A carver sometimes may work only on specific days or auspicious times of the day. Some masks demand a great length of time and a significant depth of meditation.

This level of description is an attempt to communicate that regardless of how speedily a mask can be made, and regardless of technical skill, there is a depth and slowness to carving that promotes a kind of creativity that is very precious. I Ketut Kodi describes how sometimes a student needs to be protected from knowledge that is too 'heavy' (Kodi quoted in Foley and Sedana 2005: 200) for the learner unless they are protected by 'appropriate preparation' (Kodi quoted in Foley and Sedana 2005: 200). Presumably, Kodi means 'heavy' in relation to knowledge that is *ilmu* meaning mystical or esoteric and this gives some idea to the cultural emphasis on ceremony, ritual and notions of the esoteric.

Performance Training and Balinese Identity

A *topeng* show is dogmatic as it has the dual function of not just entertaining the divine and human audience but also teaching *kebalian* or 'Balinese-ness'. This could be, for example, in the emphasis on Balinese history, as demonstrated by the arrival on stage of the hero, Gajah Madah, the *topeng keras* or 'strong prime

minister¹⁶ and this mask is always featured in every *topeng* performance as one of, if not 'the' first entering mask. Dance is considered one of many cultural assets in Bali and consequently training for dance, especially for the *topeng* performer, takes on a unique role as a site of configuring a specific Balinese political, spiritual and cultural identity (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 8). Therefore the training of a *topeng* performer, in the traditional context, is deeply embedded in an understanding that one is a representative of a unique, specific cultural identity.

In Bali the traditional style of training is referred to as the 'village style' and this commitment to *kebalian* is bound up in notions of *adat* (custom) and *agama* (religion) which, in *topeng*, includes spiritual worship, ritual offering in the form of ceremony, sacrifice and prayer. Far beyond a simple technical training, issues such as acceptable behaviour, social conduct, education and community service are among those aspects that are taught through the culturally established phenomenon of dance training. The importance placed on this cultural sensitivity and appreciation is because dance happens in a ritual ceremonial context where the stage is more than just a place of entertainment. The dance is a metaphor for a whole way of being and dancers are noticeably greatly respected for this embodied understanding and knowledge of their culture. In Bali, despite the rapid change of globalisation,¹⁷ dancers are treated like celebrities due to the importance placed on the role of tradition and culture within contemporary

¹⁶ Gajah Madah is the name of a real warrior hero, who famously ruled armies in Bali during the reign of the Majapahit Empire circa 1293 – 1264.

¹⁷ For an extended discussion about Bali and globalisation, see my article 'Dance training in Bali: intercultural and globalised encounters' included as Appendix 4.

society. In a 2011 interview with me, Ida Bagus Alit warned that, for some, the motivation to learn and want to dance is;

For the money and to look handsome. This is not good. They will never understand the mask or the reason to dance. (Ida Bagus Alit 2011)

Ida Bagus believes that a masked dancer has a spiritual role and duty and that once *kawin topeng* is achieved, or one is “*mesakapan*, (meaning ‘married’)” to one’s mask, the dancer’s motivation to work should be spiritual as well as pragmatic. Dancers associated with his lineage have this reputation.

Unlike other dance forms, to study *topeng* demands from the serious student an understanding of the stories, meanings and mantras that most people, even those interested in culture would not know or have access to. It would probably involve learning the language of Kawi, ‘old Javanese’ (Emigh 1996: 129), which is a hybrid of ancient Javanese and Sanskrit, and several stories from the *Babad* (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 42) the chronicles of Bali, which define the history of the island and the nature of the people. According to I Madé Sija:

Anyone can learn how to dance, that is *ngigel*, but this is not enough; it is superficial, it’s just dance movements. What is important instead is *mesolah*, to characterise. (Sija quoted by Palermo 2010)

Thus, to bring the mask to life and to achieve characterisation it is agreed that one must study and understand the mask in its fullest capacity and this has much to do with cultural history, identity, location and sense of what constitutes Balinese-

ness. As a dancer, a vast amount of time is spent in temples discussing or implementing sacred duties. This is where the 'village system' of training comes into the fore; working with a teacher over a prolonged time is not only traditional but reinforces the suggestion that *topeng* training cannot be reduced to purely technical matters. Rather, it includes a sense of cultural, spiritual and social understanding that is passed down from an elder mentor on a one-to-one basis. Even then the strength and wisdom of a teacher becomes a part of the training that evolves over time. Traditionally this knowledge is passed down through the paternal line, and sponsored within the family. This system is still in operation and although some non-domicile students pay for classes, the remuneration is poor and would not be considered a proper wage. For example, Ida Bagus Alit often teaches for free or receives a carton of "*minyak kelapa muda* (meaning 'virgin coconut oil')" in lieu of payment.

Bali is traditionally administered locally by the communal system and sensibility of the "*Banjar* (meaning 'small hamlet')" to which everybody contributes both practically and financially (Eiseman 1990: 9). Every member of the community, regardless of age, gender or caste, is expected to fulfil sacred duties according to their individual capacity. Accepting that there is little financial gain from teaching; the *banjar* may support the teacher by relieving him of other obligatory sacred duties within his community, such as a slight reduction in his participation in communal ritual preparation. One may conclude then, that within some contexts

in Bali it is still recognised that training is part of sacred community service, both as a dancer and as a teacher.

Performer Aspirations: Why train?

What in the West may be broadly summarised as ‘energy’, in Bali refers and contributes to a whole discourse of knowledge, on which levels of attainment is based. Matthews suggests ‘all theories of acting operate by social, cultural and scientific models of the self’ (Matthews 2011: 47) and this is extremely applicable in Bali where there are various levels of attainment and they are based on and measured by culturally specific criteria. So far I have focused on the phase of training attainment known in Bali as *Wirama*. This is the ‘[t]he stage when a performer masters the musical accompaniment in accordance with the vocabulary of movement and the whole choreography of a given dramatic character’ (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 25). This level of attainment is what most students can hope for, be they Balinese or non-Balinese.

However, in Bali the ultimate performance level is *Wibawa*, a term that translates as having spiritual aura, ‘internal power/values’ (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 125). This constitutes the fullest embodiment of the mask and perhaps the achievement of “*taksu* (which broadly means ‘divine charisma’ (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 11) or the convergence of art and spirit)” that Balinese performers aspire to. For a better understanding of what *taksu* is (and what it is not) please refer to the video ‘Taksu

and the Balinese Performer' listed as Appendix 2, which I made prior to this doctoral study.

Despite the cultural specificity of *taksu*, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's description of flow partially serves to explain the feeling for the non-Balinese performer as an equivalent to the experience of *taksu*. As Csikszentmihaly asserts:

In the flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. [...] we experience it as a unified flowing from one movement to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and the environment; between stimulus and response, and between past, present and future. (Csikszentmihaly 1975: 38)

Csikszentmihaly describes the experience of flow as being akin to a sense of enjoyment that involves pain, risk, novelty and individual challenge combined with an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness (Csikszentmihaly 1997: 110). Csikszentmihaly has identified nine definitions of enjoyment, which are constructive for my exploration of *Taksu*. These include: presence of clear goals, immediate feedback to one's actions, a balance between challenge and skill, merging of action and awareness, exclusion of distractions from one's consciousness, absence of failure-anxiety, disappearance of self-consciousness, a distorted sense of time, and finally, development of autotelic activity i.e. activity for which the sole motivation is the experience and vice versa (Csikszentmihaly 1997: 111- 113). However, whilst *taksu* as a phenomenon may be compared to flow, there is a real danger to appropriate this culturally specific

experience. *Taksu* can only be said to have occurred, or can only be awarded by a member of the audience: an external party and not the performer.

It is generally agreed that to achieve *taksu*, technical training alongside extended cultural immersion/understanding plus that undefinable factor is still no guarantee of success. The attainment and embodiment of *taksu*, is extremely rare, let alone for the Western student of *topeng*. But it is for this reason that serious and/or 'traditional' performers engage with the long process of training; they have a desire to excel to an unseen audience as well as to a human one and this is a life-long pursuit.¹⁸ Most Balinese dancers would agree that it takes years to become an accomplished dancer, let alone a *maestro* but that it is for this reason, for the attainment of *taksu*, that so much importance is placed on the notion of *kebalian* or Balinese-ness.

Turner suggests that students who wish to learn the *topeng* roles and masks also inherently, as participant observers, come to learn about Balinese culture through the body by physically doing it (Turner 2011: 64). This cultural absorption and the notion that the lived body can be a vessel to experience culture has been the discussion of much study, in the disciplines of performance, anthropology and neuroscience (Bastrop 1995, Turner 2011, Zarrilli 2001). Csordas asserts that '[c]ulture is grounded in the body' (Csordas 1994: 6). As Turner suggests, as an

¹⁸ There are exceptions. As was indicated earlier, due to the celebrity status afforded to dancers, there are those who want to perform for this reason.

'outsider', the non-Balinese may infiltrate the 'body' of the cultural other by physically experiencing the movement patterning (Turner 2011: 76), an idea echoed by Nascimento (2009: 54). David E.R. George goes further to suggest that:

It is not only our bodies which enter the world of performance, it is even more significantly, our minds which step from one set of assumptions about one kind of reality through a threshold into another. Those realities consist of both implicit epistemologies – cognitive operations and assumptions - and their ontological implications – the kind of reality they posit. (George 1999: 8)

With this in mind, it becomes conceivable that a non-Balinese could conceptualise *taksu*, even experience something akin to *taksu*, perhaps flow, through a psychophysical absorption. The body is 'the first and foremost of locations in reality is one's own embodiment' (Braidotti 1994: 161) and I have, either through mimesis, 'mirror' neurology¹⁹ or enculturation, adopted certain Balinese perspectives. That said, it remains problematic to assert that a non-Balinese could experience *taksu*. It is impossible to achieve a complete understanding of the Balinese culture, regardless of the degree of one's cultural immersion. As Jane Turner aptly explains:

While I might be able to appreciate that knowledge is constituted differently in Bali and synthesise the experiences derived from participation in the culture in relation to these knowledges, my understanding does not lead to embodied knowledge. (Turner 2011: 70)

From the Balinese perspective, full embodiment of the mask is a spiritual connection and attempting to penetrate the Balinese sense of spirituality is

¹⁹ According to neuro-theologian Andrew B. Newberg, the brain has specific neurons that 'mirror' the behaviour they see, as and when they get stimulated. ' These neurons are believed to actually mimic what we see others do' (Newberg 2010: 155)

difficult terrain. One might achieve a meeting place between two world views but this state might not correspond to the state of *Wibawa* where 'the performer has internalised a certain dramatic character and possesses the spiritual aura in line with the vocabulary of movement and choreography' (Rubin and Sedan a 2007: 125-126). This is particularly relevant, since as Turner claims '(t)he notion of embodiment is a term which in Bali encompasses a spiritual element whereby the performer opens themselves to the gods who can empower them and give them divine inspiration to perform more effectively' (Turner 2011: 70).

This would indicate that in order to attain *taksu*, the 'unique charisma' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 11), a union of art and spirit might be necessary, a possibility that has been confirmed by my Balinese teachers and performing friends. This is not purely a Western concern, as the Javanese performer Didik Nini Thowok explains:

I learned Balinese tradition, I ate Balinese food. This is so important, but not everybody is willing to do this. Many people are afraid of opening themselves to another religion. They think, "Oh, I'm Christian" or "I'm Muslim" or "I'm Buddhist" and believe following another religion comes too close to the heart. But if we don't open our heart we are not able to receive. This is the key to understanding. (Thowok cited in Ross, 2005: 221)

It would appear that from the Indonesian perspective being open to experience is key to understanding. Openness, flexibility and plurality may be general cultural characteristics of Indonesian culture, one's ability to enact any of these qualities is individual. Therefore, the choices of practical approach within this research have been designed to explore the *topeng* mask and to consider under what conditions

and circumstances a process can be developed to explore the embodiment of the mask both in Bali and in England.

Commodification of Spirituality within Training

The process of learning *topeng* might enable a non-Balinese performer to transcend their own cultural fixity and have the experience of learning different physical behaviour and 'incorporate knowledge through the physical behaviour of our bodies and thus our learning is constantly active and our behaviours constantly in the process of being modified' (Turner 2011: 64-65). From this albeit partially embodied perspective, Turner introduces the term 'psychospiritual' (2011: 65) which although useful, is not without problems. The term acknowledges that the performer is 'inhabiting a spiritual dimension' (Turner 2011: 65) where, as Kodi explains, the dancer is 'part entertainer, part philosopher and part exorcist' (Kodi quoted by Foley and Sedana 2005: 199). However, this term may imply that any spiritual connection of the non-Balinese performer to the mask is the same as that of a Balinese person, which is not accurate. Definitions and the issues relating to Balinese religion, alongside notions of spirituality and the sacred demand and are given more analysis later in the thesis. My focus is on the negotiation of the mask, the process leading towards its embodiment and how this is achievable through training. As such, it is necessary to contextualize how training is situated as a spiritual concern amidst Balinese-ness and the commodification of this aspect of Balinese culture.

I return to that moment when I sat on the floor in Bali in January 2011, arched over my work, quietly chopping and scraping as I carved, sanding and painting, the pain of sitting in this position had subsided. My legs were now loosely and comfortably apart, my pelvis was open and self-supporting, my hands were well healed from the blisters of gripping tools and scarred from the numerous chisel cuts and knife slips. The sides of my feet were now well hardened in unique, beautiful bunions that I have only seen Balinese wood carvers get from clamping the mask in between their feet. From this 'enculturated' perspective, I observed many international students come individually or in groups from universities or institutions to learn their 'fast track' mask-making course. Typically, these cultural study holidays last for three or four weeks and the participant can learn a variety of Balinese arts, including gamelan, textile, puppetry, mask-making, "*kecak* (a form of vocal story telling)" and various dance forms, including *topeng*. Yet this training package is sold with dual purpose as participants want to feel a part of the culture, without feeling like a mere tourist.

Ida Bagus Alit is involved with two groups from America that I am aware of. The West coast is represented by the Dell'Arte School, which offers on their website a fairly rounded cultural immersion for students, emphasising that 'this program is designed for those who want to participate in the family and ceremonial life of outstanding Balinese master teachers' (Dell'Arte 2014). Michael Kennard, professor of Theatre and Clown at the University of Alberta was a participant of this program in 2014 and praised the effectiveness of this programme as it allows

students to be 'immersed into the Balinese culture in ways that the regular tourist does not get to see and feel' (Dell'Arte 2014). The East coast is represented by students from New York-based 'Studio Five; The Floating Island,' an enterprise spearheaded by theatre practitioner Per Brahe. Similarly, their website offers cultural immersion with the bonus of training with 'Balerung'; this is the dance ensemble from the village of Peliatan, originally made famous by Antonin Artaud. Their website is tailored with a predominant focus on theatre and on its specific stage outcomes. It promises that in 'Balinese dance one finds the ultimate collection of gestures. No matter your background, when you execute them, they awaken a special force that we call the life body' (Studio5 2014). The description of the course goes on to suggest that by using Brahe's collection of Balinese masks, in parallel to his techniques of training, the student will experience 'a radical impact on [your] physical expression, which you take to the audience'. Students are also taught by Balinese master artists such as Ida Bagus Anom from Mas. Capitalising on the Balinese concept of *Taksu*, the website strongly suggests that students may access this inner strength and by the third week experience it for themselves; an 'unambiguous' state which 'both the teachers and the students will recognize [...] when it is present' (Studio5 2014). A culturally specific and profound sense of Balinese spirituality is coupled with the notion that by learning traditional performing arts, the student is somehow not adding to tourism but helping the Balinese preserve their traditions.²⁰ Although this is clearly a

²⁰ Studio5 claims that '(l)ast year, we discovered our presence in Bali supported and inspired the Balinese to rekindle the strength of their artistic traditions. You not only grow as a performer in Bali, but stem the tide of tourism's demands' (2014)

problematic (and rather patronising) statement, it should be pointed out that there is an element of truth to this as Balinese people appreciate foreigners taking an active interest in their cultural performances; particularly at a time when young people desire modernity and repel tradition.²¹ Furthermore, the Dell Arte school acknowledge that 'Bali is a country in transition, as development and tourism increase yearly, and the traditional arts are also changing' (Dell' Arte 2014). However, alerting their students to the impending loss of the real Bali, they warn that 'if you've always wanted to visit the mask culture of Bali, now is the time to do it!' (Dell' Arte 2014). Part of the marketing strategy is that Bali somehow needs the West to reinvent this continually evolving, shifting and clearly very delicate culture and that there is a great deal of symbiosis between what is given commercially and received spiritually/culturally. This quest for spiritual authenticity perpetuates the distinction between a mechanised/industrialised West and a primitive, spiritual East. Furthermore, this portrayal feeds into the discourses of exoticism and presenting Bali as a romantic other.

The Nuances of Spirituality in an intercultural context

I am aware that the words 'sacred' and 'spiritual' are a nebulous terms which deserve clarification. There are two different meanings to the word spiritual that are useful as they distinguish cultural as much as phenomenological differences.

²¹ Whilst this accurately describes most youth culture in the twenty first century, what is noteworthy is that whereas in the West the emergence of a teenage youth culture started in the 1960s, in Indonesia this is a relatively new and recent phenomenon which in combination with technological advances and globalisation is felt more acutely.

One meaning of 'spiritual' refers to an understanding that it is linked to religion and this is generally how the Balinese would use and understand the word in its non-secular interpretation. The other understanding of spiritual, more akin to a secular or post secular view,²² refers to how the human inner psyche is affected through that which is non-material. 'Put simply, secular spiritualities refer to a way of deeply connecting with 'yourself' rather than the Divine' (Njaradi 2014: 7). Yet paradoxically both understandings of the term 'spiritual' that I have offered can include notions of the sacred, divinity, holiness and those assertions depend on how and where they are attributed. In regards to the second interpretation of spiritual I have found it useful to replace the word with 'numinous' (taken from the Latin word *numen* meaning the presence of the divine) which more accurately depicts my experience with the Balinese mask in that what happens in the act of performance: the feeling of energy, expansion, exhaustion is in many ways unknowable to both the senses and the intellect. Yoon articulates three interpretations of the numinous and the first is particularly useful to my application. Based on Rudolf Otto's 'Idea of the Holy' he claims that numinosity depends upon an experience which originates from outside the self but is perceived within (Yoon 2010: 26).²³

²² Postsecularism is a condition of openness to notions of the sacred and/or co-existence of faith and reason, religion and the secular; where the prefix 'post' is understood within the context of moving through or beyond as opposed to any sense of a regime-change or before or after any given religion dynamic. Postsecularism is best conceptualised by Jürgen Habermas as 'a balance between shared citizenship and cultural difference' (Habermas 2008:19) where the mutual interpretation of the 'relationship between faith and knowledge enables [both sides] to live together in a self-reflective manner' (Habermas 2008: 29).

²³ Further definitions include Jung who defines numinous as a quality that is 'unconditional, dangerous, taboo, magical' (Jung quoted in Yoon 2010: 26) and that latest observation has influenced Eliade, who builds on Otto's premise of the 'wholly other' in terms of the negotiation of fear, awe and terror before the 'awe-inspiring mystery' (Eliade quoted in Yoon 2010:27).

Goldingay asserts that 'performance is engaged in some key spiritual behaviours posited by post-secularists...seeking [their] spiritual selves through a subjective, individualised approach in order to create a more authentic hybrid performance identity' (Goldingay 2010: 97). In an interview conducted prior to my doctoral research, performer Mas Theodore Rendra, describes how spirituality is 'personal' and to do 'with a communication with your own life... and nothing to do with religion but the source of your own life' (Appendix 3). Although there are different cultural contexts to the meaning of 'spiritual', Rendra's description fits a general definition which aligns with Goldingay's 'subjective' leanings. The theologian Mike Starkey has proposed that finding a belief in a personal god is 'the only real hope we have of achieving a stable sense of identity and purpose in a fragmented culture, and without such a belief we are abandoned to narcissistic, consumerist forms of spirituality' (Lynch 2002: xi).²⁴ As described by Gordon Lynch in his book *After Religion* (2002), Starkey's argument is that it is narcissistic to imagine that it is purely up to our own individual choice, imagination and preference what the meaning of life is; we need to engage in a sense of sacred beyond ourselves (Lynch 2002: 107). This resonates with a Balinese approach to spirituality, although in that

²⁴ Starkey observes how:

The use of words such as 'deep', 'profound', 'inner' and 'mystery' [imply that] such a spirituality is appallingly shallow. Not only does it fail to challenge the complacency of Western capitalism, it is a product of it. Not only does it fail to challenge personal selfishness, it is its religious expression... We live in a world that can tell the difference between Coke and Pepsi, but not between good religion and bad religion. Consumer spirituality, far from being the answer, is simply a restatement of the problem of using mystical jargon. (Starkey quoted in Lynch 2002: 106)

This is particularly resonant in regards to my choice of methodological approach. I am aware, for instance, that cakra work is predominantly seen in connection to self-help, therapy and well-being.

context there are 'good' and 'bad' individual interpretations and levels of commitment that arise from following any spiritual direction regardless of culture. However, in Bali it would be considered egotistical and therefore incorrect to follow an approach based on individualistic experience without some connection to a god.

Herein lays the distinction between my experience of Balinese and English performance cultures. Jane Turner articulates this tension in her discussion of Yarrow's book *Sacred Theatre* (2007) as follows:

The notion of a spiritual domain in many Western practices that are considered examples of contemporary expressions of the sacred in performance, is understood as an individualised experience that results from a connection made through the aesthetic practice rather than a socially engaged practice. (Turner 2011: 68)

Whilst in England, religious life is perhaps best characterised by a state of 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994: 83), in Bali, the negation of the sacred in *topeng* practice is untenable. For this reason, the ritual 'works' because the majority of its participants shares a belief in the same religion. In terms of spiritual performance in England, one may not be able to define exactly what or who the god/s is or are, but it fits into Paul Tillich's view of contemporary spiritual life being more akin to a belief in a 'God above God; a reality that transcends and goes beyond any specific image or concept of God' (Tillich 2000: 179). In contrast to the

personal, loving and parental individual god, Tillich's god is the 'ultimate reality of which we are a part and for which we have no adequate name' (Tillich 2000:179). Turner's discussion of postmodern spirituality suggests that there cannot be an 'abstract spirituality that is not connected with deep habits and our bodily way of being' (Turner 2011: 68). In this sense, Turner claims that as an audience member she has 'possibility to connect spiritually to performance but not with a specific spiritual practice' (Turner 2011: 68).

Sacred Direction within the Choreography of *topeng*

Location and place both have spiritual associations in Bali. I will limit my attentions to those ritual practices that relate to the Balinese sense of direction because, for a *topeng* dancer, it is important to not only manipulate the body in all directions, but also to use all sides of the stage, including turning 'his' back to the audience. This attention to direction reflects the "*nawa sanga*, (meaning 'the Balinese cosmic map')" which shows the nine-fold division of the cosmos. The Balinese believe that each direction is guarded by a deity and their consort, associated weapon, colour, mantra, body organ, day of the week, season and number. The Gods of specific importance are the Balinese trinity of Iswara, Brahma and Wisnu; representing east, south and north respectively. Therefore, the actual choreography is an embodiment of ritual blessing where the body itself, through direction, position and gesture becomes part of the *yadnya* ritual offerings. I remember once performing in a house temple ceremony and feeling like I had

technically excelled. Ida Bagus would never show an immediate response so I silently waited for feedback. Later as we returned in the car, he was agitated by my obvious seeking of his approval and it transpired that for rest of the performance, the other masks were continually seeking forgiveness from the Gods as I had not addressed one particular prayer gesture to the appropriate shrine and in the correct direction within the temple and therefore I had made a serious and public mistake about which I had no prior knowledge of.

Embodiment of the mask and what that means from a Balinese perspective has discussed; it includes "*idep* (meaning 'thought')", "*bayu* (meaning 'energy or force/power manifested in wind or breath')" and "*sabda* (meaning 'voice')". Whereas the *bayu* relates to embodiment, the importance of the other two is equally contained by the ritual process. Thought, *idep*, and the preceding prayer mantras invite the gods into the masks. The voice aspect *sabda* is given meaning during the performance itself, when the performer speaks or chants "*kawi* (meaning 'an ancient form of Javanese Sanskrit')" mantra. As Lansing asserts 'the meaning of a mantra cannot be realised if it is not sounded correctly' (Lansing 1983: 87); here the sounding of the syllable is crucial as the tone imbues or resonates a sacred meaning for example, in the words *ong, sang, nang, mang, sing, ang, wang*, and so on. Each of these syllables refers to a part, or rather to a deity of the *nawa sanga*, and to a sacred direction, so this chanting of mantra has a very specific ritual function and relates to direction, as well as other things in relation to forgiveness and acceptance.

Mask Performance/ Ritual Participation in a Balinese House Temple Ceremony

My primary experience of performing with *topeng* masks was in house temple ceremonies and in those situations, even as a non-Balinese, it is believed that the masks become fully charged and are connected to specific gods and ancestral deities dedicated to the religious purpose of *Agama Hindu Bali* (Coldiron 2004: 57). This experience of both participating and performing in Balinese house temple ceremonies is from an 'inside' perspective and akin to a cultural anthropological view of *communitas* (Turner 1987: 133). This term is used by Turner to indicate that people sharing a rite of passage feel a sense of equality, in a liminal state of 'in-betweeness' (the Latin word *limen* meaning 'threshold'). Of the many diverse understandings of ritual, what rituals generally share is a sense of affirmation of identity or renewal. In the Balinese context, having attended a temple ceremony many Balinese people would say that they felt cleansed, refreshed and purified and after many ceremonies, I too felt this mixed with a sense of calm and relief. Perhaps this was a response to the loaded expectation of performance, although the 'pressure' was not based on audience expectation because within a ritual context virtuosity, as I have suggested before, the performance itself is not always of paramount importance. The expectation came as much from the excitement of being connected to the mask and the anticipation of wondering how and what would happen during the performance. This connection with the mask is a condition of its embodiment although is not experienced during training. This is partially explained by the lack of the necessary conditions in training, such as the combination of a live gamelan orchestra with an

audience and most importantly the associated practice of ritual that surrounds the performance. Even from the non-Balinese performer's perspective, these activities imbue the performance with an intention that is incomparable to normal pre-performance rituals. Those added elements are not directed towards oneself in the hope of delivering a good performance, rather their reach is beyond oneself and directed towards a range of different gods, goddesses, ancestors and aspirations for the host or community.

It is well documented that "*yadnya* (meaning 'sacrifice')" (Ida Bagus Alit 2011, Hobart 2005: 253), mantra (Emigh 1996: 111, Hobart 2005: 137, Lansing 1983: 87) and "*canang* (meaning 'offerings')" (Emigh 1996: 111, 168, Eiseman 1990: 219) are all connected to the performance of *topeng*. These offerings all include "*pro ra sa* (symbolic of the "*tri murti*" (meaning the 'unification of Siwa, Wisnu and Brahma'))" (Eiseman 2010: 354). Placed in a small bowl are flowers, biscuits, cigarettes, money; any objects that the gods would appreciate and enjoy. These are accompanied by mantra, which ask for blessing and forgiveness in case anything is not as pleasing as it could be. As can be seen in the short film *Topeng and Temple Ceremonies* (See Appendix 1) the masks are blessed both before and after they come out of their boxes and these blessings are dedicated to the afore mentioned gods, the god of *taksu* and the deified ancestors who many believe are manifestations of the God of Taksu (Emigh 1996: 115, Dunn 1983: 122, Young 1980: 93). As Palermo has noted, during a performance the performer is considered "*pelinggih* (meaning 'a seat')" where the ancestors are invited to come

and stay for a while then depart' (Palermo 2010). What is accepted is that the mask becomes 'a vehicle for some great power' (Coldiron 2004: 94).

Often a performer will sense that the priest is shortening his mantra, meaning that the ceremony and all the ritual activities need to speed up, but usually each mask that dances, will occupy the stage for a minimum of four minutes, sometimes as long as ten or fifteen. During this time, one can hear so acutely the sweaty inhalations and exhalations under the wood as the air touches ones' face skin and, when I participated in these ceremonies amidst the noise of everything else, time often seemed to slow down whilst my body became aware, yet beyond awareness, of itself moving and taking space within an enormous sphere of three hundred and sixty degrees. When I wear *topeng keras Gaja Madah* it feels like the mask expands my whole body and that my entire chest becomes another eye that compels me to turn. My diaphragm become like a gliding steering wheel.

Somehow in these moments of performance I was aware of nothing else except what I call my 'negative space'; that is, although my visibility is extremely limited, I saw my outstretched hands which felt heavy loaded with rings on all fingers. However, what I focused on, or was mainly aware of was the space in between my fingers. These space-makers, this negative space carved shapes through the air. Likewise, as I raised my arms, I become aware of the empty space between my hip and elbow and it felt like a sponge that I could squeeze as my body got stronger,

more *keras*. As I moved through space this sponginess took on a repelling magnetic quality; the resistance felt 'squidgy' as though there were two forces at play within my body. It became intensely difficult, almost painful to hold this level of physical energy yet the feeling was exquisite when the mask finally came off and this 'feeling' was released through the final exhalation. The experience of dancing with this mask was so heightened and dynamic during a ritual that there was a feeling of utter exhaustion as if the mask had taken and devoured every last drop of energy leaving me, as the performer exhausted. Whilst I have never experienced *taksu* (and according to my teachers, I have only once or twice come close to it) this feeling of exhaustion is a view shared by Balinese performers. As Kakul explains:

The masks (have been) seen as symbols of the ancestors, and it is my sacred duty to receive their magic, to allow it to enter me and animate the masks, one after the other, until I am exhausted. After the performance, I must make the proper offerings to ensure the departure of any evil spirits who have witnessed the performance. And my offering must be great enough to provide for the return of the *Taksu* on the next occasion of the sacred performance. This is of absolute importance, as is the gesture of thanking the gods. The sacred words (*mantras*) bind us to our ancestors, to their revelations – to their very existence.”
(Kakul quoted in Daniel 1981: 140)

From this exhaustion comes renewed energy as 'something'; some force, agent or aspect of one's being that generated that energy is dispersed and left behind in the memory of the dance. In so doing there is a sense of change and transformation leaving new capacity or 'potential space' (Emigh 1996: 275) to be

refilled. This is how I can best describe the feeling of performing in a ritual with a mask. At the end of the ceremony, when the performance is over, the lights are turned off; costumes packed away, people go home. Perhaps the only physical, tangible things remaining are the plastic water cups, cigarette butts and banana leaves left on the floor, but perhaps in this dismantling something remains.

The Staging of Balance and Gender

As Wikan suggests, nowhere is the portrayal of gender more obvious than on the stage in Balinese dance (1990: 68). The *alus/keras* axis seems to hold and establish the culturally constructed parameters of gender and provide scope for some playful gender switching. As Emigh and Hunt claim:

Though these codes are relatively fixed and are presented, *mutadis mutandis*, in performance after performance, there is a delicious enjoyment taken in assigning the presentation of these codes to “inappropriate” performers: little boys play warriors, old men play amorous youths, little girls play kings, and mature women play exemplary men, including the God-King Rama and his brothers. These casting inversions are indications that, despite use of relatively well-fixed codes, it is a richly dynamic rather than static world that is being projected. (Emigh and Hunt 1992: 196)

This quote suggests that there are many roles for women on the Balinese stage, if those roles are male characters. Certainly, in other Balinese performance genres, besides *topeng*, there are female characters but generally, in *topeng*, the stories and content only allow the performer, who is typically male, to take on an

extremely limited number of female roles. On the other hand, there is more variation and scope of male characters to play.

Another important factor in the discussion of staging gender in relation to the study of Balinese dance-theatre, although this is not always evident in *topeng*, is the long history of cross-dressing. Socially and culturally the boundaries that differentiate gender in Bali, like elsewhere in Asia, are often transcended and notions of 'feminine' and 'masculine' are frequently disrupted specifically on stage in regard to cross-dressing and the presentation of "*bebancian* (meaning 'a gender type that lies somewhere between male and female')" and can be played by performers of either sex (Hughes-Freeland 1998, Dibia and Ballinger 2004). Hughes-Freeland suggests that in Java 'performance is gender-ascribed, but available to both sexes, according to specific conventions" (Hughes-Freeland 1995: 201) and this assertion can be extended to Bali. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide more specific detail however Ni Madé Pujawati summarizes most succinctly the differences:

There are 3 type of dance styles in Bali: female, *bebancian* [and] male. It is the dance style we are talking about not the one who is performing.

The female dance style [for example] *Panyembrama, Legong, Pendet, Sekar Jagat, Puspanjali*, those are normally performed by women or girls. It doesn't mean that males cannot perform those dances. Even though men perform those dances, the dances are still [in the] female style...

The *bebancian* dance style [for example] *Terunajaya, Margapati, Panji Semirang*, those dances are normally performed by either sex (women or men).

The male dance style [for example] *Topeng Keras, Baris, Topeng Tua, Topeng Dalam, Topeng Bondres*. Those dances are normally performed by men. Even though women can perform those dances the style of the dance is still male style dance. (Pujawati 2014)

The 'in-between' gender state of *bebancian* is a dance style, as opposed to a way of 'being' on stage. In mask work, where the face is hidden and the body comes to the fore, these nuances are clearer and so being gender neutral proves an impossibility; there is always a tension between playing 'masculine' and 'feminine' in *topeng*.

Analysis of gender on the Balinese stage has generally concentrated on how both sexes can play different genders which are demonstrated by movement gestures that are located along an axis of either *alus*, meaning refined, and *keras*, meaning strong, powerful or loud. Whilst this accurately describes the general conventions of Balinese performing arts there is a void of analysis regarding gender in *topeng*. Whilst in a *general* way the choreographic gestures and *alus/keras* movements inherent in all Balinese dance is evident, there is an absence of scholarly attention to female, Balinese masks, perhaps because so few female masks exist.

The sexing and definition of 'female mask' in Bali needs some unpacking as the use of this term refers to a mask that represents a woman's body. 'Female' tends to refer to the sexed body, not the gendered body which is discussed in terms of masculine or feminine. This is important to acknowledge so that I can move on to discuss the gendering of the mask/body as feminine within certain cultural constructions.

Existing female masks in *topeng*

One of the central tenets of the present thesis is to propose that a new *topeng* portfolio of masks is relevant since there are very few female masked characters available to play.²⁵ In the *Babad*, the chronicles of Balinese history, there are no women of significance in the forefront of any of the stories. This lack of female characters is evidenced by the conversations that I have had with Ida Bagus Alit, Balinese *topeng* experts and from the existing documentation on *Babad* within the scholarship of *topeng* (Emigh 1996, Rubin and Sedana 2007). Beyond their key role and function, the *babad* are texts and histories that function as 'propaganda for nationalist, racist, sexist, dynastic or personal futures' (Bade 2013: 87). As postcolonial theorist Dipesh Cakrabarty asks 'how do you construct a narrative for a group or class that has not left its own sources?' (Cakrabarty 1998: 473). A possible route to answer this question is to explore how those voices are represented and by whom.

²⁵ See the thesis introduction for a contextualization of how gender is read in Bali, both culturally and on stage.

In terms of my research trajectory when I started my doctoral studies only two female *topeng* masks were known to me. The first is the character of Sita, a character from the Hindu epic Ramayana (See Image 1) who is also known in Bali as *Topeng Ratu Putih*, meaning the ‘white queen’. She is the beautiful and obedient wife to Rama, renowned for her dedication, self-sacrifice and purity.



Image 1. *Topeng Ratu Putih*, Designed and Made by Ida Bagus Alit.



Image 2. *Topeng Suzi*, Designed and Made by Ida Bagus Alit.

In stark contrast, we have the second female mask that I encountered at the time: Suzie, a half mask (Image 2) with wide open mouth allowing the performer to fully engage his lips and tongue. This mask is a flirtatious clown who manipulates and dances provocatively in the erotic style of *joged*. Whereas Sita is *alus*, meaning refined and soft; Suzie is *kasar*, meaning coarse and vulgar. Clearly there is a dichotomy which, on a most obvious reading, mirrors Western representations of the virgin/whore. Both Sita and Suzi are archetypes and as such they can potentially show a range of character, both good and bad. However, because there are only two female masks available within the collection of *topeng* and because they demonstrate such polarity, reduces the representation of women to stereotypes that become empty, parodied versions of female impersonation. Humour is a vital component of any *topeng* performance, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with parody but in this context, any potential readings of womanhood might be severely limited or negated completely.

Mrs. Old Man Mask:

The documentation on the following Balinese mask is a Balinese example of introducing a new female mask within the codified cultural parameters of Bali. In 2010 a set of five masks were commissioned by the Balinese Ministry of Art and Culture. From this commission, one female mask was designed and this mask (Image 3) was named *Sugara Manis* meaning in Balinese 'the Sweet Ocean', or as she is more affectionately known *Topeng Tua Perempuan* literally meaning the

woman version of the Old Man mask. For the purposes of this thesis I will refer to her as Mrs Old Man.



Image 3: *Sugara Manis* and/or *Topeng Tua Perempuan* and/or Mrs Old Man.

Designed and made by I Dewa Nyoman Tjita and I Dewa Gede Mandra

This new mask was designed and collaboratively made between I Dewa Nyoman Tjita and I Dewa Gede Mandra with an original choreography created by I Madé Djimat. As a female mask Mrs. Old Man is rare because this female mask has its own dance with choreography that is not seen elsewhere within a *topeng* performance. Mrs. Old Man movements and the choreography created for her by Djimat are refined, which echoes the ‘distinguished’ aspect that Ida Bagus Alit describes of *Topeng Tua*, The Old Man Mask.²⁶ This choreography is based on a hybridisation of pre-existing elements: the walk of the *gambu* character *Condong*, the maidservant, and the “*joged pinyintan*, (meaning ‘an ancient form of courtly

²⁶ A description made by Ida Bagus Alit in 2011 during a personal conversation with the author.

dance’)" which is very difficult to master. On one level the mask’s choreography is a particularly good example of the ‘refined’ gestures of *alus* movement. The mask *Sugara Manis* exhibits feminine behaviour; she sweeps and pretends to be shy. The wave with the hand held close to the face is a culturally coded gesture of “*malu*, (meaning ‘shy or coyness’)" that a Balinese audience would recognise. She delicately spits her “*sirih* (meaning ‘betel nut’)" and blows a flirtatious kiss to her audience upon leaving, mimicking her ‘husband’s’ wave or salute, which is a gesture that many dancers enjoy including in their performance.

Djimat created this dance so that both the male and female version of the Old Man, the second character to enter the *topeng* stage, could be performed on stage simultaneously with two different performers inhabiting the two different masks. Watching them dance together is intended to be complementary. However, *Topeng Tua Perempuan* seems to occupy the stage only in a supporting role, inherently subservient, that promotes her husband rather than sharing the performing space equally or taking centre stage in her own right. The two masks could exchange the focus of the audience’s gaze by playing both major and minor roles alongside each other thus enhancing the comedy which is deliberate; instead Mrs Old Man seems to allow space for her husband to shine. *Topeng Tua Perempuan* in her manifestation of *alus* reflects the aspirational aged wife, or perhaps, rather than offering any new insight or representation, she simply reflects what we perceive and know already about *Topeng Tua*, the Old Man. Despite the contribution that *Topeng Tua Perempuan*, Mrs. Old Man is making to

the development of a female mask repertory, she is on stage essentially to support her husband mask. The audience is presented with a mask confined in accordance with patriarchal views and so this mask never reaches its full potential.

Presence of Women in *Topeng*

There has been some insightful scholarship examining the emergence and development of women's roles in a variety of Balinese performing arts, for example, Catherine Diamond's wide ranging discussion of women in traditional and non-traditional performance (2008), Emiko Susilo's dissertation on women's gamelan (2003), Jennifer Goodlander's Asian Theatre Journal article on female *dalang* (2012) and, most significantly, Carmencita Palermo's study of *topeng* (2009). Included in this scholarship of Indonesian dance is Rachmi Diah Larasati's monograph (2013) on the cultural reconstruction of dance in post-genocide Indonesia. These works share and document the enthusiasm as well as the frustrations of female pioneers and my research supports further enquiry into the specific arena of *topeng*.

A Balinese woman, Desak Nyoman Suarti, founded a female *topeng* group called *Topeng Sakti*²⁷ in 2000 and since then another female group has started, called

²⁷ Sakti is the Balinese alternative spelling of the Sanskrit word Shakti which refers to female power.

Topeng Wanita Mumbul Sari, from the village of Keramas (Palermo 2009). This new *topeng* starts to chart the emergence of women as equal players and subjects on the Balinese stage and it proves that women have the skill and clear ability to achieve a convincing performance. However, as Ballinger observes, the work of these groups reflects a theatre 'that is often a mirror of aspirations rather than a reality' (Ballinger 2005:7). This masked dance-drama is created from the confines of a patriarchal framework. One reason, among many, as to why this might be the case is that they are using familiar masks of male characters.

From a non-traditional viewpoint, one that capitalises on the flexibility of approach that many Balinese people commonly share, one could argue that *topeng* as a masked dance-drama does not have to include the specific (religious) stories and rituals, including mantra and offerings, and that it would still be a *topeng* because of the masks, style and the value placed on entertainment. Certainly, this suits and defines my current use of the genre in terms of my performance of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood*. However, a strictly traditional view, and certainly a view that Ida Bagus Alit would uphold,²⁸ might claim that thorough *topeng* training is not simply knowledge of the mask or the choreography, but also the stories and mantras that accompany the form. This difference is a crucial one when counterpoising the emergence of female *topeng* troupes to the established male ones, as while it is true that many male performers do not ever have access to this deeper knowledge,

²⁸ See my interview with IB Alit, translated by I Madé Yudi. (Appendix 7).

usually when performing in a troupe, there is at least one person who is expert in these matters; matters which are still the preserve of men.

Absence of Women in *Topeng*

Topeng Sakti made a valuable contribution in bringing the female voice and body onto the stage and into the foreground. Since performer Cristina Westari Formagia's death in 2008, *Topeng Sakti* has been inactive. This is significant as Westari was the only Western woman in the group and it might point towards the cultural difficulties and obstacles that Balinese women confront in organising themselves in the face of patriarchy, an idea further explored by Palermo (2009). The absence of women in *topeng* in this section of the thesis introduction are further discussed in an article I co-wrote with Coldiron and Palermo, which appears in full as Appendix 5.

In their early analysis and ground breaking article 'Gender Bending in Balinese Performance' Emigh and Hunt (1992) give detailed accounts of all manner of dance genres, ranging from *legong* to *baris*, *gambuh* and *calanorang* but at no point discuss gender representation within *topeng*. This, considering Emigh is a *topeng* dancer/scholar, is significant. Female masks have been ignored within the *topeng* genre although there has been a greater response to Rangda, Bali's most famous female mask (Coldiron 2004: 55, Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 70 – 75, Heraty 2000).

Dibia and Ballinger (2006: 66) as well as Ballinger (2005) discuss how there are Balinese women defying convention, but that it is uncommon to see Balinese women performing *topeng*, thus emphasising the unusual and brave nature of *Topeng Sakti*. Until recently Balinese women have not wanted to inhabit traditional masks (Palermo 2009: 60) and there has been an absence of female *topeng* performers. Palermo's research suggests that women's resistance to performing in masks is linked to the performance of the final mask, Sidhakarya, who completes the ritual (Palermo 2009: 61). Menstruation causes women to feel *leteh* or *sebel*, which translates as general feelings of uncleanliness. Menstruation and the post-partum body excludes all women from any activity within the temple. Ni Wayan Latri articulates this from the perspective of sacred performance: 'physically we are still dirty, because [of] it (menstruation) we are considered impure, it is clear that it influences us' (Latri cited in Palermo 2009: 49). From the position of a twenty first century Western feminist this is problematic and is at odds with western sensibilities where menstruation is not considered a reason to be excluded. Whilst there are flexibilities within the distinct cultural and religious understanding of *Agama Hindu Bali* and many Balinese women would find this irrational and not relevant for how they lead their lives, within the world of sacred performance, female dancers do respect this exclusion and do not participate in sacred dance. Palermo relates this to a patriarchal social tendency that controls women by controlling women's sexuality, and that it is the very nature of women and their sexuality that makes them unclean (2009: 49).

Research as a White Western Feminist

This research is from the position of a Western feminist with a desire to work between cultures and geo-political spaces. It takes into account my own body, history and experience, one that recognizes my 'white skin' (Rich 1984: 215) with all its implications concerning identity and location, one that emerges out of a personal need to find alternative, women-centered approaches that 'de-narrate' the traditional stories in order to seek out new and ways of being, and doing *topeng* in England.

As a Western woman, my creative choices as *topeng* performer arise from a specific embodied feminist approach; my choices will not be the same as those of a Balinese woman. However, as Reinelt has convincingly argued, this stance:

Since it is political and deeply personal, it cannot be put on and taken off again like a critical coat every time the scholar goes calling on a new topic; it is rather more like a second skin, which goes everywhere. (Reinelt 1992: 227)

There are risks in applying a Western feminist perspective to Balinese performance and many scholars warn that this is problematic (Coldiron 2013, Hughes-Freeland 1995, among others). Spivak reminds us there is a real danger in claiming to represent and speak for the female, 'third-world' 'other'; the subaltern voice, which she defines as having 'all lines of social mobility' removed (Spivak 2005: 475) and the 'non-recognition of agency' (Spivak 2005: 476). However, I do not intend

to engage in the representation of specifically Balinese women and create new subject positions on their behalf. Instead, I hope to illustrate through the creation of new masked characters, diverse and other potential representations of women that sit comfortably within the *topeng* genre. From this perspective, I am not speaking *to* or *for* the Balinese woman and my work is not principally disseminated in Bali. However, because the Balinese technique of carving is the only one that I have used for over a decade; it is the most dominant influence on my crafting of masks. In regards to my movement I do not seek to replicate images of Balinese dancing girls - or male Balinese *topeng* dancers for that matter either - but to embody the mask by employing the principles of the choreography that I am physically able to dance.

Echoing how Balinese culture perpetually negotiates balance, the contexts and relationships within my research seem to incorporate a vast number of opposite principles: East/ West, man/woman, masculine/feminine, traditional/contemporary, youth/age to name but a few. Within each seemingly distinct binary there is always a complex shifting of boundaries to negotiate. As one considers these aspects within an intercultural context, for example by consideration of the blurring distinction between opposites; in-betweenness and attempts at any sort of filtration are recurrent themes throughout this thesis.

Chapter One

Traditional Training and Bespoke Regimes: Change and

Continuity within *Topeng*²⁹

In this chapter I outline and critique the depth of my traditional *topeng* training and what this has afforded me in terms of education and experience within the context of my doctoral research. This focus on training explicitly grounds the thesis in response to specific research questions how one may start to embody the mask and in reference to how we may engage and apply *topeng*, and its related techniques to contemporary performance training. More critically this detailed documentation offers a rationale for how I have attempted to filter what I have learned into a transferable and intercultural training regime. I discuss how a specific training followed in the traditional way can and cannot be considered as part of wider, intercultural performer training.

Rather than expand on all aspects of a traditional *topeng* training which would involve how to carve, how to make “*Yadnya* (meaning ‘offerings to the Gods’)”, in this chapter my intention is to focus primarily on those aspects of training that involve the animation of the mask and its embodiment, and to unpick what that

²⁹ Part of this chapter is developed from an article called *Dance training in Bali: intercultural and globalised encounters* that appeared in TDPT 2014 and which is included as my Appendix 1.

means, both for a Balinese performer and for a non-Balinese performer attempting to bring the mask to the elusive notion of 'life'. I will articulate how the mask reaches its full embodied 'characterisation' and give an analysis of how the choreography is manifest with different assumptions based on cultural and religious notions pertaining to the use and harnessing of energy.

I offer an analysis of the physical processes of doing and learning through a practice-as-research methodology and as such I share some of the training challenges and obstacles that I experienced. As well as physical difficulty, those challenges are related to ethics, culture and the gender ascribed politics of power; all of which this chapter discusses. However, from the outset, it is important to clarify that my analysis of those topics is unavoidably linked to my position as a white, British woman who, at times, operated as a 'cultural Other' in the Balinese context. These concerns and issues have also been raised in the previous subsection 'Research as a White, Western Feminist,' yet, as it was done there, it is important to note that I am aware of the privilege of my position as a British academic/artist working in Bali (and hopefully, this acknowledgement of privilege will be evident throughout this thesis). Nevertheless, in the current section I aspire to consider my experiences and responses in ways that also intersect with race and class issues. What follows is an amalgamation of how this training to bring life to the mask manifests and how one can work interculturally to devise or re-calibrate a training regime. These issues and experiences are thematically separated; those pertaining to all aspects of traditional training in Bali and those of relevance to my

understanding and application of this training in the creation of a more bespoke regime.

These ideas are connected by concerns relating to temporality within the genre of *topeng* and I focus specifically on notions of change and continuity within training. I critique and analyse the individual experiences of an aging body within the context of a training system that embraces repetition and endurance. This balance between micro and macro exposes on the one hand a maturity and experience akin to the challenges of a deep training, a term that I will define, and on the other, a naivety or lack of experience in view of the life time commitment necessary. I therefore establish the context of different temporalities within training. This focus pre-empts the development of a hybrid type of training practice and this is of relevance for a variety of reasons as performers and practitioners may share the same challenges, obstacles and desire to seek culturally sensitive and appropriate solutions in order to work in and between cultural performance traditions. In terms of change and continuity, hybridisation³⁰ is applicable as it would be in a variety of circumstances but it is a particularly culturally sensitive approach in Bali partly because of the flexibility that many Balinese people share in terms of making their culture accessible, and more specifically because the genre of *topeng* has always had to change with issues of Time.³¹

³⁰ With the word hybrid comes a dilemma as in nature a hybrid is often infertile and this does not reflect my experience which has been highly productive.

³¹ This has meant that the genre has evolved internally within Balinese traditional culture in order to remain popular and relevant, however these changes are most evident only in the resulting

Simon Murray proposes a training challenge which to a degree describes the 'journey' (Knight 2004: 40) and commitment to the Balinese mask that my training reflects. For Murray, one of the main challenges of any training process is to imagine 'deep training as a lifelong practice, an enduring unfolding, a practice of embodied critical reflection, a praxis of theory and action, of head and hand, of thought and deed' (Murray 2015: 53). In a context where for 'depth we can read thickness, consistency, density, girth, width, compactness, opacity, consistency, consolidation, intimacy' (Murray 2015: 52) this can be aligned to what anthropologists have called 'thick descriptions'³² and so what follows in this chapter is an account of my training in Bali in relation to these two terms. My practice has evolved as 'deep training' and in addition to some of the associations that Murray suggests, other defining qualities of 'depth' in the context of my own training include: a long- standing training in terms of time and duration (that what is achieved whilst in training takes time to settle in the body), knowledge that may be transferable and applicable in other contexts (rather than knowledge that is finite) and finally, a vertical dissemination of knowledge from master to student where the 'hand-in-hand chain is itself symbolic of the continuity of practice and the experience of knowledge transfer' (Matthews 2014: 35).

performances. Traditional training is slowly changing in Bali (refer to Appendix 4) however these changes are most evident only in the resulting performances.

³² 'Thick description' is a phrase first introduced by anthropologist Clifford Geertz and which has become recognised terminology for all that information that extends beyond a factual account of what 'happens' (which is 'thin description'). This includes all the cultural context so that the information becomes meaningful to the outsider

Traditional Topenq Training in Bali.

Ida Bagus Alit and Í Madé Djimat advocate the more traditional *gurukala* dance training system in which the student works one-to-one with their teacher in their “*sanggar*, (meaning ‘a home-based workshop in the teacher’s own house’). This is often known as the ‘village style’ and this is the way that I have been taught predominantly. As a live-in apprentice one would gain skills such as carving, dance and eventually all aspects of performance and ritual. For a mask apprentice also learning to carve, it is not uncommon for the student to simply observe and pass tools and carry the mask baskets from the car to the temple, long before he gets to carve himself. As I Ketut Kodi explains: ‘even being around someone who has knowledge, I am learning, and just being touched on the head is enough’ (Kodi quoted in Foley and Sedana 2005: 200). When learning to dance, the student copies the teacher (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 15) and once a basic choreography is learnt, the teacher drills the student in a military fashion until the dance is “*masuk* (meaning ‘inside’)”. This corresponds to Clarke’s suggestion that in Asian traditions where the genealogy is paternal there is a tendency for the participant to copy the parent (Clarke 2009: 27). It is then the responsibility of the student to refine, practise and observe as much as possible. Whilst “*stil sendiri* (meaning ‘individual style’)” is encouraged in both making and performance, the student initially adopts the style of the master dancer, the teacher who physically manipulates the student’s body and shapes him like moulding clay.

To my knowledge, in performance training, non-Asian styles of learning do not frequently involve this level of imitation. In the West for example, there is often more emphasis on learning a technique through its creative exploration. A lesson is sometimes referred to as a 'workshop',³³ where participants embark on an individual journey with the masks according to their own connection to it. Even with *Commedia dell'Arte* masks, which are codified by character and movement (Rudlin 1994: 35), there is far more space and freedom for the student to create their own interpretation. The level of copying necessary for training in Bali is physically and psychologically challenging for many non-Balinese students, especially those who crave individual interpretation. This is what scholar and *topeng* dancer Jane Turner calls the 'Western sensibility for individuation' (Turner 2011: 79), a response which may be perceived by the Balinese as arrogant and egotistical.³⁴

Like many aspects of Balinese culture, there appears to be a paradox; for the trainee to express too much imagination, or independence, too soon is considered simply wrong and not within the codified limitations that cultural norms dictate.³⁵

³³ Western dance and choreography is also taught through imitation and repetition and so I acknowledge that this generalisation is based within the teaching of drama related subjects.

³⁴ There are also non-Balinese students who are happy to learn by rote, repetition and imitation but in my experience and to my knowledge, a performer's interaction with a mask often necessitates an immediate individual response.

³⁵ Extremely experienced and respected *maestros* create new masks and dances, such as Ida Bagus Anom's "*bondres turis* (meaning 'the tourist clown mask')", or Í Madé Djimat's *Topeng Tua Perempuan*, a mask which I will discuss in more detail in chapter three. These examples demonstrate a clear development and appropriation of tradition based on deep cultural knowledge and understanding.

In Bali, there is a greater conscious acknowledgement for tradition than Westerners are familiar with and this conventionally includes a demonstration of respect for age and wisdom. If one chooses to train one-to-one with a “*guru* (which is the word for ‘teacher’ in Bali)”, one is embarking in a special mentor/mentee relationship. Of course, this does not exclude asking difficult questions, but it fundamentally relies on accepting the teaching that is given. According to Professor I Wayan Dibia:

In Bali, it’s like a process of entering a new world, the world of the mask. That means you have to sacrifice your own personality to be the new body of the mask. Giving up one’s personality to enter the world of the mask, that is the only way for people to bring the mask alive, otherwise it will become only a piece of wood. (Dibia quoted in Coldiron 2004: 68)

What Dibia refers to as ‘sacrifice’ in practice feels more like ‘surrender’ and arguably, the way of accomplishing that ‘surrendering’ might be achieved by putting faith and trust in one’s teacher. In the Balinese tradition, training is parental; teachers, both male and female often refer to their students as “*anak anak* (meaning ‘children’)” and this demonstrates the relationship between student and teacher. To extend the metaphor, children eventually leave the nest but always have a sense of belonging and rootedness; equally so the *topeng* student is expected to develop his *stil sendiri* but always refer back and give credit to the teacher and be a part of his teacher’s entourage of dancers.

There are many differences in approach between the traditional Balinese and the training approaches available in the West, (and here I speak from the pedagogical approaches that I have experienced both participating in workshops and delivering them).³⁶ Traditionally a Balinese dance lesson would not include a warm up or a cool down activity but Djimat, influenced by his experiences working on the international circuit, has gathered a new range of skills and incorporates these techniques when teaching non-Balinese students in Bali. Non-Asian students take much longer to become familiar with the choreographic steps, tire more easily as they struggle to adjust their bodies into alien shapes and find it harder to hear the 'gong' in music. They/we/I ask more questions in order to better comprehend, as if cognitive knowledge can translate into embodied awareness, what Puttke refers to as the 'cognitive architecture of dance movement' (Puttke 2010: 108). In the early days of practice when I got things wrong, Ida Bagus Alit would jokingly nickname me "*Ibu Logika* (meaning 'Mrs. Logical')" and kindly advise (which was his way of insisting) that I stop reading my books about dance as they were preventing me from dancing. His advice, however, was certainly applicable to me as embodied learning takes time, whereas cognitive understanding can be quick and readily accessible.

³⁶ Throughout study and professional work I have participated in workshops in various Higher Education Institutions with all of the internal and external training that is available. I have also undertaken training at the école Phillippe Gaulier, short courses facilitated by Jos Houben, various mask training residencies with Ninian Kinnear Wilson, Tradiing Faces and the Masked Studio, various residencies facilitated by Lone Twin, Hoipolloi, Peepolykus and Chris Johnston's 'House of Games' in applied drama settings as well as one off workshops lasting just a day. I have also benefited from skills based workshops as part of professional theatre companies and by leading and facilitating devising workshops for Devon Youth theatre, the National Youth theatre, Plymouth Theatre Royal and also for Totnes Young People's theatre within a range of multi and interdisciplinary performance practices.

As well as the traditional route of training in Bali, I also participated in a three-month intensive *Dharmasiswa* scholarship at the *Institute Seni Indonesia*, or *ISI*, the Institute of Indonesian Arts. Here a student typically learns a broad variety of dances, including *topeng*, which are executed with greater technical skill and precision than a village trained dancer. Students there are more likely to aim to find work in the tourist industry where it is not uncommon to be ‘talent spotted’. The training at *ISI* involves working with mirrors, working in a larger class group, committing to an agreed time frame, paying prescribed fees and perhaps, it more closely resembles a ‘western’ style of academy training. To offer a summary of the most significant difference, training at *ISI* is extremely technical and therefore the student becomes a better dancer in preparation for performance because of this training. However, what this opportunity lacks are those larger cultural, spiritual and historical aspects of this dance practice that prepare for other elements of the ceremony of which the performance is only one aspect.

Learning the choreography of *Topeng*

Usually a teacher will assess the body type of the student to decide which mask will be taught first. Due to my physique Ida Bagus Alit decided that I would dance the first mask to enter the stage, “*topeng keras patih* (which translates as the ‘prime minister’)” (Coldiron 2004: 77). As I have explained, Ida Bagus Alit has a particular version of this mask; known as *topeng keras Gajah Mada* (see Image 4).



Image 4: Ida Bagus Putu Wirabumi wearing *topeng keras Gajah Madah* at a house temple ceremony in Ida Bagus Alit's "*griya* (meaning 'high cast house compound')". 2005.

This mask is unique to him and the distinguishing features of this design are more bold and aggressive than in a usual *topeng keras patih* mask; the depth of colour, for instance, 'affects the feeling of the choreography for the performer' (Coldiron 2006: 177). As can be seen, this mask is a full-face mask and as such does not speak; only the movements animate the character.³⁷ Any *topeng keras patih* mask demands power and strength as the choreography is vigorous. Coldiron refers to this mask as a '(h)ighly energetic characterisation, the most prominent feature of which is the extreme physical tension, which is released briefly in furious movements then held again as the dancer strikes a pose, fingers quivering'

³⁷ Whilst in Western mask technique usually speech and dialogue is discouraged, this is not the case in Bali as there are several full-faced masked characters who speak. The dialogue however is usually fairly inaudible but this is a reminder of the sacred function of language is for the 'unseen' audience of the Gods.

(Coldiron 2004: 177). This corresponds to the general view amongst *topeng* scholars. Emigh describes the mask's movements as;

[The] head makes small, sharp, and sudden movements. [The] legs are bent, the feet are set apart and firmly planted on the earth in a position derived from martial arts...The warrior alertly scans the new space...Ominously, perhaps suspiciously, with a sense of great strength and consummate control, he moves forward. The walk is extremely 'unnatural'. (Emigh 1996: 120)

In Bali, I learned this choreography in bite size pieces, one gesture at a time, repeated over and over again. In Balinese *topeng* training the student first concentrates on the footwork and the gestures of the upper body follow. During training, Alit would adjust my body, often through gentle pressure or alternatively slaps on my limbs if my elbows were dropping for example. There was no verbal description of what to do or what to aspire to, just an invitation to copy and follow. After time, I started to learn the mantra and through this process one learns to whom one should pray and the 'mantra voice' which is a low, atonal sound. I would physically train every day, usually in the early morning and/or later afternoon when the outside temperature was cooler and more comfortable. Ida Bagus Alit would like to teach mantra at what I call transition times of day; just as the sun sets or sun rises and this would precede his own meditation. This would leave the day time generally free to carve in the workshop unless there was a ceremony to attend.

Just one example of the many gods and goddesses to which one must pray is the God of Wind for *bayu* ('breath') so that one's dance can be powerful and embodied

with spirit. In Bali, the concepts of *idep* (thought), *bayu* (energy or force/power manifested in wind or breath) and *sabda* (voice) are often referred to as the Three Ways of Communicating or *tigajnana* (Hobart 2003: 213-214). These are the three ways of mastering the performance of masks and these energies are reflected in the movements - for example, the strong and swift movement known as '*ansel*' which represents the fiery power of Brahma; '*nayog*' which is a balanced pushing, flowing movement which represents Siwa; and '*ngikal*' which shows the wave like, watery quality of Wisnu. Symbols of these Gods are also marked on the costume colours (red, yellow and white respectively) to represent the "*tri murti* (meaning 'Brahma, Wishnu and Siwa')" and are present in all sacred offerings. Combined and integrated into these qualities are *keras* and *halus* representing the hard, strong and powerful and then in contrast the soft and refined movements respectively.

In Bali, the concept of energy is called *ngunda bayu* and relates to dance generally. Swasti Wijaja describes *ngunda bayu* as circular breathing originating from the stomach, giving life to every single muscle, which she defines as 'a mystery' (Wijaja 1995: 5 cited in Palermo 2007). Palermo's research (2007) suggests that this 'mystery' could find an explanation in the work of Ida Wayan Granoka: he makes a connection between the breath and the sound of the gamelan where the circular movement of the breath to the right and to the left according to the tuning scale systems *slendro* and *pelog*, creates a unity within the body as microcosm and a unity with the macrocosm (Granoka 1998: 19). The place from where breath emerges is considered to be the *pusat nabhi* centrally located in the body,

opposing up and down, right and left; equivalent to the navel area. What is explicit is that breath is seen as an internal balancing mechanism between various poles of opposition; micro/macro, inhale/exhale, feminine/ masculine and that these poles are reflected physically in the *agem* which are the basic standing positions which form balance through asymmetry.

Eventually one learns to understand the energetic feeling of the mask which can be appreciated once the co-ordination of breath, inhalation and exhalations can be located and fixed within the gestures. I soon experienced a quite remarkable 'shift' through putting my body through this training. Odin Teatret performer Roberta Carreri expresses a feeling akin to what I was experiencing;

A very specific and special kind of power arose in my body
[...] I experienced my body becoming like a lamp that makes
light. I felt that it was present; I felt a stream of energy.
(Carreri, quoted in Watson 2002: 77)

When the breath is controlled there is a sense of the upper body rotating around the diaphragm like a ball in a socket; the upper body feels like a magnet that is pulled backwards, forwards, up, down and to the sides whilst the lower body is rooted with gravity, a feeling that the feet are extending beyond and into the ground. The choreography physically enlarges the body and with breath, the capacity to use space seems to extend beyond the size that the body already occupies. Whilst the body seems enormous, the intimacy of the mask to the skin reduces this space, breath is audible and somehow these two extremes offer a personal understanding of what "*ngunda bayu* (meaning the conceptualisation of

how energy moves in the body’)” feels like in practice when the micro and macro coincide.

From my experience of attempting to harness these energies in the body through these poles of opposition I would assert that they manifest internally and externally. Whilst one requires energy to dance the fast sections of choreography, it is the slow and sustained pauses where the measure of internal energy comes to fore. Ida Bagus Alit would call this holding of energy “*dekunci* (meaning ‘locked’)”. This is akin to what Carmencita Palermo has experienced with her teacher I Ketut Kantor who would instruct her to ‘hold it’. Palermo articulates that this instruction ‘cannot really be explained but that the “it” was something in between breath and energy’ (Palermo 2007: 37).

Latihan Menari: Training as/in Performance

The Indonesian verb *latihan* means both to train and to rehearse; there is no distinction made between these two requisites of performance practice. Although my focus in this chapter is on training, I see this training as significantly linked to performance; as in Bali it is part of the same continuum. Therefore, before any discussion of a bespoke training, it is important to make a return to the conditions of traditional training that apply in Bali and to contextualise this within the framework of interculturalism.

Understanding the context of training as/in performance is useful within a discussion of Balinese *topeng* training as this as/in approach accommodates analysis and contemplation ‘under both rubrics (as well as their blurring)’ (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 2010) which in my consideration of the Balinese preoccupation with balance seems highly fitting. This is useful because my practice can therefore adhere to a central tenet of Balinese culture, which is an inherent part of the intercultural relationship that I am striving for. The generation of knowledge in relation to this symbiotic relationship between training and performance emerges specifically as a result of training that happens within the traditional Balinese ‘village’ style. Any binary that may exist in an English context between training and performing is again worthy of disruption, because in Bali this knowledge generation is not to be viewed in a one or the other, either/or format.

Choosing to facilitate my own *latihan* program in Bali and seek out new and different teachers in addition to the apprenticeship with Ida Bagus Alit was a non-traditional, assertive approach which alienated me from gaining deeper access into the world of *topeng*. Both teachers were slightly offended. To have two *gurus* does not taste “*enak* (meaning ‘tasty’ or ‘nice’)”. In retrospect, perhaps it was foolish telling the truth and informing my teachers that I was having lessons with both but in Bali reports and gossip would have ultimately revealed my situation. During this time, I was not invited to accompany either teacher to ceremonies as this privilege had been revoked which meant that I was deprived of watching performances and more importantly deprived of opportunities to dance. Gone too

was the opportunity to see special *lontar*, hand-written, palm leaf manuscripts; where the secrets of *topeng* are hidden through mantra. Consequently, this phase of training positively affected the process of research as the denied opportunities gave me the distance to appreciate the closer and more intimate relationship between training and performance.

Performing *topeng* is different from other Balinese dance forms in the sense that the music follows the dancer and not the other way around. The dancer decides the dance and the music follows. Traditionally the dancer improvises around a selection of gestures, each communicating various triggers to the gamelan players which in themselves are considered *menyatu* meaning real or believable and 'being the music' (Palermo 2007).³⁸ For example, raising the palms up to the headdress keeping the elbows high, indicates that an *ansal* gesture will follow, which requires a faster and specific sequence of music. In a temple ceremony, this improvisational quality allows the dancer to have a sense of control over the delivery of the dance. This means that on a functional level, the performance can be flexible and respond to the other rituals that both the priests are facilitating, the hosts of the ceremony are enabling and even other performances that are taking place simultaneously. Usually there is always a *wayang* shadow puppet

³⁸ Tenzer explains the connection between music and the dance and suggests that the beauty of both separately and combined are materialisations of the same beauty which is offered to the gods (Tenzer 1991: 12 -13).

performance occurring just alongside the *topeng*, also with its own musical accompaniment called *gender*, a sort of wooden gamelan.

The differing contexts of performance and the conditions under which performance happens in Bali emphasise the close relationship between performance and training and the duration of time over which one is engaged in these combined practices. In Bali students are often very prematurely encouraged to dance in front of an audience, regardless of their ability. There is recognition that the stage is a training ground. There is a place for the inexperienced performer, not that this is considered 'amateur' or unprofessional; there is just an acceptance that performers need to practise in front of the audience and progress. Audiences are frequently exposed to children's dance or more senior women dancing. Dancing is then equally seen as a service and as a ritual group activity as well as a 'chance to shine'.

If the teacher feels the student is good enough, and ready to a degree, they will provide a platform for the student to perform in-front of a live audience. This opportunity would usually be at a house temple ceremony where there would be less pressure than at the village temple. In Bali, there is more opportunity to develop one's potential as a performer due to the sheer number of opportunities to perform. In busy times, this could be three performances a day several times a week. Performing the same mask repeatedly and at different times of day and in

different conditions all influence the growth and development of the performance. Performing is seen as an inherent part of the process of learning and there are no rehearsals, just an opportunity to do one's best and be done with it. It is understood that through time and repetition, the relationship between performing in front of an audience with live gamelan accompaniment will grow and develop. Students repeat the version of the dance instilled by their teacher until they can adapt, improvise and hold the stage on their own merit. This offers the student an opportunity akin to Zarrilli's sixth part ('Phase III: in performance') of his training phase;

Once a complete psychophysical score has been prepared, the actor utilizes the pre-performative training and its principles as immediate preparation for each performance, and a set of psychophysical sensory awareness tools to tweak the performance of the score in the moment of each performance. (Zarrilli 2009: 88)

This phase appears to be similar to the level of performer known as '*wirama*' as defined by Rubin and Sedana (2007: 25). In Zarrilli's model there seems to be a difference between the content of the training and what is being performed. In Bali, the possibility of performing your training and vice versa opens new possibilities for the cyclic connections between the 'set of psychophysical sensory awareness tools' (Zarrilli 2009: 88).

In Bali performers have the luxury of time. Ni Madé Pujawati, a Balinese dancer living in London agrees as she believes that 'the ultimate and important thing is to perform in Bali and get feedback and do it all again' (Pujawati 2011). There is an

emphasis on training as an ongoing process as opposed to training as a product and a means to an end. The implication is that as a performer one can develop a relationship to that role in performance. In England in contrast, unless a performance is extremely successful often the opportunity to play a specific role is limited due to the ephemeral nature of performance.

This routine of training as/in performance has perhaps brought me closer to understanding the intricate relationship between the performer and the mask that is a lifetime commitment from the Balinese traditional perspective. The platform of a temple ceremony offers a unique opportunity for the performer to train as there will always continue to be the need for ceremonies as long as the Balinese are *Agama Hindu Bali*. In this environment the performer gets to try and test what they have learned as they develop their special relationship with their mask and thus traditional *topeng* training finds its own understanding of temporality.

Obstacles and challenges within the traditions and codification of mask practice.

Apart from doing a yoga teacher training course and living on an ashram for several months in Southern India, I had never experienced such a regimented or disciplined training. What marked this as a particularly unique training experience for me, was that for the first time ever, I was working one to one. There were just two of us in the room. However, we would regularly be joined by an assistant, who would support his teacher, or occasionally a neighbour or visitor (always male)

would examine and scrutinise what I was doing. The absence of any women during training and the 'maleness' of the observers marked a significant contrast to previous training in the UK because in this environment I was made more aware of my white womanhood and thus, the strict sense of gendered hierarchy in Bali which is not as prevalent in the UK.

As much as I was compelled to learn about the mask, craving physical accomplishment and knowledge, I sometimes equally wanted to resist or even reject the learning on offer. These are issues that are explored in more depth in Chapter Three. For now, it can be noted that in addition to aching bones and early morning starts, sometimes I simply did not feel comfortable with a training situation that revolved around a 'father figure', nor did I always want to copy what he did. As a high caste Brahman, my teacher (and his assistant) represented an authority that was foreign to me, not due to my cultural difference or lack of caste, but due to the fact that I was a woman. In Bali, men and women rarely fraternise alone together and this is an unusual social interaction or circumstance. It can be said that when women, Balinese or non-Balinese train in this specific situation the learning environment can be one fraught with a sexual power dynamic that is unavoidable. However, this is a contentious claim and potentially reductive because whilst as a Western feminist this is how experience this situation, it could be experienced by Balinese women as a culturally coded hierarchical code of conduct that is alien to me. This evidences the notion that whilst Othering occurs both ways, clearly it is tangled with multiple intercultural tensions.

As a western woman, part of my discomfort was based on being made to feel the Other, not racially or culturally but as a woman and the effect of this was disempowering. This adds complications to the intercultural experience and evidences that othering can work both ways and at the intersection of patriarchy and race.

Apart from obvious verbal and physical manifestations of power inherent in the 'moulding like clay' dynamic, sexually charged behaviours (often subtle) were also present in this teaching process. Typically, training is a hot and sweaty business; loose and as few clothes as possible are the best option. However, the movements make the body wobble and this invariably made me uncomfortable as the assistants would try to avoid (and fail) to look at my breasts. One day I wore loose clothes that totally covered up my upper body. Ida Bagus frowned and his assistants laughed; they said that Balinese women wear tighter fitting clothes and that my 'look' gave their eyes 'confusion'. In Bali, images of, and therefore expectations for and behaviour toward, women mirror the Sita/Suzi, Virgin/Whore dynamic which is addressed in the Introduction and then further explored in Chapter Three. Indonesian celebrities on television wear 'sexy' clothes, but a traditional Balinese man would not want to see his wife or daughter look like this. Although I was introduced as a family member, it felt on this occasion very much as if I was encouraged to be complicit in a titillation game. In the end, I continued wearing what I considered to be more appropriate clothes but this failed to 'win

me points' in demonstrating my Balinese-ness. It was also an obvious act of defiance which could have been thought of as egotistical.

In retrospect, had I been following a different kind of training, one that was with or in a group, it is plausible that this tension would not have been so palpable or so apparent. Thus, without a peer or other students to share and reflect on these experiences (or even laugh them off) I did not have the ability to be objective about what I was experiencing and it was hard to divorce this undercurrent from my ability to learn and train productively. After low level but continual degradation, I assumed it was my own failure and that in my resistance I was becoming extremely angry and egotistical. In an environment where one is encouraged to be anything but angry and egotistical, this led to further feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and lack of confidence in one's abilities as a student.

Even though I am a white, Western woman within my *topeng* training, because it was over such a long time frame and closely resembled a traditional training, as I have suggested, there was an emphasis on the attainment of 'Balinese-ness'. Therefore, a different cultural identity was imposed and encouraged. I was therefore encouraged, as a white, British woman within Balinese culture, to act (in what felt t to me) in demure, quiet and obedient ways, a set of behaviours that clashed with the way in which I understood my position (and my being) as a woman. Alongside performing in temple ceremonies, the attainment of Balinese-ness seemed to be the measure by which my success as a *topeng* artist was

measured. All aspects of my conduct became an etiquette test of my constructed Balinese identity which after many months and even years spent living in my teacher's house, was difficult to culturally untangle and separate out from my English cultural identity. Most challenging was knowing how to determine my own identity as a woman and as a feminist. All of these issues are discussed, with a degree of solution, in Chapter Three. However, what is arguably significant at this juncture is that whilst there is a danger for the intercultural performer to falsely adopt and exoticise another cultural behaviour, so too is it dangerous to absorb aspects of that culture which are detrimental to not only one's training but one's life, and sense of humanity and fairness.

Whilst the above situation was on-going, in the year preceding my doctoral research in Bali I experienced increasing frustration with the *topeng* choreography and the embodiment of the mask for a variety of reasons. These were more tangible problems which I could pragmatically, through research, negotiate. With the embodiment of the dance, although I could technically 'do it' however much I could theoretically understand and appreciate the qualities of energy as articulated by the Balinese religion, as a non-Balinese person I could not realise the potential of full embodiment as defined by Balinese levels of accomplishment. My level of attainment could only ever reach the phase of training known in Bali as *Wirama* and for the reasons that I have identified in my introduction, I would

be unlikely to ever experience *Wibawa*.³⁹ Whilst within the realm of my training world I was becoming more 'Balinese' paradoxically, in the social setting my white Western and female body was alienating me from the traditions of *topeng* and the psycho-spiritual domains that the genre culturally connects to.

In terms of the other aspects of dance training, one of the reasons for my increasing frustration was the 'codified, rigid and prescriptive' (Pujawati 2011) choreography and the regimentation of the training. What was initially enjoyable and all a part of the discipline and cultural study, soon became fixed, stale and predictable. The other and equally immediate reason was that I was following a training regime designed for a younger, nubile, pre-teen boy body which was difficult to follow.

Nevertheless, as Butoh practitioner Fran Barbe observes, 'performers who work within a network of codified rules have a greater freedom than those who are prisoners of arbitrariness and an absence of rules' (Barbe 2012). Paradoxically, as Barba also remarks, this performer will 'pay for this greater liberty with a specialisation that limits their possibility of going beyond what they know' (Barba 2006: 6). My Balinese dance training had layered onto my body a new vocabulary

³⁹ *Wirama* is the '[t]he stage when a performer masters the musical accompaniment in accordance with the vocabulary of movement and the whole choreography of a given dramatic character' (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 25). in Bali the ultimate performance level is *Wibawa*, a term that translates as having 'divine charisma' (Ballinger and Dibia 2004: 11).

which often disabled my own sense of expression. From a practitioner perspective, I needed to untangle the relationship my practice had with Bali in recognition that, as Oida and Marshall argue:

Learning a new physical language can be a marvellously enriching experience, but this should be undertaken after you have established a good working relationship with your body. If you just add more technique and control to a socialised body that is working with learned habits, you simply add another layer of pattern to an already patterned body. (Oida and Marshall 2002: 11)

As a theatre maker, I was accustomed to devising performance, using my own body and life story as the material source for ideas. Whilst I was rehearsing hard to perfect the Balinese technique, I became increasingly aware that I was limiting my body's ability to have a freedom of self-expression. For example, I wanted to unlearn the tendency to always lift my elbows to shoulder height as a neutral position in which to seek pause or rest. This embedded choreography was deemed a success by my teachers, but I felt that the dance had been implanted, imposed, inserted and fixed onto my body in a 'copy and paste' format. In contrast to any sense of immersion or rootedness, I did not feel that the choreography suited my body; I struggled to achieve certain gestures and after prolonged difficulty, dysfunction and creative blocks, I ceased to enjoy what I was doing with the masks. I am reminded of some advice I Madé Djimat once gave me "in Bali you must practice dancing, not because you want to be a dancer, but because you love the dance" and this is poignant because there were times when I did not want to practice, as I have indicated, and I did not love the dance.

Devising a Bespoke Training

Out of this lack of enjoyment, this ‘failure’ to genuinely connect with the masks, a strategy of reconciliation and new ways to enliven familiar routines were needed. In Bali, I had developed some boss/servant patterns of behaviour with my body, weighted on the attainment of outcomes. This was in part due to viewing training as something that could only happen in Bali, under certain conditions, with certain people and the pressure to achieve as much as possible in the time available. During *latihan* (training and rehearsing) my patterns involved pain, disappointment with myself, awkwardness, shame and consistently holding the “*agem* (meaning ‘the basic standing position’)” for too long in an attempt to please my teacher. As part of this tactile ‘moulding clay’ dynamic I would allow him to bend back my fingers to reach my forearm. In fairness, this is the way that children are trained; it is *tradisi* but without the agility of youth this has now resulted in premature arthritis, injury, restricted movement in and from my wrists and several other ailments which I now live with.

In England, rather than follow my traditional Balinese ‘village style’ training in a purest fashion, which without a teacher and outside of Bali is impossible, it was necessary to find a way that this training could adapt, change and hybridise. Jonathan Pitches asks; ‘How does one balance a state of *engagement* in ‘hands on’ practices with a state of *separation* from those very same practices, the second being more appropriate for reflective thinking and expression?’ (Pitches 2011: 138,

italics in original). From this initial foundation, the challenge was to configure a training that could re-situate a specific performance technique within a wider intercultural analysis. This integrated training would enable a richer, deeper, more comfortable approach to dancing the traditional choreography of *topeng* and potentially move through and beyond the Balinese gestures in order to bring or find new 'life' for the mask. Exploring a syncretic or horizontal transmission of knowledge and a 'simple binary of *system/individual*' (Pitches 2011: 139) within a training regime may offer a personal and meaningful response to the mask. Simultaneously this regime would abide by the energetic principles of the Balinese traditional culture as they manifest within the *topeng* choreography.

When one engages in a training practice there are many possible ways to pick up bad training habits and patterns that sit outside of the tradition. These may both become incorporated, either through negative 'bad' practice or through positive choice and adoption. Either way a training regime must be balanced, devised on high ambition and practically sustainable. One's commitment is rigorously tested as the pressures of other demands affect this routine.

Transforming Blocks to Release Training

"*Janggan takut* (meaning 'don't be frightened')" is a phrase that my more recent teacher I Madé Djimat would frequently say as he sensed in me a conflict with traditional Balinese training techniques. There were many issues at stake. As well

as fear of further pain and injury occurring during training, I feared that in order to seek a new way of training, I would have to completely start again, and having spent over a decade developing a close relationship with Ida Bagus Alit, it felt enormously disrespectful to change, re-interpret or simply stop *latihan* as I felt that I had to.

As a feminist practitioner, I felt weak to admit that I needed my (male) teacher when simultaneously I wanted to subvert all he had taught me. At times, I felt that I had to tolerate certain modes of behaviour that I believed to be inappropriate for a training groin a certain way, it felt problematic reconciling the growing divide between my cultural and political principles as a white feminist and the Balinese patriarchal culture that I was becoming more aware of. Yet, at the core of this conflict there is an underlying tension which, arguably, is prevalent in all intercultural exchanges. As a cultural relativist, I am convinced that world views, value systems, and patterns of conduct are 'arbitrary' yet coherent and logical within their own cultural setting. Therefore, engaging with the world whilst resisting a Western-centric approach requires, at times, to abandon that which gave meaning and sense to our lives at 'home.' Nevertheless, understanding conceptually this process does not make it easier to navigate those tensions in a cultural landscape foreign to one's own.

However personal and reflexive these observations and anecdotes, what they offer are questions in relation to hybrid cultural identities. When the legitimacy of training is questioned and when this training involves betrayal or rejection of the teacher and taking 'something' and transforming it, ultimately this provides a new critical framework in which to explore the new territory these changes facilitate.

Physical and psychological blocks are a natural part of any creative process and demand attention as they usually do not serve the practice positively. Locating and identifying blocks are the only ways to know how to transform them until they cease to dominate one's practice. As Taavo Smith identifies in relation to creative blocks, 'the most challenging and most rewarding to confront are those linked to the identity of the performer' (Smith 2010: 26). For that reason, these blocks make worthy discussion points as moments of transformation and become markers within the process of change. Fear is an ongoing burden and when the struggle and effort to support this negativity ceases, for whatever reasons, there is a profound and deeply transformative process that can manifest in a form of release. To return to Djimat's phrase '*jangan takut*' (meaning 'do not be afraid'), this research has enabled a slow but sustained release of these anxieties and a regaining of my own selfhood, womanhood and cultural identity.

Easy versus Easeful-ness: Slowly embracing *stil sendiri*

In devising a new relationship with the *topeng* masks, or a new way of interculturally using the range of masks within a *topeng* collection, positionality

and working 'in relation' is key. With a late starting, aging, female body (potentially in a state of post-partum) one can rise and accept challenge however one must also accept one's limitations. Somatic body work offers the practitioner a unique opportunity to experience a sense of moment-to-moment reality with one's body and hence one has the invitation to develop a different understanding of working with the body, one based less on the visual preoccupation of dancing (*topeng*) and more on the experiential feeling of the moving body. Through this revised lens, it is possible to see how the two practices of somatics and *topeng* can work together to suit the aging body of an intercultural performer. Whilst the actions and practices remain distinctly different, the founding principles of each share a sense of symbiosis. (These statements are given more analysis in my final chapter.) On a very basic level, somatic movement offers the practitioner the experience of acceptance and comfort which is what I shall discuss.

In my own process of learning *topeng* what was needed was to slow down, be less urgent in the struggle to learn and in order to find enjoyment, forgive myself for any lack of technical virtuosity. To move forward, it was necessary to leave behind feelings of inferiority based on traumatic memories and unpleasant experiences. I refer to notes from my PhD journal made during my research process to describe this new strategy;

A year of passivity starts. 'Listening so that I can really hear.
'Looking so that I can really see. I invite slowness. I invite a high level of resistance to urgent impulses, they are just there, I

acknowledge them. They are not going away nor are they getting my attention.

Whilst making certain allowance for physical inability, it goes without saying that the fitter and stronger the body, the more possible that one might be to reach the potential of the choreography. So, before I could legitimately design a bespoke training based on acceptance and limitation, I needed to know where those limits lie and maximize them. I did not know at that time whether I was mentally strong enough to withstand the gender politics of Bali, which were precipitated, magnified and given a focus within the training. Therefore, strengthening the body allowed me to focus on something achievable, where I could notice a physical transformation. Strengthening the legs and lower body was necessary so that the entire body could 'wake up' and respond equally; I needed to re-establish my body's availability so that I could reach the low *agem* basic stance position that Dibia and Ballinger describe as 'imperative' (2004: 19).

In addition to yoga asana and alternative and complimentary approaches to my diet which I describe in greater detail in Chapter Five, how I strengthened my body was through general increased activity, running and ironically by repeating the choreographic gestures of *topeng* choreography. This enabled me to find a personal joy in the movement, based on how it was subjectively felt and not on how it objectively looked. By going deeper into some of those very aspects of my training that were repelling me I could further understand how continual

repetition is the training. Working alone became more enjoyable than training with my teacher because I could rid myself of all the baggage that was blocking me. In working with this physical mantra or repetition and not against it, came confidence and an expansion of physical horizons of what my body can do. My attitude had shifted; rather than strive and push my arms up higher, which had been my previous agenda, I tried to sense the feeling of what happens when I lift my arms. This point marked a significant moment of 'surrender' and from this I was aware that I needed to, and could, extend my shoulders in a more sustained way. Breathing into this expanded position made my sense heat in my nose as I inhaled and I had discovered a way of maximising the strength of the position. Balinese teachers and dancers describe that to maintain this optimal position of high and out-stretched arms, one needs to 'lock' the shoulders in an elevated position as described previously. To aid this level of in-tension, the dancer should also lock the eyebrow muscles and flare the nostrils underneath the mask. This is not a mere replication of the characterisation of the mask; it is understood that this facial expression will aid focus in holding the shoulder lock and will support one's breathing which is challenged under the mask. I would not have found this lock without my moment of surrendering to the repetition of the mask's choreography aided and fully supported by a somatic' approach and so this started a significant and profound process of 'eureka' moments.

I learned that by seeking comfort in the gesture and allowing myself to change position when this no longer feels comfortable, to be 'in dialogue' with the

choreography eventually relaxes my shoulders, and in doing so, I experience ease and an opening of the pelvis. Initial dance training in *topeng* occurs without wearing the mask, so when I later started to work with my mask I found that preparing the body in this way optimised the dynamic pause/stillness positions. It allowed me more space, time and opportunity to experience the joy of breath as opposed to functional necessity that was based on locking or unlocking. It enabled a re-connection with *keras* movements, which I have defined, which demands stillness in combination with sudden and strong arm gestures. I experienced a new quality or dimension within the weighted, almost suspended, power in my stillness positions; they were lower and paused, breathing was easier. I could then sense a rush of heat emanating from my chest and a grounded sensation in my solar plexus. Rather than enduring pain throughout one's training, using the breath to find easefulness is possible by breathing into the *agem*, so that with each inhalation one can actively visualise the (dis)comfort and stop and change, pause and reassess as necessary. Due to the obstacles that I was facing, my renewed starting point as identified by this initial moment of surrender was one of acceptance of myself and the embracement of comfort, where of course breath plays a crucial part. Zarrilli claims that his practice in embodiment starts with the breath because 'it offers a psychophysical pathway to the practical attunement of the body and mind' (Zarrilli 2009:25). However, to seek comfort there is a paradox because Balinese dance is by nature difficult and virtuosity is the aim. Therefore, comfort is never to be replaced or confused by making the gesture 'easy', however easefulness can be sought through comfort so that the dance ceases to be painful.

In terms of what this combined, intercultural training which incorporates a somatic approach has unblocked and developed in my *topeng* practice, reveals a new-found ownership of how I may potentially explore and enliven the mask. Whilst this may not seem on the surface a hybridisation of training or particularly bespoke, the state of mind hybridises and adapts from a traditional view, albeit an adopted perspective, to show a return to one that is reflective of one's own body's needs and culture. As an example of how this is useful to me in practice, whilst I continue to visually on the outside perform the same or similar shapes as *topeng* choreography dictates, what I am performing both gesturally and in terms of my distribution of energy is gently nuanced with my own cultural codifications and embodied interpretations. For instance, as well as being in dialogue with the choreography in terms of comfort, most notably in relation to stillness and pause and intake of breath and finding a renewed quality or enjoyment of each gesture, there are many other moments when I have a different cultural appreciation of the mask and the choreography. For example, when I am performing '*ngikal*' rather than embody the wave like, watery quality of Wisnu, of which I have limited cultural reference for, I can literally listen and feel my own bodily fluid tipping from my elbow and I find comfort and nourishment in that gesture alone. (These ideas will be expanded in Chapter Five when I discuss in greater detail the embodiment of the mask from somatic and psycho-physical perspectives.)

Seeking comfort during training may compromise one's gestural or expressive potential in performance, but it does promote actual enjoyment of the choreography, which in turn expels delight in the dance. Enjoyment and delight, I

believe is indicative and closer to the higher qualities of ritual performance as described by the various Balinese levels of attainment. This understanding of dance also marks a personal transition of embodied understanding that dance can be a state beyond a personal 'flow' and be closer to a sense of active service beyond entertainment for entertainment's sake. I have experienced this namely in relation to accepting my aging body and its limitations and in addition, by the cessation of aiming towards an unobtainable and imposed Balinese cultural identity. I have stopped trying to recreate with the same virtuosity what I was able to achieve fifteen years ago and I am now more accepting of what is achievable moment to moment. Now when I pick up the mask there is an agreement between us somehow, that through my breath and my non-Balinese body-mind, that I am entering an accepting mask who will enjoy and not judge how I animate 'him'. I therefore experience on occasion what Fraleigh calls 'intrinsic dance' which she describes as a state of 'pleasure we feel in our bodies when we are in our own flow of being, moving for the dance and not to please others' (Fraleigh 2000: 58). In this sense, I am embracing any remaining fear and closing the space that fear creates. During a workshop with Suryodarmo (2011) he offered me a fitting description for this process:

It feels deeply reconciling if the distance that was created out of fear or shame between ourselves and an object, an aspect, an energy or feeling shrinks so that the objects energy and feeling can touch us and be felt, be received and transformed.

This way of embracing fear of inability, pain and age corresponds with the idea that 'forgetting' and transformation appear to rest heavily on the strength and

power of the imagination or the will to transform, which all manifests in an understanding of belief. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully critique the relationship between creativity and the imaginative process, it may be relevant to highlight Hobart's observations, that 'stimulating the senses and the imagination is certainly an intrinsic part of the curative performances in Bali' (Hobart 2003: 7). These aspects are ideas relating to ritual performance that I am building for a fuller discussion in the following chapter.

Change, Continuity and the Temporal Turn.

What becomes apparent through the documentation of traditional training and how it resonates in practice is that in order to continue (one's relationship with the mask), there needs to be change, the one necessitates the other. As David E.R. George explains:

All theories of time have to confront a basic philosophical problem, one as much logical as empirical; the problem of continuity and change. They form a classic binary; everything changes, but to be recognized as the thing which changed, something – in everything – must continue. You can only have change if there is continuity and vice versa. (George 1999: 44)

Here again there appears to be an as/in dimension where binaries are disrupted and reconfigured. What fits within a training and what does not fit within training, be that system or individual, seems mutable and interdisciplinary. What this illuminates is that honing an appropriate approach to performance is one thing,

and in Bali this is known as *styl sendiri*. However, working within the boundaries of gender and interculturalism there is also scope for there to be *styl sendiri* in one's self-led training also. Here there is space for a positive disruption within the chain of tradition; a chain that has links to a history and lineage of training as well as links to an unknown future. There are wider implications within the academy in terms of what this offers intercultural performer training, as in so many instances of intercultural exchange what is vital is an understanding of what, how and where is this disruption or hybridisation occurring and most poignantly, questions should be raised in terms of appropriation and commodification. This applies not just to the cultural values and ethical positions that these practices uphold but also in respect of the fact that traditionally, these practices offer a sense of sustained, deep training, which can only be achieved over a great length of time and endurance. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to look at long term training processes as they become sites of resistance for the imperative of newness within contemporary performance training and how such training systems contribute to break away from normative regimes of aging and corporeal standards set by the pressures of newness and youth, however what becomes apparent is the tension between age and youth, wisdom and reflection contrasted against virtuosity and skill.

My relationship with the mask resonates with a different sense of temporality, which is often considered within a linear trajectory. In contrast, what this experience of deep training within the context of Balinese *topeng* offers is more cyclic for two reasons. Firstly, within a traditional perspective, the *topeng* genre

offers this constant revisiting of a relationship on stage, which is demonstrated by the performance of the mask. Secondly, if one envisages a somatic approach within this intercultural perspective of *topeng* training, there is a constant visitation to the sense of moment-to-moment presence, without concern for past or future. Whilst these aspects could be shared by other performance traditions, these particular conditions situate some very specific qualities of mask work to a sense of time which spirals between mask character, performer and notions of individual selfhood. In this sense, as my body ages and my sense of self responds to the passing of time, and particular training experiences become 'chapters' of a longer training, I recognise how I have grown up within my training and how certain changes mark significant markers of change in my practice. For example, training is rarely a practice that is a solo activity, at least not in its initial stages. Training is a social act and engagement with others, be that teachers or fellow trainees. The training environment itself must also be comfortable; again, that is not to say that it is easy or enjoyable necessarily, but that it is safe and ethical, involving a 'two way traffic'. Without compromise both parties must feel 'at ease'.

Ultimately this research has enabled me to stop considering training as something I can only do in Bali but integrated as part of my life, wherever I am. As Matthews asserts '(t)his training brings about new conditions of living- not out of nothing, but within and through the structuring process of 'ordinary life' – and organises new ways of doing-the-body'. (Matthews 2011: 171). If there is no separation between training and life this invites further research into the question is there something

intrinsic about training that fuses the body and mind as a practice in its own right? Answering this question leads me into my next chapter. Certainly notions of transforming philosophy into action, as is evident in *topeng*, sits comfortably with the idea that embodied practices create lived understanding through ‘doing’, yet there remain mysteries, as was shown by Wijaja’s example of *ngunda bayu*, and Kodi’s definition of *taksu*. These mysteries are impossible to define so regardless of the academic need to neatly package an explanation; mysteries are perhaps best left as unexplainable.

However, this consideration of performing and the aging body within training and the (intercultural) hybridisation that comes as a result, offers a new lens in which to consider the classification of *topeng* as masked dance-drama and questions if, within an embodied, processual Practice-as-Research model a useful definition might be to reconsider ritual practice as an alternative, or included paradigm for training. What becomes clear within a *topeng* training is the subtle differences between ritual, performance, efficacy and entertainment, where according to Schechner’s ‘entertainment–efficacy braid’ (2013: 80) virtuosity is not a prerequisite of ritual. This is of extreme significance because whilst I imagined that I might become a better technical dancer and believed that this was the acquisition of skills that I was aiming for in my training, what the imprint of the village style of teaching has afforded me was a greater understanding of “*kebalian* (meaning ‘Balinese-ness’)”, for good and bad, and the processes of ritual, which will feature in my next chapter. Through the codification of a training which originally

promoted choreography and mask-making as a means to ‘give life to the mask’, this exposure has come full circle within my performance practice reaching an understanding that the fuller nature of training, which is a time based and a process of duration, comprises of a training-as-performance-as-ritual triangle.

Chapter Two

Relocation of Ritual and the Specificities of Home

Dislocation of Performance Practice

Having established in the previous chapter the interconnection between training, performance and ritual, in this chapter I specifically focus on the proximity and rubric ‘as/in’ between performance and ritual. Outside of Bali, *topeng* is usually made accessible by its defining disciplines of mask, dance and drama. Whilst these aspects certainly exist within a *topeng* performance, what unites these distinctly different modes within the one genre and the very purpose of the performance is what we would refer to as ‘ritual’. (In Bali *topeng* is more readily referred to as “*tari upacara* (meaning ‘ceremonial dance’, what we may think of as ‘ritual’)”.) This is of significance for the intercultural performer because by negotiating the complexity that ritual presents, what is offered is a mode of approach that is culturally more intuitive and working within Balinese frameworks, as opposed to literal Western translations of what is seen and done, albeit on the surface.

In this chapter I discuss the relocation of those aspects of *topeng* training as/in performance that encapsulate the ritual within a Balinese home temple ceremony. Notions of home, homing and identity are discussed in terms of the challenges relating to belonging and displacement, which are common tenets of intercultural performance work. Feelings of dislocation are frequent for intercultural performers (Tian quoted in Zarrilli 2013: 33) and the use and re-appropriation of ritual becomes the means by which I reconcile this disconnection within my performance practice and to reconfigure my self-identity in relation to place/s. This chapter's goal is to articulate an appropriate and culturally sensitive 'homing' of a performance practice of Balinese masked dance-drama within an English context. The aim therefore is to "*memperlepaskan* (meaning to 'untangle' or 'release')" the relationship a performance practice may have and find a sense of interrelation with performance (making in England); which necessitates a view and understanding of a third space in between two distinct cultural modes of performance. The paradoxes between different cultural performance traditions (in this case Bali and England) may require reconciliation so that one's performance making does not seek to imitate or reproduce a (*topeng*) performance but instead reposition the set of acquired knowledge amidst one's own (inter)cultural performance making and body.

One of the key aspects which allowed me to I achieve this was through ritual itself because ritual can 'produce a powerful subjective experience of the integration of opposites' (Newberg 2010: 162). In this sense, the experimentation discussed in

this chapter be an attempt to restore the balance and fusion between my two geographically-determined lives and the performance practices that defined them; on the one side this is predominantly mask work (*topeng*) and on the other non-masked performance. Like many things in Bali, a sense of 'place' and belonging is loaded with not just social but spiritual meaning (Eiseman 1990: 3). Understanding the sacred aspects of Balinese ritual performance in relation to place from a non-Balinese perspective is a great challenge which I will discuss. I will also attempt to define such nebulous terms as spiritual, ritual and sacred and will explore their possible translatability across two different geographical contexts (England and Bali).

Practice-as-research Methodologies

This chapter will focus on the process of performance-making as opposed to the study of a finished 'product' as a way to focus on aspects related to 'ritualization', a term which is of significance to my practice in Devon. As a non-Balinese *topeng* performer (and without the conceptualisation of *Agama Hindu Bali*) I decided to engage in a number of ritualised activities, which I shall later describe in detail, which centred on two factors that I consider particularly significant in Balinese house temple ceremonies and the place bound activities that support them. They include the combined importance of geographic place and ancestry within Balinese culture. These two considerations enabled me to embrace a combined sense of geography, to re-invent and put to test some of the place-bound activities of the Balinese ritual process.

Between August and December 2011 my objective, was to navigate a 'home from home' that traced a personal geography and relocated my performance practice that was, at the time, rigidly rooted and specific.⁴⁰ I called this practical research project *home* and it culminated in a performance with the same working title that was performed in both my flat in Devon and my *kos*⁴¹ in Ubud. In total I performed *home* six times, four times in England and twice in Bali and typically I had an audience of minimum two and maximum of five people.⁴² Without distracting from the issues of process, a short description of the performance would say that it was not dissimilar to a performative tour of my house, where I would dance, improvise movement, demonstrate mask work, invite my guests to eat with me and then go off on a hide and seek game around my house looking for touristic postcards and pen-pal letters that I had written over time to myself as a form of journal to, for and about my performance practice.⁴³

⁴⁰ It was rooted and specific to the *banjar* 'hamlet' of Abisimel in the village of Lod Tunduh, near the town Ubud, in the Gianyar regency of Southern Bali, Indonesia and I was trying to relocate it to the Manor Court neighbourhood in the village of South Brent, within Dartmoor National Park, in the South Hams borough of Southern Devon, England.

⁴¹ A *kos* is a very small, basic house, often just a room with a toilet, that is part of a bigger complex of sheltered accommodation. *Kos* are generally popular with economic migrants from other parts of Indonesia.

⁴² Each sharing was completely different due to the intimacy and proximity of the audience and although this was not my main intention, this unpredictability mirrors the experience of a Balinese solo performer arriving to perform in a new place with a gamelan group with whom he has never rehearsed.

⁴³ These sadly are not included in my appendix and no longer exist. They were mislaid during the process of moving, packing and relocating.

What emerged through the process of performance making, however, was how each place (Bali and England) feels like 'home' to me, while both the bedsit and my *kos* room were continually in a state of either been packed or unpacked. This upheaval was a practical metaphor for the 'in-between' aspects of my process and the passing through this threshold or liminal state before either arriving or returning once more. I chose to perform at home for various reasons which will be discussed in the section dedicated to the discussion of its devising process. However, I would like to emphasise some of the initial and basic points of departure. The first relates to the fact that the ritual processes that I was exploring were associated with home, the materiality of the body and indeed the embodiment of home-related issues such as the need for food and shelter. The second was that my experience of *topeng pajegan* was mainly within the house temple ceremony context as opposed to one of the village temples. This is of relevance because although the ritual activities would be the same in preparation for a performance in any temple ceremony, in a house temple ceremony the whole experience is not only smaller in size but more intimate because it is connected to a host rather than an entire community.

Between Ritual Theory and Autobiography

There are many discourses on the theory and practice of ritual.⁴⁴ Performing at home allowed me a closer understanding of these theories in combination with

⁴⁴ Roland Grimes has grouped seven models together in various sub-themes: social functions and processes (Turner, Schechner, Durkheim, Douglas, and Goffman); ecology and biogenic (Rappaport,

performance. Most useful to my enquiry in this chapter are those understandings located on the juncture *between* theatre and anthropology, those that propose a dynamic tension, a braid between the efficacy of ritual and the entertainment of theatre. As both Schechner (1988: 120, 2013: 80) and Zarrilli suggest 'every performance both entertains and ritualises' (Zarrilli et al 2006: 87). Goldingay's research (2010) has proposed an emerging taxonomic strategy⁴⁵ which explores the problematic relationship between performance scholarship, religion and spiritualities; Goldingay identifies that an 'emergent' model 'sees ritual and theatre as being co-existent' (Goldingay 2010: 70). Whatever the contradictions and paradoxes, narratives between ritual and performance are co and inter-dependant. As an example; like many religions, in Bali the sacred is performed rather than talked about and this I suggest is reliant on the performance of ritual.

As Frits Staal, states ritual is an:

Activity governed by explicit rules. The important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say. (Staal 1996: 16)

The emphasis in Bali is placed on showing the sacred and the ultimately sacred structures of human life. To extend the example, women will spend hours making

d'Aquili); phenomenology (Eliade, Van Gennep); underlying structures (Geertz, Birdswhistell, Bateson, Austin, Levi-Strauss etc); psychology (Jung, Freud, Wallace, Huizinga, Neale etc.); historical/theological (Bouyer, Jungmann); and "imaginative, sympathetic participation" (Ricour, Tillich etc) (Grimes 1982: 32).

⁴⁵ Based on Raymond William's model of residual, dominant and emergent aspects of culture, Goldingay's argument (Goldingay 2010: 69- 83) suggests that the 'residual' narrative (dating back to nineteenth and early twenty first century scholarship) locates the origins of all theatre in religion, specifically ancient Greek. This has been superseded by a currently 'dominant' narrative which suggests that the roots of theatre, as opposed to origins, are not religious at all but emphasise the relationship between performance and ritual, both being terms that have complex terminology. The third narrative, the one more appropriate to my interests, is 'emergent'.

the afore mentioned *canang*; they chat and drink tea while making these necessary offerings in the same way that English people decorate their houses with decorations at Christmas. Clifford Geertz refers to this performance of Balinese religion in the following terms:

Beyond a minimal level, there is almost no interest in doctrine, or generalised interpretation of what is going on at all. The stress is on orthopraxy not orthodoxy. (Geertz 1973: 365)

It is an assumption, but it is possible that neither group know the reasons or the symbolism behind their activities; they just know the ritual demands it and that it is *tradisi*.

Drawing on the theories of ethnography and anthropology I am particularly invested in what Catherine Bell terms 'ritualization' as opposed to ritual 'as continued and repeated actions as part of cultural daily behaviour, not merely for some specific outcome or event' (Bell 1992: 74). In this sense, it becomes clearer to understand my claim that the daily repetitions of training formulate a triad where training co-exists with ritual (and performance). The implication is that ritualization is best understood as active practices that are performed; this allows for 'greater agency, intentionality and the interplay of creativity and constraint within social action' (Hughes- Freeland and Crain 1998: 3). Ultimately the ritual function of my process for *home* was multidimensional and most usefully and relevantly theorised as a 'contested space for social action and identity politics –

an arena for resistance, negotiation and affirmation' (Hughes, Freeland and Crain 1998: 2).

In this process theories relating to autobiography became useful and in particular Deirdre Heddon's term 'autotopography' (Haddon 2007: 15). Within this fusion of autobiography and cartography there is a sense of mapping one's self and charting a process of personal discovery. Haddon asserts that:

The self is a meeting place. If loose ends and on-going stories are challenges to cartography, so too are they welcomed as challenges to autobiography. (Haddon 2007: 123)

The content of my performance was deeply autobiographical and from this perspective autotopography offered a different view of understanding ritual; it contributed a fresh approach in a way that a traditional anthropological or ethnographic approach was unable. Partly this was since it re-established the subject position within the research, and drew out this proximity from its cultural context in Bali towards my body in a way that gained intimacy, identity and meaning, which was the function of this ritual. However, what is particularly appealing is that because of the link to mapping and charting, this intimacy can be critically analysed with enough distance to see the whole terrain as part of a greater landscape. This view is, as Carson McCullers has suggested in relation to the 'Subjective turn', or 'the we-of-me' (McCullers 1973: 39), and it is occupied by other players, both human and non-human constructs (for example the abstract notion of 'Balinese culture' in relation to my embodied landscape). Rather than

having a focus on logic or science, my rituals were explorations into the 'subjective turn' in the sense of a 'life lived in deep connection with the unique experiences of my self-in-relation' (Heelas and Woodward 2005: 3) and included 'states of consciousness, states of mind, memories, emotions, passions, sensations, bodily experiences, dreams, feelings, inner conscience, and sentiments' (Heelas and Woodward 2005: 3). This subjective turn is an extension of self-identity in relation to other people, not a self-in-isolation. Autography unites these ideas because my body in Bali, was the same body in England despite its inculturation within a Balinese sensibility where '[c]ulture is grounded in the body' (Csordas 1994: 6) and as there was a gradual acquisition of the characteristics and norms of Balinese culture. Bodies are the sites of ritual and my body is the meeting place that Haddon describes where the challenge of this on-going story can continue in relation to others.

Balinese Ancestors and the significance of Place:

Before I can discuss the rituals that I created and how I embarked on this relocation, I would like to emphasise how, in Bali, ancestry is articulated through the importance of geographical space and how this affected me as an intercultural performer. In Bali, geographical place and a sense of 'home' as the seat of one's family, roots and place in the world is intrinsically linked to one's identity. The suggestion that 'as a concept, home is inseparable from the concept of identity' (Teather 1999: 4) rings particularly true in the Balinese context. Teather discusses how issues of space are highly complex and her four definitions of space aptly

apply to notions of 'home'. First, there is the 'space of place'; this is the experience of space as material, defined by locality and bounded by a sense of territory. Secondly there is 'activity space'; this represents 'communities of interest', basically what people do and where actions overlap with others. Thirdly there is the 'positionality of space'; this includes notions of power, identity and who we think we are in relation to others. Finally, there is 'discursive space'; spaces that are related to mental attitudes and values that we hold (Teather 1999: 1-3). The latter two notions of space may include cultural behaviours that through repetition, we adopt and that become embedded through a process of inculturation in and onto the body. The mutuality of and transition between place and self relates to Heddon's statement that 'to be located means not only to be embodied as a gendered, sexed and racial subject, but also to be embodied in and through specific spaces' (Haddon 2007: 88).

Like elsewhere, but especially in Bali the cultural process of self-identification is marked by an understanding of difference. Issues arise such as who one is, where one is and how one fits in and what acts may support such placing in its broadest capacity. According to intercultural artist and *Grup Gedebong Goyang* performer Suzan Kohlik, social introductions in Bali are 'extremely important and part of a very simple, yet highly codified etiquette' (Kohlik 2012). This initial introduction confirms basic information through formulated questions which filter, through channels of elimination, name and place dropping, the initial data to 'place' your

identity within a whole matrix of possibilities.⁴⁶ The process of introduction or 'small talk' is known specifically as *basa Bali*. A social understanding of who you are, where you're from and where you are going, quickly enables you to become a 'pin' on a map of connections, as 'one of many' and relational within a multitude of dots. Due to this strong sense of interconnection, establishing and building the profile of one's identity that carries one's reputation in Bali, is a way of balancing individuality alongside being a representative from a specific area, group, caste or family.

During my extended stays in Bali I was regularly introduced as 'Dippany'. My name cannot be pronounced easily; as Balinese people often experience difficulty in pronouncing the sound 'f'. *Dippany* is the name of the Goddess of *canang* or 'offerings' which is easier for people, especially women who are principally concerned with the making of offerings, to both remember and pronounce I would then continue: 'From England'. Time allowing, I prefer to say '*saya dari negeri lain*', meaning 'I am from a different country or 'soil'. I would then be asked '*yang apa*' (which one?) - 'Another island' I would respond with a specific hand gesture waving my palm away from my body, that would indicate 'another island away from Indonesia' (as there are over eighteen thousand islands in the archipelago) as opposed to a hand gesture blowing my fingers towards my body would indicate on national soil. This way of traversing language and body language, in the spirit

⁴⁶ For further reading of *basa bali* and how the Balinese express place through their language, see Eiseman 2010

of fun and jokes is an example of participating in *basa Bali* and demonstrates knowledge of local customary behaviour, as in Southeast Asia this type of avoidance is received culturally as humorous.⁴⁷ Usually the conversation would continue ‘Single: - Living in a *kos*⁴⁸:- I don’t do business here in Bali:- ‘Studying *topeng*:- Yes, I can do it:- Yes I do dance in ceremonies:- Yes, I do speak Indonesian:- Thank you, but I am still learning’.

When in the company of Pak Djimat, he would introduce me to his friends and associates and then send me off proudly to introduce myself as “*anak anak* Pak Djimat’; (literally meaning ‘child of Pak Djimat’)”.⁴⁹ As I explained in the previous chapter, the Balinese immediately understand this as being a student/teacher relationship. This placement is the first of the initial mapping process. I am now associated to this teacher, lineage and *sanggar*, as opposed to that teacher and his lineage.⁵⁰ There are rifts and tensions as performers and teachers compete against

⁴⁷ I also noticed how my friends in Bali were also economic with the truth when they did not want to be ‘placed’ and preferred some autonomy.

⁴⁸ This immediately places me in a certain economical bracket as this means living in an Indonesian community on a low budget, as opposed to owning my own villa with a swimming pool.

⁴⁹ One occasion that ‘he sent me off’ was when he was performing at a private party to a very wealthy ex-pat social entrepreneur. When I arrived and introduced myself I was immediately turned away and it was made clear that I had no right to be at that gathering. I was deeply apologetic and embarrassed as I would not have deliberately gate-crashed without invitation. Clearly there was a cultural mix up as Pak Djimat assumed a very Balinese stance; that as his student I would have an extended invitation and that if someone arrives at your house, you welcome them. This was a significant and unplanned event that has shaped and influenced my consideration of the cultural importance of reputation in Bali and the high value that is placed on the village ‘gurukala’ student/ teacher relationship.

⁵⁰ Pak Djimat, despite being in his late sixties, is renowned for having many girlfriends. He is *nakal* meaning ‘naughty’ so there is also perhaps an assumption made that I am his lover. This is a typical response and my reputation becomes linked to this. These frustrations and others which form part of a wider social understanding of men and women’s relationships are carried forward into my next chapter.

each other as individuals so this affiliates me to him.⁵¹ In the “*griya*, (meaning ‘a high caste household’)” of Ida Bagus Alit and family, I am also introduced as “*keluarga* (meaning ‘family’). Alit delights in telling the story of how he stayed in my house when he visited England in 2008 and to everyone’s surprise, he tells them that I am not rich and that our house was very average. When we are out at a temple, however, I am not introduced at all. I am usually ignored and left to my own devices. Here the social assumption is that I am a student or follower but this lack of introduction is a reaction to his position as a high caste man on an official visit. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a celebrity status awarded to freelance *topeng* dancers, particularly of Ida Bagus Alit’s standing. As it was explained to me by dance ethnographer, *Grup Gedebong Goyang* performer and co-author of *Balinese Dance, Drama and Music* (2004), Rucina Ballinger, ‘tourists are very low on the caste scale and unimportant’ (Ballinger 2012) except now when they participate in the ritual efficacy by putting on a mask and going through the “*langse* (meaning the ‘curtain’ that separates *Niskala* and *Sekala*, the Seen and Unseen worlds)”. Then they become of interest but no more so than any apprentice that the teacher is exhibiting. However, the status of a performer who arrives with “*tamu* (meaning ‘guests/ visitors’)” is obviously a boost to the reputation of that performer, as is the temple ceremony host pleased that “*orang turis* (meaning foreign ‘tourists’) have visited.”⁵²

⁵¹ Many of my fellow *topeng* friends who are non-Balinese trained with the late *Kakul*. He was considered Pak Djimat’s professional *topeng* ‘rival’.

⁵² This is in part is due to the Balinese sense of hospitality which is very welcoming and in part due to the fact that it is considered *moderen* (Vickers 1996; 1) ‘modern’ to have tourist friends; the assumption is that one is worldly, speak English and have lots of the sorts of things that tourists like

This anecdotal explanation of how I am introduced leads me to an important consideration of my own placing and foregrounds my difference. It also signals the need to devise/employ a wide range of strategies which can be put in place to culturally interpret and translate these complexities. Is it as Kristeva suggests that 'the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities' (Kristeva 1991: 1). My point of view as a recipient of being in Bali and experiencing this 'consciousness' or 'marking my pin' has been two-fold. Firstly, I understood the meaning of this interest in *basa Bali* (small-talk) to be 'it's not just about where you are from and who you are locally, but how do you also fit into the world?'; "*Asli dari mana?* (meaning 'where are you originally from?')". "*Agama anda apa?* (meaning 'what is your (polite) religion?')". As cultural geographer Mike Crang claims 'our knowledge of the world is em-placed, it is always starting from and based around places as centres of our 'care' in the world' (Crang 1998: 110). These 'care' centres and the place-bound notion of 'marking' in Bali is something that appears to be both mundane and profound; of this physical, geographical world; of Sekala, the Seen world and from the 'other'; *Niskala* the Unseen World. I suggest that simply asking 'who you are' may be a way to ascertain who one's ancestors are and possibly who one will come back as. In

and this could range from, for example, drinking Coca-Cola or the ability to put on a good ceremony; a display of culture that the Balinese so celebrate.

Bali one's ancestors are extremely important so this placing is of increased significance as one's 'home' also includes the temple to one's ancestors.

The second perspective I have gained as a recipient/participant in introductions and *basa Bali* is that, before I have even spoken, I have been identified as "*tamu* (meaning 'guest/visitor')" or if I am less lucky "*bulay* (meaning 'whitie')". The word *tamu* is not intended to be offensive, it is certainly not intended as a racial attack, it is more a greeting "*Oya ada tamu*, (meaning 'oh yes, there's a guest')" a phrase I would often hear Ida Bagus Alit's daughter Dayu, say or his wife, Ibu Agung. Bali receives millions of tourists every year, the majority stay for two weeks, so this is an accurate description. However, there is a fine line between difference and 'othering' so this label carries with it deep associations. 'Othering' as Crang suggests involves setting up identities as unequal, where belonging to a group is linked to the good qualities that group shares and wishes to celebrate. Thus, part of belonging to a group is the projection of fears and dislikes to other people (Crang 1998: 61). When in Bali, I can become more Balinese in my thinking, functioning and cultural behaviour and day to day life (which includes performance). I may fit in and be accepted as family in certain situations but to the society at large I am and always will be described and defined by the connotations surrounding the term *tamu*.

As I am long-term visitor with a respect for Balinese culture there is a strange irony that this is a reality which causes me a great deal of discomfort. However, being 'Othered' is not entirely intolerable; otherwise the foreigner would go home.⁵³ There are of course bigger cultural, social and ethical issues at stake; the critical issue is one of money and mutual exploitation. In terms of economics, one often hears the following common phrase towards tamu even if they are long term residents of Bali; "*kalau gak punya uang pulang aja*" (meaning 'if you don't have any money, just go home')". The instinct of Balinese people is to share and be communal and help out, so the implication is 'you have family back at home who can help you. Go back to them. Go home.' This phrase indicates that there is no bond with Balinese people, no willingness to help; none can be given. It also implies and fairly too, that *tamu* have the means to financially choose and it is for this reason that many guests are financially exploited. *Tamu* have the luxury to be able to go home and there-in lies the 'truth' of the matter; there is another place for them/us both economically and in terms of family. People like me are visitors because although we have made Bali a 'home' we are not from that place.

When I return to England I often felt as if my 'identity space' has genuinely shifted as I literally incorporated through my body some of the specificities of Balinese culture. In Bali, whilst clearly *tamu* sometimes, especially after a performance, people would suggest that my soul was Balinese. In the complex process of

⁵³ Incidentally the word for foreigner is *orang asing* but the translation of *asing* or 'foreign' also can mean alien, strange, outside, odd, out-side or remote.

understanding and defining of my self-identity, in combination with my own sense of periphery, there is evidence that self-identification becomes a 'product of the...contestations' (Moore 1997: 88) between self and place. This conceptualisation sees notions of self-identity very much 'conceived as a bundle of conflicting "quasi-selves" (Featherstone 1995: 45).

Designing a Performance Practice based in Ritualization processes

In English culture, the word 'home' carries with it positive connotations of tradition, such 'as in home-cooking, home-made food, home-coming and home truth' (Robertson et al, cited in Teather 1999: 190). Although, in a postmodern context of flux, change and migration those associations are challenged 'home' still resonates with culturally positive associations. On return to my English 'home' in my village in Devon, as I have indicated, I felt clueless in my own ability to create rituals and re-establish my performance practice which had become increasingly comfortable and 'at home' within the Balinese house temple setting. In my attempts to relocate my performance practice and indeed reconnect with what that was, or could become outside of Bali, there were obvious aspects that needed consideration.

There are significant differences between a Balinese ritual that is established and coherently reasserts and confirms the identity position within the community and one that is newly designed to create an individual identity position. To untangle the relationship between a performance practice defined by ritual within a

Balinese cultural context demands a high level of sensitivity. According to social theorist Ulrich Beck, 'living and acting in uncertainty becomes a kind of basic experience' (Beck et al, 1994: 12) in contemporary culture and my dilemma was that without a religious system or belief to follow, I did not know where to legitimately start my performance making or what purpose my rituals would be for. The process in England started with the sole repetition and focus on several place-bound activities which corresponded to Balinese ritual performances as an attempt to feel 'at home' and from these activities I then started to devise new rituals. With no metaphorical map or compass for this autotopographic journey, my absent teacher provided imaginary guidance as to how to embark on this mission. Ida Bagus Alit is not interested or aware of academic discourses and his interest would most probably have been on applying strategies that he could comprehend and that were grounded in familiar trajectories. I, in contrast, had to be mindful and deconstruct Western concepts that 'dominate the respective discourses' (Gottowik 2014: 16) or, as anthropologist Annette Hornbacher suggests, I would risk:

Picking up on an old line of Western orientalist explanations according to which the Balinese ritual culture displays a form of blurred Hinduism of which most Balinese, except for a few Brahmans, are unaware.' (Hornbacher 2014: 242).

Clearly, intercultural performance practices demand challenging levels of reflexivity as postcolonial discourses discourage the imitation, consumption and making up from one's 'imagination'⁵⁴ new rituals that 'represent or configure on

⁵⁴ Peter Brook criticises the actor who 'searches vainly for the sound of a vanished tradition', he claims 'we have lost all sense of ritual and ceremony... So the artist sometimes attempts to find

stage what is outside of [one's] own identity space' (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 3). Similarly, Phillip Zarrilli warns of not seeking out 'a mystical or spiritual something' (Zarrilli 2002: 187-188).⁵⁵

In Bali, Ida Bagus Alit was my primary 'informant' and gave me access to a very wide range of ritual practices that were specifically relating to *topeng*. However, as a high caste Brahmana man, he promotes a particular view that is potentially conservative, elitist and as I have indicated previously influenced by a culturally imposed patriarchal view of the world. In contrast my experience of ritual practice in a domestic setting has been gathered from a range of more general sources, including women and children. Through Ida Bagus Alit I had access to a number of highly refined ritual practices, yet when I attempted to relocate many of them I was drawn to the simplest ideas which I could engage more fully with. It is as Hornbacher suggests:

Balinese religious authorities provide a satisfying explanation for the ritual practice that after all depends on the motivations and aesthetic arrangement of ritual practitioners who are mostly commoners and share ... very different ideas about the meaning and function of the [ceremony]. (Hornbacher 2014: 243)

new rituals with only his imagination as his source: he imitates the outer form of ceremonies... unfortunately adding his own trappings – the result is rarely convincing' (Brook 1990: 141).

⁵⁵ When teaching Kalaripayatu Phillip Zarrilli actively dissuades his students from interpreting their experience of Asia in the body as some mystical, spiritual experience or phenomenon. I quote in full;

I occasionally remind participants... *Not* to push or attempt to find some mystical or spiritual "something" on what they are doing, that is, they are to assume that what they "find" will come out of the *specificity* of their embodied relationship to the exercise in the moment of its performance. (Zarrilli 2002: 187-188)

One of the ritual practices of the Balinese house temple ceremony that required attention was daily “*canang* (meaning ‘offerings’) to the deified ancestors. This was particularly important as it was a practice that I performed with other women in an informal capacity. Offerings differ in their size and elaboration but are made at home by Balinese women, either in a solo capacity or in large numbers depending on the size and importance of the approaching ceremony. To develop meaning and function, when I relocated these offerings I created an altar (which is simply a special place) in a direction, where one repeatedly places objects of significance. This is exactly how the activity is executed in Bali. Hobart asserts that ‘images and symbols are vehicles that transmit values, beliefs, and attitudes between generations’ (Hobart 2005: 57) and this channelled my focus towards my goal; connecting with my own ancestors.

Alternative Vistas in *Topeng*: Using the Balinese Cosmic Map

In Bali, the architecture of a house, indeed the entire village layout, shares the same sacred sense of direction as the body (Hobart 2005: 56); for example, the positioning and layout of the rooms relate to Gunung Agung, Bali’s highest mountain, where the Balinese believe their deified ancestors reside (Eiseman 1990: 3). In England, where the performance of *home* started, I mapped out the geographical directions in my flat and changed my bed around so that my head was in the direction of Dartmoor’s highest point, High Willhays, and my feet were

towards my local beach. This idea directly mirrors the fact that traditionally in Bali everyone orientates themselves not in terms of compass point directions but rather in terms of the *nawa sanga* (also known as the map of the sacred of cosmic directions). These 'spatial and spiritual orientations' (Eiseman 1990: 2- 11) are identified in lay terms as directions that relate to "*Kaja-kelod* (meaning 'mountain-seaward')" which are part of a matrix of 'interlocking set of horizontal and vertical orientations [which are] a consequence of a Hindu conception of cosmic structure' (Eiseman 1990: 5). This means that in Bali people sleep with their feet towards the ocean and with their head towards the sacred mountain, Gunung Agung. Although I can intellectually understand the roles of the different gods and goddesses that are reflected in the directions of the *nawa sanga* I cannot claim any belief in them, so by changing my room orientation I started simply to conceptualise the *nawa sanga* through the experience of *kaja-kelod*. This was accessible and I noticed how dreams changed, my waking mood differed, I was more aware of better sleep hygiene and generally my self-awareness altered in terms of direction and time of day. Whether I was outside tracking the sun from east to west and positioning myself accordingly or inside and measuring shadows and guessing the time of day, I began to slow down and observe changes in direction. With the *nawa sanga* taped to the floor of my bedsit, I became more aware of the qualities of different directions and how they affected the feeling of the choreography. From a simple and accessible example, how it feels moving from shade to full light, I could tune into how the *nawa sanga* is reflected in the choreography and stagecraft of *topeng* (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 107). These directions are split on various trajectories

within the body which are considered a part of the intrinsic balance of the performer.

In combination with a commitment to practising *topeng* choreography daily I then created a wide range of movements and actions without the mask that were in relation to my natural environment; a way of movement meditation that I first experienced with Suprpto Suryodarmo. Dartmoor was accessible from my doorstep, so I would take myself on a walk and see how and where this walk would take me. Daily activities also included daily blessing, prayer, rolling and repetitive moving specifically as though my body were in the state of prayer and intentional worship. Deborah Hay offers useful insight into the conditions for which this is possible reminding us that 'praying is thus liberated from content and replaced by a peaceful alertness' (Hay 2000: 55). This was a way of establishing rituals, habits and repeatable exercises that could embrace the geographical space of the house in relation to the cosmic Balinese map and my performance practice within it.

Often, my altar would display things from nature that I had found on walks; bits of bark, lichen, feathers; whatever I felt celebrated my pursuit. This process also granted me access to symbolic ancestors relating more to a sense of ecology and environment, rather than any bloodline. For example, it was only a short imaginative leap to see myself as a daughter of Dartmoor, even though my roots are not in Devon. From the simplicity and repetition of walking, collecting and

making *canang* the ritual process became how performance (re)created my identity through its effect on belief. For instance, I can now coherently believe that I am from Dartmoor. Through a process of autotopography, where self is a 'meeting place' I could 'map' out navigational routes of self/place identity. The post-modern conception of self can be thought of as multiple, non-essential or fixed, one that crosses borders and blurs distinctions and this consideration of dynamic pluralism is crucial to any attempt at discussing self-identification in relation to place. As Massey claims 'if it is now recognised that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places' (Massey, 1993: 153). Anderson also articulates the close connection between self- and place-identity formation and the multiplicity of identifications to both. He claims that 'aspects of the self-influence place, and conversely, aspects of place influence the self' (Anderson 2004: 46).

For the process of devising *home*, I separated out those ritualistic activities which are place bound and specific to Bali, such as *canang* making. In doing so I could tease out those previously mentioned 'quasi-selves' (Featherstone 1995: 45) so that re-integration of place and self was a possibility. Of course, re-integration and wholeness does not imply singularity or conglomeration.

Calling Ancestors

Engaging with the “*nawa sanga*, (meaning the ‘Balinese cosmic map’)” and the importance of direction in establishing my rituals gave me access to new ways of understanding how the imperatives of my research could focus on the construction of an intercultural performance in England. One way was through the exploration place bound activities, the other was by using a different, non-*topeng* mask. Having made a claim that my performance practice in England was non-masked this seemed an ironic, yet obvious bridge between my two practices. Prior to my doctoral studies, I had made in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit a series of seven *cakra* masks. Using one particular mask (as seen in Image 5) from this collection provided a new lens through which to establish alternative ritual processes that connected me to my ancestors but through the very notion of my body as a metaphor for my home.



Image 5: *Topeng Muladhara*, designed and made by Tiffany Strawson

This was appropriate as the cakra system I employed is similar in anatomical layout and function to how the Balinese view of the internal mystic fires, which are vital aspect of Balinese pharmacology (Hobart 2003: 220–223). The cakra system is most commonly related to ‘an ancient metaphysical system that [shows] the interrelationship between various aspects of our multidimensional universe’ (Judith and Vegas 1993: 6). Zarrilli calls these cakras wheels and centres (*cakra*) and asserts that they are the structural elements of the ‘subtle body alongside dynamic elements and cosmic energy’ (Zarrilli 2009: 70). The cakra system is also an established part of Balinese corporeal knowledge and relates to the *nawa sanga* in terms of its similarity of associations with colour, body organs and mantra. I chose to work with this structure because of its relationship to Balinese corporeal knowledge and its relationship to *nawa sanga* and the ritual process of performing in ceremonies.

I spent six months working in a state of ‘quietness’ and self-reverence, focusing on just one cakra. Because in a Balinese ritual there is an invitation for the ancestors to visit *Sekela*, the visible and manifest world of humans, this gave me two good reasons for my initial focus to be the base cakra which is called *Muladhara*. This cakra, according to Judith and Vega (1993: 41) is concerned with tribal belonging, family, survival, security, shelter and issues relating to nurture, growth, the physicality and wellbeing of the body and home; most importantly with *Muladhara* the house becomes synonymous with the body. The associated element is the earth (Judith and Vega 1993: 41).

Yet, a mere conceptual engagement with the cakra system was not a useful approach for a project such as mine. Therefore, I attempted to find a number of physical activities that could ground those ideas. The seemingly simple task of sweeping is an example of one of the processes that I engaged with as part of this research into *Muladhara*. Sweeping obviously is an activity relating to the household cleaning and this is a recommended task to engage the base cakra (Judith and Vega 1993: 44) as establishing a good sense of grounding, taking care of survival needs and taking care of one's body is all encouraged. Teeth, along with bones, and the immune system is one of several major organs/body parts associated with *Muladhara*. Any way of protecting, cleaning, feeding or nourishing them is to be endorsed during focused work on *Muladhara*.

On my altar for *Muladhara* there was a selection of red, brown and dark orange items which I used to bring my attention to the worshipping my ancestors. These items included my mother's special Christmas tablecloth, my practice fan that Ibu Arini (a very famous Balinese dancer) gave me in Bali, a book of architecture (representing my ideal house within my rented flat), fruit from my allotment, candles and an incense burner. Myrrh, patchouli and cedar wood are fragrances that specifically promote a sense of well-being for *Muladhara* and smell is the dominant sense of this cakra.

The cakra work demanded that I engaged deeply in the execution of work and tasks; I swept, mopped, kept house and kept order, I apologised to family members, I forgave past misgivings, I did my tax return, I spoke little except when necessary, I did not socialise or do anything that would distract me. If I was not at home in my flat in Manor Court, I was gardening in my allotment growing food to cook and consume or out walking. The name of this first cakra literally means 'root' and just as roots grow down, the experience of *Muladhara* is one of energy and attention moving down the body; down the length of the spine, into the legs, into the personal past and down into ancestral roots. I researched my ancestors and found out who they were. I set up an altar place and symbols of them were placed there. Objects and visual stimuli alone do not grant access to deeply embodied memory. Therefore, daily I also recited the names of my family and my ancestors as far back as I knew.

The literal digging of soil and excavation into my own ancestry created the opportunity that allowed me to experience the interconnectedness of the tangible and tactile body with intangible memory. This work on ancestry also made me consider my lineage and my role in continuing that line. Before I started these rituals, I had not experienced any maternal interest yet, a year after I started that process I was pregnant and expecting my first child. This ritual work in relation to my ancestors, of which the cakra, the direction and compositional work all contributed, created a profound shift within my life. Of course, one could easily and rightly argue that the routines and 'rituals' of early parenting also bring about

these changes, however, the creative focus of following these *home* rituals allowed me to 'meet' the challenges of the cultural obstacles relating to Balinese ritual. Such meetings involved moments of connection, disconnection and silence. Often the conversation was one-sided, however with patience and endurance it became clearer how I could penetrate ritual activity in a creative and culturally appropriate way that is now sustainable regardless of where I am.

I started out by acknowledging the numinous aspects of Balinese *topeng*, the sacred ceremonial environment that *topeng* takes place in relation to *Agama Hindu Bali* and the cosmologies at stake within the Balinese understanding of the universe. As complex and culturally specific as this is, I hypothesise that there is a possibility to find something akin to this through the embodiment of one's own non-Balinese ancestry.

On a simplistic level, negotiating the past as a foreign country (Lowenthal, 1985), is a useful way for the intercultural performer to start and offers new insights. This is because it enables her to consider the ever-changing role that the past has on her present life. One way to achieve this is to start with one's bloodline and by informing oneself of one's relatives, dead and alive. This by Balinese definition establishes one's past influences, karmic soul and key characteristics. There is a useful connection between the Balinese sense of cosmology and sense of eco-feminism that I employ. Eco-feminism promotes a sense of:

Ecological consciousness that sees nature as alive, active and capable of communicating with us. This insight carries us further into a sense of sacred within nature. (Roszak 1995: 295)

Rather than suggest there is a natural or essential feminine nature, eco-feminism invites men as well as women to recognise both their female and masculine natures and to take responsibility and be active in renewing their emotional bond and sense of connection to the Earth. From an eco-feminist perspective, we can:

Ponder our ancestors; the themes played out in our heritage and our heredity become the serious meaning of the old stories. If we listen to the generations of spirit, we become firmly grounded (Roszak 1995: 296).

Rozzak's suggestion clearly identifies with the traditional and made-up stories of my female ancestors and the idea of becoming a 'Daughter of Dartmoor'. Waking up this ecological and ancestral consciousness sees nature as source of communication that associates feminist spirituality with a sense of sacred within nature. Two streams of dissent and protest combine here; the ecological and the women's movement. Both have suffered from patriarchal oppression and exploitation where historically women have been identified with nature and 'nature' with the female; both being considered inferior, both treated as things that are there to be 'conquered'.

The feminist and woman centred ancestral systems that I am engaging with, however, (especially those relating to Dartmoor and the land) are not to be considered under a lens where eco-feminism idealises woman as a symbol of nature; a continuation of essentialist notions and idolising the spirituality of women regarding their biological function of reproduction. Any identification with 'Mother Nature' here is to be dismissed as 'just another repetition of the old stereotyping' (Roszak 1995: 297). Rather what is acknowledged and celebrated is the ability to experience an ancestral call from and through a connection with the local, natural environment. In this way, there is a sense of recovering, voicing and reclaiming a sense of lost history. My understanding of the eco-feminist perspective is that this ability to channel a listening quality towards the land is equally available to men as it is to women. In this sense, listening and receiving are perhaps considered as feminine qualities, but are not gender prescribed. In performance the connection to Dartmoor, the landscape and nature in general is no more or less of significance to the gendered difference of the audience. The codifications of any performance tradition conceive, produce, articulate and embed further sets of cultural values. However from an intercultural perspective, this connection to the land encourages a sense of centre and base which gives the performer a set of established cultural values which are easily made available to the audience.

Notions of home and ritual, borrowed from my Balinese *topeng* practice, facilitated an interest in my own ancestors and sense of lineage, both in terms of

my bloodline and within a wider sphere of training.⁵⁶ My constructed rituals *per se* do not grant me, or any performer exploring the use of ritual within their practice, a spiritual connection to the specificity of the *nawa sanga*, the Balinese cosmic map, *topeng* masks or the Balinese ritual process. What it gives is a greater understanding of how to read and create energy, hone intuition and to see where one's own physical (and spiritual) disruption, 'disease or 'gap' presides' (Myss 2001: 22) and originates. This allows one to make changes, if necessary within a performance practice if that is where they fit. My experience of being a *topeng* artist in Bali is that one's performance practice is a life choice, so from this perspective one's creative and spiritual lives align and integrate and once again be considered within the as/in framework. These rituals that I repeated for *home* radically enabled me to shift back into the geography of my own physical territory and body, as a way of locating the practice within myself. The application of this ritualised process allowed me to witness and observe the flow of energy in my body, which according to whether it was at the front or back, left or right, enabled me to tune into a sense of *keras* and *alus* (Balinese definitions of types of energy in the body). The benefits of this ritualised performance are that it has given me a

⁵⁶ Another and different approach is to consider ancestry in terms of communities of interest, and by doing so extending the concept of lineage in terms of influencing factors. For example, what groups, communities, disciplines or training situations have been of influence to one's training and performance making? These can be general, or else specific to one ethos, or time and place-bound; for example, 'I am a woman and I come from a long line of women before me', 'I come from Lecoq' or 'I come from the class of 1994 University of Kent at Canterbury'. Each lineage has a code of conduct or set of values, which may or may not be visible or evident to an audience.

heightened, developed personal understanding of my performance practice and within my own cultural and personal geography.

Therefore, I suggest that the orthopraxic nature of ritual; the embodiment and 'doing' or repeated activities with a specific intention, can become a strategy of 'homing'. Notions of home and ritual, all borrowed from my Balinese *topeng* practice, facilitated an interest in my own ancestors and sense of lineage, both in terms of my bloodline and within a wider sphere of knowledge. Performers can apply this acquired information in several circumstances which have a relevance to training and performing. The practice of 'homing' the body through intercultural encounters recognises the relationship, connection and dialogue between physical action and inner reality; the macro and the micro, the Seen and Unseen. However unnavigable or inarticulate these may appear. Balinese ritual practices offer new understandings of how the concept of 'home' moves away from the notion of place, geography, culture, and instead becomes an embodied practice in itself. This opens the possibility of a multiplicity of homes emerging through a new, invented set of (female) rituals.

Chapter Three

Axe, chisel, knife: Carving out new female *topeng* masks

Creative Strategies of Resistance

In the previous chapter I discussed the ways in which I ‘homed’ and relocated aspects of my Balinese performance practice, both of which are heavily embedded in ritual activity, within the constraints of my life in Dartmoor, Devon. Bali was for the purposes of that chapter, imbued with a sense of activities that were celebratory, concerned with worship and as a landmark in the search for an internal sense of harmony and healing. In stark opposition to the semi-idealised vision of Bali upheld in the previous chapter, in this chapter I will focus on two

main aspects of Balinese culture that are more difficult for me for two basic reasons. The first issue is the negotiation of my problematic social position as a woman in Bali. The second is a result of my position as a female Western practitioner who is attempting to create intercultural artworks within the specific genre of *topeng*. Within this position I am asserting that there is a need for an alternative cartography of how women could be represented in this genre.

As a Western feminist performing in my *topeng keras Gaja Madah* mask ('the Prime Minister') could have been potentially interesting if I could have maintained the vision that with each performance through my female body I was subverting patriarchal norms. However, in practice, it felt like I was endorsing, participating in and contributing to the very forms of male dominance feminism should be trying to combat. In Chapter One, I discussed the power dynamics of gender and sexuality that made me uncomfortable in my training environment. However, I also experienced other acts of aggression in Bali at this time (often gender related) which I still find difficult to process. To allow some of the tensions, obstacles and challenges of my training to unravel, it is first important to note that, during my time in Bali I experienced a lack of sufficient clear guidelines or procedures through which claims of sexual misconduct by Balinese men could be addressed (particularly when the parties affected were white Western female students). Yet, problematic (and potentially dangerous) interactions happened thus complicating further the dynamic of intercultural relations. That is, despite one's best efforts and positive intentions, an intercultural relationship is ultimately defined by

individuals, as well as by the cultures to which those individuals belong. I acknowledge that in my interpretation of events (a process which, I claim, rendered me an 'Other'), I might also be Othering Bali since, as an outsider, my view of this culture is fragmentary and partial, and while I was there I lived in a continuous state of 'failure,' trying to understand the nuances of patriarchal structure in which those behaviours are situated. In doing so, it is hard to reconcile a sense of interculturalism based on equality, opportunity and fairness. Yet, in every intercultural relationship there is a juxtaposition between positive and negative and this is what makes the relationship dynamic and ever changing. In this instance, it is possible that one may never understand or feel reconciled or connected within those cultural differences. As my experience evidences, some aspects of an intercultural relationship are negative and do not promote a mutual, symbiotic Othering, but in turn this can also be productive creatively and inspire a desire for deeper exploration.

The irony was that as a performer I was increasingly more included into the inner circles of Ida Bagus Alit's world and as a feminist I became simultaneously more cautious of my desire to enter it. The masks that I crafted were a reaction to these difficulties and challenges that I had experienced, and was experiencing in lower doses on a daily basis. With the advancement of my language skills, I started to have more awareness about what was being said, as well as what I could see happening. My anger and frustrations were silently invested into my slow but conscious daily carving routine. A question remains; why did I stay in Bali? The

answer is that I had committed into a process of training, and Bali had become my home; warts and all. My task was to separate out those aspects that were positive and work with those negative aspects that I did not like. To work against them would be pointless as there is little justice for women in Indonesia, let alone foreign women; white women. I committed to make an individual act of resistance that could re-empower myself personally. This became the rationale for the research.

With that in mind, this chapter introduces a new set of female masks made in Bali, both by Balinese craftsman in 2010 and by myself in 2011. I have discussed how mask practitioners often discuss masks as living entities and I can claim that my motivation was to somehow look to the masked characters as allies who would boost the male to female ratio within the practice and who could then support me in numbers. These masks are all female and play with traditional representations of women which are limited within a genre that is the preserve of men both in terms of the performance and the conception of masks. This series of new female masks were based on my own personal experiences and those of the women around me at that time in Bali.⁵⁷ Each mask created was imbued with what I consider to be the incredible resolve of Balinese women in the face of

⁵⁷ My data sourcing is in alignment with social anthropologist Unni Wikan who used her Balinese friend Suriati, as her main data source for her book *Managing Turbulent Hearts, A Balinese Formula for Living* (1990). These masks are the result of what I observed unfold over a ten year period, both before and during my official doctoral research. At the time I did not think to make 'field notes' and as such, the information I recall is not ethnographic data as much as anecdotes about my friends' lives which I shared and in which I participated.

adultery, domestic violence and/or legal inequality where the law does not recognise or respect a mother's role or a women's position.⁵⁸ Whilst these circumstances on the one hand create the story of the research, on the other they illustrate my lived understanding of the specific cultural conditions of Balinese women.

The representation of gender in Balinese performing arts, as I briefly mentioned in the thesis introduction is extremely complex. The problem within *topeng* is that there are so few female masks available to play and those that do exist fall into the virgin/whore binary. Theoretically, from an aesthetic and cultural perspective, one that is based on balance and complementariness, there is no reason on a practical level for this reduction or why this should be the case. This chapter positions female Balinese masks within their cultural context and describes how these intercultural masks were created based on Balinese designs. These new masks all rearticulate constructs of beauty through the traditional channels of *alus*, *keras* and *kasar* characteristics. In negotiating this revised identity for female *topeng* masks, I engage in a particularly culturally coded Balinese aesthetic which is itself tangled and disrupted by the influence of Indonesian State discourse and the colonial gaze. Through the creation of this new set of female *topeng* masks my process subverts these constructs both in Bali and In England, as I recognise

⁵⁸ In the case of a marriage breakdown for example, the mother is always 'sent back' to her father's house with no access to her children who remain in the custody of her husband. There she assumes the diminished position of her brother's wife's "*pembantu*, (meaning domestic maid)".

the reach of the masks extends beyond their source culture and are shared and disseminated in a wider intercultural context.

Coldiron suggests *topeng* masks 'depict historical figures (who are also deified ancestors) or archetypal characters' (Coldiron 2004: 79) and thus the masks that I designed are 'made up' creations based on Balinese designs. Although I carved eight masks in total, in this chapter I will focus on just two masks from this portfolio: Ibu Berani and Little Miss Muffett. Both *Ibu Berani* and *Little Miss Muffett* are based on pre-existent traditional masks which evolved into new, but recognizably Balinese masks. Both masks feature in a *topeng* style performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* that will be discussed in full in the next chapter.

Because the word *topeng* refers to both the mask and the genre (Emigh 1996: 181), this chapter will separately discuss those two different aspects: 1) the staging and representation of women on the *topeng* stage as a reflection of patriarchal culture; and 2) the cultural specificity of the mask design and crafting process. Practical approaches relating to the actual performance and embodiment of these new masks will be the concern of the last chapters.

Constructed and Traditional Roles for Women: An overview

There is a need to critique the influences of patriarchy within the *topeng* genre. A brief review of the dominant beliefs and practices prevalent in Balinese society explains the specific circumstances to which I am reacting.

The polarity of roles for women in Bali is split between the traditional depiction presented by examples such as Sita (the wife of Rama in the Ramayana) or Sumbadra (wife to the philandering Arjuna, in the Javanese version of the Indian epic) whose characteristics include loyalty, obedience, demureness. The other extreme example is the sexually assertive and wild temptress archetype, such as Nyai Lara Kidul (the mythical Queen of the South Seas) or Rangda (the monstrous widow-witch) who are tempestuous, mysterious and dangerous. These gender archetypes have become popular and extreme examples of female representation in line with the development of patriarchy in society. Despite the concept of balance and harmony and a commitment to a 'both and many' relational cultural perspective that *rwa bhenida* suggests, when it comes to the social construct of gender, this dichotomy is often presented as an 'either/or' reduction.

According to historian Barbara Andaya, gender roles that were originally complementary, ones that celebrated sexuality and fertility as part of human survival and animism, diminished in Southeast Asia as it became slowly more influenced by models and images of Hindu patriarchy that endorsed female containment and male control (Andaya 1994:108). According to Hatley, during the nineteenth century the masculinity of the Javanese aristocracy challenged colonial

power and as a result, the dominance of men and the subservience of women was celebrated in court art forms which infiltrated into mainstream society (Hatley 2002: 132). This example of how performance reflects patriarchal dominance continues to this day within *topeng*.

The impact of this first wave of tourism in the 1920s seemed to introduce more active roles for Indonesian women, which enabled them to work beyond domestic settings. However, the threat provoked by the risk of 'contamination' from the Western women they encountered 'prompted reinforcement of the traditional, refined feminine ideal by both indigenous leaders and colonial educators' (Hatley 2002: 132). More recently in Indonesia (dating back to the 1960s), with a view to the political landscape of the New Order⁵⁹, gender relations and gender roles were an important dimension of state control that reinforced constructions of identity (Robinson and Bessel 2002: 1) and were 'the result of pressures from multiple forces, each of which employs some form of violence' (Diyah Larasati 2013: 100).

In the 1970s socially, economically and artistically the situation started to change for Balinese women as they themselves started to forge opportunities and take more active roles in performance making. Palermo asserts that this change 'happened thanks to the establishment of dance training institutes, the tourism

⁵⁹ The New Order was the name of the political administration founded by President Suharto. This was a strong, centralised and military-dominated government.

boom and the division of dance into sacred/profane categories' (Palermo 2009: 33). Coldiron claims that the changes that happened in Bali during the seventies partially occurred because of the influence that Western women had on Bali (Coldiron 2014). It is important to mention that during this time; Western feminists were riding the second wave of feminism and they were fighting against gendered and patriarchal values in the West also. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to draw too many political parallels: it is suffice to say that this effort had a global reach and multiple instances of pollination. That said, the assumption by Western feminists, such as myself, of patriarchal authority and female oppression may be inappropriate for various reasons. As Ward Keeler suggests (and the same applies to Bali) 'the Javanese preoccupation with difference among individuals along the dimension of prestige/potency overshadows gender as a highly salient distinction' (Keeler 1990: 127).

Whilst conducting research in Bali there is the need to be culturally sensitive for the specific reason that using the phrase "*feminis*, (meaning 'feminist')" or claiming to be a "*perjuang hak-hak perempuan*, (meaning a 'fighter for women's rights')" would be counter-productive and alienate those who describe themselves as such from Balinese people. As Hatley has noted, the term feminist can be 'identified with sexual boldness, and social assertiveness defined as alien, foreign and contradictory to Indonesian women's inherent, authentic nature' (Hatley 2002: 133). It is also necessary to assert that, as Chandra Mohanty states, 'third world women have always engaged in feminism, even if the label has been rejected in a

number of instances' (Mohanty 1991: 7). This is certainly the case in Bali as in many cases, the desire to be traditional, conventional and harmonious means that women might not acknowledge that their society and culture is a predominantly patriarchal one. Throughout my stay in Bali my challenge was to appeal to a Balinese culturally coded sense of feminism which is based on 'complementariness' and 'domains of preference' (Wazir Jahan, Karim 1995: xiii-xiv). As much as I would theoretically like to endorse a sense of complementariness and balance, practically my personal experience and observations indicates that this is a utopian dream and that in terms of the representation of gender equality this notion remains abstract. As I have witnessed, these 'domains of preference' are historically defined and politically reinforced. What they show is a contradiction to any romanticized notion of complementariness and show precisely domains of hierarchy. So, from this view I would problematise Wazir's statement and say that this complementariness is generally imposed through male subjugation and power.

Nation State Identity and the 'womanisation' of Bali

Whereas the Balinese aesthetic relates to beauty and balance, conceptions of beauty are prescribed by, and maintained as products of tourism and colonialism. Through this process what becomes clear is how Balinese gender identities are also a part of a colonial construct.

National identities are created through processes of essentialisation 'for which heritage provides the archive' (Hall 2008: 5). In the West, as feminists we are warned that 'fixed characteristics, given attributes and ahistorical functions' (Grosz 1995: 48) which are the precise reasons why essentialising women is dangerous as it leads to the idea that gender is 'an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (Butler 1990: 270 italics in original). Essentialism, biologism and naturalism as Grosz observes, 'provides a ready-made justification for the most conservative and misogynist of patriarchal social relations, they are treated if they were the effects of a pure and inert nature' (Grosz 1995: 50).

Balinese cultural identity is complexly tangled with an Indonesian Nation state discourse. How this is articulated through Balinese performance-related practices is in two broad registers; one which is articulated in Balinese language and the other in Indonesian, 'each coming with different concerns, purposes, and different sets of assumptions about who and what Balinese are or should be' (Theodoridou 2015). What is clear is how in Bali gender and national identity have evolved side by side and the image of the Balinese woman has become a part of Bali's development and tourism strategy. Performance artist Cokorda Sawitri, speaks critically of a process of 'womanisation' (Sawitri 2001: 132) of the performing arts in Bali which has produced a superficial beauty without real aesthetic value, and a situation where women are manipulated by the tourist industry. Picard suggests that Balinese identity 'is the outcome of a process of semantic borrowing and conceptual recasting' that the Balinese have had to make

'in response to the colonization, the Indonesianization and the touristification of their island' (Picard 1999: 21). The fixing of the Balinese (female) subject by Dutch colonial authorities, touring artists and the wave of anthropologists and bohemians that flocked to Bali have all contributed to a 'desirous occidental gaze to hold onto a Balinese 'authenticity' (Vourloumis 2010: 115). Vickers observes in his book, *Bali: A Paradise Created* that 'over three centuries the West has constructed a complex and gorgeous image of the island that has come to take over even Balinese thought' (Vickers 1989: 2). This has been made possible through Western and Indonesian State discourse. This 'gorgeous image' of Bali the nation, is most definitely feminine and conjures the image of the country as a dancing beauty; 'a solitary female figure, swaying towards us' (Vickers 1989:2).

Design Strategies for New Masks

In this context, my approach in making new female masks is traditional in that the crafting technique, the type of wood used and the tools employed in the carving process, all respond in their own way to the overall vision and inception of a Balinese mask. The way I sit is also traditional with my feet clamping the wood and my legs open metaphorically birthing the masks into being. From the onset, my female non-Balinese body is altering and affecting the masks from the very moment of this traditionally viewed moment of becoming.

My design strategy, however, is to re-articulate new designs through the *keras-alus* axis. Rather than present a new paradigm, this axis is precisely what defines the genre. The intention is to engage with these qualities, to subvert and challenge them and in so doing undermine the established power and authority that is often afforded to them. Specifically, these new designs will engage with the quality of *alus* which I as will discuss is tied up with issues of *kecantikaan*, where notions of beauty, culture and identity all seem to clash together. Also, the new designs will engage with *keras* and show that there can be strong, stiff, powerful female masks whereas at present there are none.

Within this approach, it is important to foreground the fact that, as feminist scholar Emily Lee observes, a 'strategy does not increase understanding; rather it promotes epistemological confusion' (2011: 259). She continues to suggest that with a strategy 'its method is not universal -- but with each encounter, a strategy plays with ideas in a wily way and continues to participate in theory-making, if only by disrupting the process' (Lee 2011: 264). Therefore, the methods, validity and scope of knowledge that I am exploring must ask crucial questions to participate in what Grosz identifies as a vital part of any feminist undertaking.

Grosz asks:

Which commitments remain, in spite of their patriarchal alignments, of use to feminists in their political struggles? What kinds of feminist strategy do they make possible or hinder? And what are the costs and benefits of holding these commitments? (Grosz 1989)

Before I attempt to answer these provocations, some key issues relating to the construction of essentialised notions of beauty need to be untangled. It is possible to suggest that in Bali there is no scope for conceptions of beauty other than those that depict beauty as always feminine. Even if the masks are male, as in the case of *Dalam* (the king) for example, his handsome characteristics are feminine such as smooth skin, soft features and all this configures as *alus* meaning refined. As I suggested in my thesis introduction, Western feminist theory is not always confluent with Balinese aesthetics in practice and what is needed is a different understanding of how theory can be understood in the Balinese cultural context so that the criteria and approach can be appropriate.

Nascimento has observed that the intercultural performing arts have always had to 'strike a balance between the desire to make new and the need to use recognisable elements for the spectator in a manner that creates an empathetic link among practitioners and spectators' (Nascimento 2009: 3). My methodological approach and strategy invests in a sense of similarity whilst simultaneously showing and facilitating a subtle difference, a strategy that the Mrs. Old Man collaboration has already shown and it is not restricted to the intercultural arena nor it necessarily aims to discover new territories. Developing Nascimento's idea that there needs to be recognizable elements, I propose that there is an interconnection between difference and similarity, where one becomes a part of the whole. As Cakrabarty reminds us 'difference is always the name of relationship, for it separates as much as it connects' (Cakrabarty 1998:

478). Considering the familiar and often said Indonesian phrase “*sama, sama tetapi tidak sama* (meaning ‘the same but not the same’)”, I suggest that in creating ‘the same’ these masks can positively show a slight difference. Working with similarity or along the similar/different spectrum does not mean erasing or homogenizing difference but it involves responding to the specificities of the cultural aesthetic within a political and social sphere of reference. As Grosz, has warned us ‘(t)here can be no feminist position that is not in some way or other involved in patriarchal power relations, it is hard to see how this is either possible or desirable’ (1989). By contributing more masks that play with female beauty I am indeed contributing to that discussion yet, to re-visit Lee’s observation of the conversation to be had between ‘wily play and theory making’ this research objective is not a radical shift to a completely new territory. Rather this research strategy is an attempt to answer some of Grosz’s questions regarding a commitment to stay within patriarchal frameworks whilst offering new political perspectives.

The Balinese Aesthetic of Beauty

All *topeng* masks (and their dramaturgy) are situated within a Balinese cultural aesthetic which Geertz summarises as a desire ‘to please – to please the gods, to please the audience, to please the other, to please self, but to please as beauty pleases, not as virtue pleases’ (Geertz 1973: 400). Whilst there is contestation on how Geertz has interpreted Balinese culture (Hobart 1982: 2) what is apparent is the preoccupation that the Balinese have with *kecantikaan*, meaning ‘beauty’.

Without meaning to conflate notions of beauty with those of *alus*-ness, as they remain subtly distinct, it can be said that beauty is inherent within all masks that have *alus* characteristics, be they male or female. Features on the mask such as combed hair, smooth skin, clarity in the choice of line all are understood as symbols of beauty.

Elizabeth Young makes the case that the social role of *Topeng* drama is twofold; it must both convey paradigms of social behaviour, based on aesthetically derived norms, and it must satisfy those norms (Young 1980: xviii). Whilst beauty is, as Geertz outlines, a part of Balinese aesthetic, so too are conceptualizations of balance, and indeed balance is considered an inherent aspect of beauty. It is accurate to say that the Balinese 'seem to prefer a balance of opposing drives to the single-minded pursuit of perfection' (Hobart 1982: 15).

In the introduction, I described how initially I was a mask maker and I was encouraged to dance in order to learn how to make a better *topeng* mask. There is always integration between the mask design and the dance. As a mask maker one knows that balance is best expressed through subtle asymmetry and the expression of imbalance emphasizes the return or 'search for that elusive balance' (Rubin and Sedana 2007:107). This understanding of balance in the features of the mask is reflected in the dance *agem* or basic standing position, where the right elbow is high, but the wrist is dropped whilst the left leg is tense and positioned

beyond the natural standing gait. The staging, the production values of a *topeng* performance and the mask itself also convey these aesthetic norms of beauty in balance. As well as displaying an individual sense of balance in the actual design which I will discuss later, visually the masks of a *topeng* performance will always collectively convey a balance on stage. This means that as well as masks that are generally considered beautiful there are also those that are generally considered as ugly. In describing the Balinese tendency to exaggerate features on masks and show afflictions, Judy Slattum reminds us that 'it is important to keep in mind the Balinese custom of turning horror into humour and laughing at distress' (Slattum 2003: 13) so ugly masks are important just as refined masks channel more serious topics. So, within a Balinese aesthetic, one could argue that although only two female masks exist, the polarisation between Suzi and Sita completes the aesthetic.

Features of the mask in collaboration with the choreography

A crucial aspect to emphasise is the fact that all masks are 'types'. A mask is always to a degree a reification of an essentialised identity; it is a representation and this is unescapable. However, within the range of male *topeng* masks, there is a greater range of characters available to play. Whilst some are *alus*, some are *keras* and some are *kasar* there is more scope to play different characters. Design features, such as buck teeth, big noses, pronounced brow also indicate differing voices which are required to animate the masks, as I Ketut Kodi explains, 'if you want to become a *topeng* dancer you have to have a high voice, a middle voice, a

low voice' (Kodi quoted in Foley and Sedena 2005: 202). This is significant (to me) as it adds weight to the fact that with so few female masks in existence, there is little scope to play, experiment or improve a female performer vocal's 's performance.

One of this chapter's main concerns relates to showing how plurality is achieved in both the number and variety of masks to play and how multiplicity can be evident in the design of a mask that shows a very contrasting counter mask. This includes the design features that show an opposite or other quality in contrast to the primary and obvious reading of the mask. Often, but not always, the counter mask has a subtler characteristic. Both ways of showing multiplicity suggest that there can be other ways of being/knowing womanhood that extend beyond the binary representations of Sita and Suzi, the two example of Balinese masks illustrated in my introduction.

This is achieved to the greatest extent when there is a relationship between the mask and choreography, however what comes first is the design, and its choreography is secondary. Unlike other masks, Sita and Suzi do not have their own choreography, or even a set of specific defined gestures so there is no framework on which a performer can improvise and deliver a fully rounded portrayal of the character. They can merely guess from the codification of the mask design.

As I have suggested, the design and the choreography make any *topeng* mask complete. In Balinese *topeng* one cannot have one without the other and this connection between the design features of the mask and the movement vocabulary of a performer is best described as a way of understanding the semiotics of the mask. On the one hand this is simple, a smiling mask allows the body to smile with rounded, flowing movements; this is *alus*. Typically, the only mask to use refined gestures on a *topeng* stage is *Dalam* the king, who is male. Rubin and Sedana suggest that the king's gestures 'have a light, upward movement as though flying towards the gods' (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 107). A frowning mask encourages the performer to also frown, to lock the shoulders and in doing so within Balinese choreography the elbows automatically rise and this is *keras*. Buck teeth, huge cheeks, a split lip implies *kasar* which means splayed feet and a display of stupidity and vulgarity. In addition to these codes, the performer reads the *topeng* mask like any other mask and identifies with the raw and instinctive feeling of the character. So, while it is plausible that Sita and Suzi can be animated without specific choreography, as evidenced in performance, having specific choreography adds gravitas to the depth of their character and allows them a 'voice' of their own through gesture.

A *topeng* artist knows that well-designed mask can maximize one's ability to share 'multiple potentials' (Emigh 1996: 288) and within Balinese tradition there is a desire to challenge tradition, reinvent it and stand out for doing so, however these

challenges to convention are nearly always within codified parameters. So, what in Bali is considered “*kontemporare*” would not meet a Western definition of contemporary and any Balinese notion of modern is arguably a reconstruction of tradition. A new mask can challenge convention, as I will demonstrate, but Balinese tradition is conservative and therefore new designs are best articulated through pre-existing discourses. This is how tradition slowly re-invents itself and possibly, this linking of the past and present could stimulate a differently engendered future. As Grosz asserts ‘what counts as history, what is regarded as constituting the past, is that which is deemed to be of relevance to concerns of the present’ (Grosz 2000: 1020). Whilst there remains a strong sense of Balinese aesthetic, one connected to beauty and balance, the idea of reinventing what already exists is a viable channel through which to focus new constructions of womanhood.

Topeng Little Miss Muffett

Exploring Balinese *kecantikaan*, notions of beauty, I aimed to create a female mask that was not the familiar icon of beauty that most Balinese female masks employ. *Little Miss Muffett Mask* is a mask that many Balinese people would be familiar with, as similar designs are sold as tourist souvenirs (See Image 7). The *Little Miss Muffett* mask (Image 6) has, however, distinctive characteristics as the two comparative images show. This mask is not stereotypically ‘beautiful’ yet despite her over made up face and black teeth, there is still a trace of an

essentialised beauty. This mask may disrupt notions of beauty but in here there is still a reference to the Balinese mask. The shape of the eyebrow, the defined upper lip or the flower adornment in her hair for example echoes qualities that are important to the Balinese.

Yet, to challenge notions of beauty, I attempted to create a 'normal' girl, whose face was adorned with literal scars and other signs of life. Therefore, Little Miss Muffett has a wood worm crack, which was not filled in with sawdust and sanded off (which is the usual technique for this kind of 'mistake'). Notions of beauty are still present, there are still symbols alluding *kecantikaan* in that



Image 6

Little Miss Muffett, designed and made by Tiffany Strawson.



Image 7:
Un-named tourist mask, designed and made by Ida Bagus Putra

there is attention to decoration, refinement and an attempt to ‘make-up’ and beautify. However, these aspects are by no means comfortable, there is nothing ‘pleasing’ about this construct of beauty. The mask’s yellow skin suggests that she has been bleaching, or that she is sickly and possibly ill because of black magic. This colour reference, although not a traditional choice for a mask, would be understood by Balinese people.

Topeng Ibu Berani

This mask was created as I was interested in transforming a strong male mask into a female one that could reflect the 21st century egalitarian notions of feminism, in which a prime minister could be a woman (for example, the former prime-

minister Ibu Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia). I imagined this new mask in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit and re-named her *Ibu Berani* which translates as Mrs Brave or Mother Courage.⁶⁰



Images 8, 9 and 10: *Topeng Ibu Berani*, designed and made by Tiffany Strawson

The importance of the red colour (as seen in images 8,9 and 10) and the strong features, although toned down, are still present; these represent aggression and assertiveness, often associated with '*keras-ness*' or masculine energy.

The strong association of the name 'Mother Courage' with Bertolt Brecht is not coincidental. In 'Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory', Elin Diamond describes how 'when spectators see gender they are seeing (and reproducing) the cultural signs of gender, and by implication the gender ideology of a culture' (Diamond 1988:

⁶⁰ In the Indonesian language there is not a great range of vocabulary to exchange for English words. Hence *ibu* means both Missus and Mother and *berani* implies both brave, bold and courageous.

84). She suggests that the purpose of *verfremdungs effekt*⁶¹ is 'to denaturalize and defamiliarize what ideology makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable' (Diamond 1988: 85). Diamond claims that 'in performance the actor "alienates" rather than impersonates her character, she quotes or demonstrates the character's behaviour instead of identifying with it' (Diamond 1988: 84). From the general perspective, masked performance however, almost the opposite is true; to employ Brecht's *Verfremdungs Effekt* one risks not fully embodying the mask as ideally there is no separation.

However, specifically in consideration of my performance of the male, original version of this *keras* mask could be read as politically resistant as my female body can only imitate and demonstrate the artifice of gender. In this context, the difference between my body and the male mask could be interesting. Grosz suggests that difference cannot:

Be readily accommodated in a system that reduces all difference to distinction and all identity to sameness. A politics of difference implies the right to define oneself, others, and the world according to one's own interests (Grosz 1989).

⁶¹ Brecht describes *Verfremdungs effekt* as a way of '(p)Playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances [is]was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious' (Brecht 1961: 133).

Moreover, this mask's name was a nick-name of mine; my friends would often joke and call me this and say '*ya tapi kamu bisa Dipp, karena kamu berani*' meaning 'you can do what you want Tiff, because you are brave'. Here the word 'brave' could be substituted for all the things that implicitly mean 'Western'. *Berani* is a word often used by Balinese people to describe Western women who travel alone, yet it is loaded with cultural connotations. When I told Ida Bagus Alit, of the intended name for my mask *Ibu Berani* he smiled (in disapproval). His objection was that brave is considered 'unfitting' for Balinese women (Wikan 1990: 71) and women generally. Wikan offers a very detailed analysis of the gendered implications of being brave as follows:

Women are not brave, as men "must" be. For females, the most frightening characteristic – and they call it frightening (*seram*) – is a grave and stern expression – *nyebeng*. Hence men cite acts denoting arrogance...as the most negative quality in others, whereas women cite a facial expression indicating anger... Thus the behavioural appearance women fear most in themselves, arrogance, is not what they fear most in others (potential anger). Also in order for a woman to prove that she is not arrogant she must radiate friendliness in a manner that would be ridiculous – or womanly- for a man. (Wikan 1990: 73)

It is interesting that, rather than be 'brave', Balinese women react with a 'stern and grave' expression as facially, this is how fear is read as the brow creases in the same way. As Napier articulates, 'the freezing open of the eye, when the overt presence of the whites exaggerates the nuclei, in fear, surprise, anger, and, in general, moments of arrest mediate emotional states' (Napier 1986: 198). 'Courage' is an extremely challenging quality to characterise symbolically in a

mask.⁶² Courage is a proactive reaction to a threat or real danger; there has to be an element of challenge to be courageous. The opposite of courage is fear and that is how I found the counter mask to *Ibu Berani* and in this way, there is a degree of emotional balance in the mask which was challenging to capture.⁶³

Within a strictly *topeng* realm these masks are considered interesting but confusing. Little Miss Muffett is identifiable perhaps as a less 'stock' character, and more as a clown; she can explore new territories that the ordered masks, the *penglembar*, cannot. The ambiguity of these masks that look familiar but are clearly different creates a dialogue; they invite questions and new interpretations. A mask design alone cannot conjure new stories without a performer to embody them and so a mask design is not definitive. Rather it is open for a performer's interpretation, and physical animation to make it come alive.

As a Western female *topeng* performer exploring the complexities of female representation within *topeng* the methods, validity, and scope of knowledge presented in this chapter is clearly motivated by an individual strategy of resistance which playfully bends the rules of traditional codification. Relating my mask making to my experiences and the life experiences of many of my female

⁶² I acknowledge that there are wider issues relating to the expression of any quality in a mask. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address these in detail. For further reading on mask design see Knight 2003: 119- 124.

⁶³ This was a challenge because I was emotionally battling with the contrast between confidence and self-doubt within my training for many of the reasons that I have identified.

Balinese friends and women in my social circle, it became apparent that in order to show difference, it is necessary to present a vision of similarity. In this way one can penetrate and subvert the 'norm'. Whilst the technique, style and parameters of codification remain within the Balinese aesthetic of beauty and whilst the features fit along the *keras* and *halus* axis, what is different is that these ideas are lifted from stereotype and thus subverted into more positive and ironically balanced representations of women. The strategy of 'same but different' really must emphasise the notion of similarity *plus* difference as nothing is lost from the original remit of tradition, but much has been gained in this process which has allowed me to not only make new masks but also to envisage new ways to perform them and new stories for the masks to tell. These masks are not radically different or they would cease to be *topeng*, but using prescribed techniques and cultural codification, these masks subvert patriarchal representations and challenge notions of beauty both within Bali and beyond.

Chapter Four

Same but not the same:

An Intercultural Approach to Little Red Riding Hood

As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, my work has continuously looked at ways of ‘moving,’ ‘relocating,’ and ‘adapting’ contents and forms from one geopolitical context to another. Having discovered the mask *Topeng Tua Perempuan*, ‘Mrs. Old Man’, and having made a series of new female masks, I then decided to develop a new performance context outside the rigid structures traditionally set by *topeng* in which those masks could be explored further. This phase of research responded to the question: what would the performance world of these masks look like from a perspective that paid homage to the traditional form and structure of Balinese *topeng* whilst simultaneously aiming to empower women by heightening their presence both throughout its act of performance itself and in its narrative? In addition – how could these new female masks be animated in performance? With my previous performative explorations that resulted in the performance *home*, I was acknowledging the connections between, training, ritual and performance. In contrast this project that is the subject of this chapter, did not attempt to engage the mask within the specific ritual conditions that prevail within the context of Balinese culture. My initial goal and focus was more akin to

respond to Western notions of performance; therefore I predominantly was responding to the theatricality of the mask that is inherent within the *topeng* genre. This included: the style of the masked presentation by the solo-performer; the function of each mask; the structural order in which they symbolically enter; the nature of the stories told; the fusion of little and grand narratives that are weaved in combination with dance and song; and the ability of the performer to cast a new perspective on a well-known story. Imbricated into this is the skill and ability of the individual performer as Dibia and Ballinger explain:

He must be able to perform all the characters in a *Topeng* play, know the *Babad* (historical chronicles) and be fluent in Balinese and Kawi. Songs must be memorized, and storytelling technique perfected. Above all, his knowledge of religion and philosophy must be profound. (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 66)

This chapter documents the evolution of a performance of *Little Red Riding Hood*. It foregrounds some of the major aesthetic decisions as a prelude to seeing the masks in performance where my body occupied them and, through practice, developed new choreographies, gestural languages and possibilities for female masks within *topeng*. The ideological intentions behind making new choreographies and gestures underpin an exploration of how the genre can be reworked through an intercultural lens that can accommodate new perspectives, stories and ultimately new female masks and ways of inhabiting them.

My performances of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* started in the Autumn of 2012 and have continued intermittently. Thus far I have performed in a variety of different contexts ranging from solo performances in my own house to an intimate audience, to performing in the open air at a local festival in my village to an audience of children at a local primary school. I also performed in front of a very large, mainly Indonesian audience at the *Indonesia Kontemporare* festival in 2013 hosted by SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies). The performance has subsequently evolved on two levels; the first one based on its reception by its audiences and the second one based on its function as a research method. As much as there is a desire to entertain the audience this creates a paradox for the researcher. Pleasing an audience does not necessarily create the seedbed for research in regards to answering specific questions which related to new representations of women with *topeng*. This was a difficult journey because the audience responded enthusiastically to traditional formats some of which were the very ones that I was trying to move away from. For example, the rendition at the London *Indonesia Kontemporare* 2013 festival was, from the audience perspective, very successful in terms of performance, yet from my point of view as a researcher these performances failed to fulfil the aims set for this project. The present chapter aims to offer several reasons why this was the case.

Each performance of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* has, in some way, explored my process of embodiment of a select number of female *topeng* masks that were discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, the aesthetic choices and the

theatrical modes put in place for this performance are not radical departures from the Balinese traditional formats which define the genre. How it differs is that it offers an illusion of similarity in terms of the recognisable components of the Balinese culture (such as the use of the traditional *topeng* structure), yet, it has been designed in such a way that it also explores new territory within this traditional, patriarchal *topeng* framework. Thus, there is an attempt here to subvert the relationship between power, gender and agency. This is achieved by my female body responding to new masks that potentially tell European narrative tropes employing new *topeng* choreographic languages. The gestures that I developed for the masks were akin to Balinese dance with its emphasis on balance, beauty and the *alus/ keras* axis but they were made up as a response to the conversation between performer and the mask as an object and the mask as a character.

Personal engagement with a mask coded as female and deliberately choosing a story that positioned women in a narrative role, as an active subject and not as a passive object, allowed me to move beyond the hierarchical frameworks of traditional *topeng* and its training environment. In this sense, feminist strategies of devising, for example Aston's treatment of fairy tales (1999: 151- 153) all assist in the navigation of the politics of hierarchy within *topeng*.

As I have identified, I was committed to using the generic structure and linear format of *topeng* in terms of the order of masks presented and, in so doing, I was devising in a way that, according to Harris, involves 're-iteration and re-interpretation of pre-existing traditions, discourses, images and signifying conventions which in themselves could be said to have the status of "texts"' (Harris 1999: 18-19). By using the idea of the mask as the 'text' what became apparent in my own work is that in here, I could too resist the authority of a 'canon'. This process of devising, claims Aston, is 'especially important to women who are marginalised by dominant culture and theatre and therefore have the most to gain from 'authoring' their own work' (Aston 1999: 143).

As Haddon and Milling assert 'copying led[s] to difference' (2006: 220) and whilst there are many similarities between my intercultural *topeng* performance and a Balinese *topeng*, I am deliberately giving myself as a performer more power and agency by occupying a female mask. Immediately I am therefore contesting assumptions about authority, authenticity and originality which have interesting repercussions. As Haddon and Milling claim:

In much contemporary devised performance, the appropriation, reworking or deployment of sources results in the shaking loose of both familiar meaning and habituated meaning-making strategies. The refusal to proffer any straightforward, 'given' meaning is intended and political. (Haddon and Milling 2006: 206)

Using female masks was the starting point for devising new and different strategies for performance. What is unique about *topeng* is that the masks are the initial

building blocks; every idea comes from the mask. When those masks are not traditionally male, a new set of options and indeed obstacles arise which this chapter has charted. The mask is the marker and container of codification and the codes of representation with all its politics, cultural traits and histories contained within it. When these are changed or replaced with new narratives and characters there is a shift. This is made evident when an individual performer has an individual response to her mask, which changes her body language, rhythm, tempo and musicality of the body; when the mask brings forth utterances, sounds, words that are deeply invested and considered on an individual level. Different performers embody the same mask in different ways and this is significant, as when notions of self, self-hood and self-representation are in play can be a fruitful point for devising process to start and where interesting material can be gathered. Due to the role that the individual 'self' plays in the making process of any devised performance claims related to notions of authority, authenticity and ownership are challenged.⁶⁴ What becomes interesting is the notion of re-presenting where the aim is not merely to present the same, but to re-present something altogether different.

⁶⁴ In any *topeng* piece, as I have suggested, because of the mask work there is doubling, different persona and nuanced versions of oneself. In addition there is a shifting sense of presence and slippage between selves when the performer is seen on stage taking the masks on and off. Plus there is always the self in relation to others, that is, the audience. One could suggest that the varieties of selfhood, self-playing and self-representation that post-dramatic devised theatre offers, have always been present in Balinese *topeng*.

Returning to Harris's definition of devised theatre, which implies a layering and re-layering of pre-existing material, locating the mask within a traditional and familiar genre, whilst giving it my personal cultural interpretation allowed me to expose some of the political tenets that the research explored (i.e. the absence of women and the exclusion of a female perspective).

Haddon and Milling articulate the importance of this as a strategy, where the idea of a 'text' can be replaced by the image of a mask:

It is to be remembered that any texts that are appropriated are, themselves, already representations. Appropriations, therefore, are representations of representations, and where such a doubling is enacted critically, the means of both representations will be laid bare, not in order to provide authoritative representation, but to unveil representations' mechanisms. (Haddon and Milling 2006.207)

Because I was working solo and with a story that was not well known in Bali, I did not have to consult or seek approval from my Balinese teachers. Significantly, because the story was not originally Balinese, I did not have to align with Balinese gender types and could rely on my own cultural interpretation to bring the masks to life within the story. Also, following Aston's practical devising strategy (1999: 151) I could I could apply a feminist approach in or to the story that I had chosen, compare this re-telling to the original story and seek out the implications of this re-telling which facilitates a 'critical thinking about agency and subject positioning' (Aston 1999: 152).

Conventions of the drama: 'Aesthetic Logic as a whole'

As Emigh has pointed out '*topeng* is not only a dance theatre, it is also a story-telling theatre, rich in verbal interplay' (Emigh 1996: 127). Until now, much of the focus of the thesis has related to the 'dance' aspect of the masks and how the physicalisation and the ways in which its choreography has been learned through an as/in triad of training, performance and ritual. There has been little discussion of the 'drama' within *topeng* and the dramatic components which alongside the masks define the genre. In terms of dramaturgy, I had to break down the structural components of *topeng* and explore a range of 'subterranean features' (Barbe 2012) and this process began by *listing* those qualities and specific aspects and attributes of *topeng* that inform the genre so that I could collate and collage them together, but not necessarily without offering a direct replication. In the development of my performance I consider what Zarrilli terms the 'structured units and their requirements within the aesthetic logic as a whole' (Zarrilli 2009: 113).

An initial response to the suggestion of an aesthetic logic is to align these 'units' with the various layers and levels that are present in a *topeng* show and fit into a simplistic whole. In certain ways, these units have similar functional characteristics to *topeng* masks and what this means for me as a performer is that there can be a lot of freedom to improvise within each 'unit' as each mask speaks and acts freely

according to their character's role and function. While the formal structure of *topeng* is prescribed Rubin and Sedana assert:

A performance may look rigidly conformist to a fixed method or technique ... but in fact an individual performer has enormous scope to interpret and shape a given performance; the performer's personality is not lost, in spite of a complex, traditional framework within which he operates. (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 112)

In any *topeng* performance the mask work demands an enormous amount of improvisation. The performance relies on each performer knowing and understanding the character of their mask. Emigh conveys how improvisation and the *topeng* masks function in the story, the psyche of the performer and the character that is distinctly unique to the mask. In his own version of Little Red Riding Hood⁶⁵ he describes his own experience as a *topeng* performer as follows:

I'm not sure what is going to transpire here actually. I've done this show all over the world and there is no text to it. I have a notion of what is going to happen but often I am wrong about that. The order of the masks is not arbitrary. As far as I could I am making an adaptation of a Balinese way of showing the characters and the order you might receive them. (Emigh 2009)

This aligns with whenever I have performed *topeng* and taken on a spoken role, either in Bali or in England. I have never rehearsed with any co-performers and, in general, such a practice is almost unheard of.

⁶⁵ Later I will briefly describe this performance.

Presenting the Narrative

Every *topeng* performance hinges on specific conventions in terms of the mask which can be understood, primarily, through the order of the structured 'units' which I shall later describe. Also, a *topeng* performance relies on the narrative presented. As Rubin and Sedana comment:

The performance always belongs to a genre of masked theatre rather than play based theatre; the performance is identified by the genre rather than by a play. A play is at work in the text and plot details can vary, but this is secondary to the genre. (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 116)

One of the distinguishing features that all *topeng* performances share is that the story is sourced from the *babad*; the genealogical chronicles of dynastic histories that exist throughout Indonesia in written or oral forms. They tell of the great battles involving 'local kings, clan leaders and other heroes' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 42). The most typical stories of *babad* are the *Babad Dalam* which tell the story of the major Balinese kings, for example Gaja Madah, ruler of the Majapahit Empire. The philosophical messages they convey show how the forces of "*dharma*, (meaning 'righteousness, justice and truth') 'out-win *adharma* that which destroys these principles' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 43).

As Helen Creese asserts, 'the study of Balinese *babad* literature is one of the most neglected areas of Balinese Studies' (Creese 1991: 237). Hinzler claims that the most important function of *babad* is the religious worship of ancestors (Hinzler

1976: 47) and that the word's meaning relates to the image of a 'fishing net' (Hinzler 1976: 42). This suggests nets or lines that bind generations of family history.⁶⁶ There is strong evidence to suggest that land, family and history are deeply entwined into the formation of a specific Balinese identity and that this is represented within religious ritual and playfully embedded into the stories (Emigh 1996: 127). Scholars, such as Worsley, have also suggested that these stories are 'ahistorical' and deeply embedded in myth and legend (Worsley 1972: vi). With *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* I have engaged in both interpretations, embracing the fact that this narrative is directly related to issues surrounding the concept of genealogy and that it is also related to legends or myth. These readings further explain my choice of *story* as a narrative springboard on which to base my *topeng* story.

However Little Red Riding Hood is a story most often associated with pre-pubescence and emergent sexuality so the choice of this fairy tale needs further explanation. The reason for choosing Little Red Riding Hood is two-fold; I was motivated to explore a more dynamic staging and distinct means of animating the *Topeng Tua Perempuan* 'Mrs. Old Man' mask. This was partly born from frustration and partly as a reaction to this mask's confined choreography, which as I have detailed, is always in relation to her husband and never developed on her own merit. As I indicated in my chapter dedicated to defining a bespoke training, my

⁶⁶ Other names and meanings suggest that the stories are literally named after the different regions of Bali which they represent and originate from (Ballinger and Dibia 2004: 42).

aging body and notions of temporality have become increasingly interesting to me therefore the Mrs. Old Man mask presents new opportunities and ways of exploring the performance of age. Another reason to explore the *Topeng Tua Perempuan* mask was due to the process of 'homing' my practice within a Devon context and landscape. As I explored my ancestors and lineage from an autobiographical perspective, I became more fascinated in the concept of my own contribution as a mother to this blood line. The role and function of older women in general (and more particularly within my own family) became of interest as I considered my ancestry. What has given the performance more nuance and depth is that the process of making the performance and my doctoral research generally had to be halted in February 2013 as I embarked on maternity leave whilst pregnant with my daughter. The continuance of my PhD studies was reliant on the childcare that my mother could provide in the form of being 'Grandma' and so the intertwining facets of life, research, relationships and the stories told in *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* interconnect. Remembering the metaphorical image of the 'net' (described earlier in relation to the *Babad*) I therefore had something personal and poignant to add to a retelling of this story.

Since 1977 this story became a canonical piece of performance within the small world of Western *topeng*, due to John Emigh's based on the same fairy tale which he called: *Little Red Riding Shawl*. Knowing that a performance using this range of female *topeng* masks would be outside of traditional practice in Bali, the other

reason to choose this specific fairy tale was to offer an alternative version of this performance.

Emigh performed *Little Red Riding Shawl* to a wide range of audiences North American audiences at 'parties, schools, old-age homes, mental hospitals, at anthropological conferences and theatre conferences' (Emigh 1996: 266). Most of these events were in the USA however Emigh has also toured internationally. The *Little Red Riding Shawl* show is sometimes revived and performed periodically for student lecture-demonstrations and academic conference events in America and internationally. In his work, Emigh's believes that the masks are of universal appeal and that his version is 'adding significance, questioning virtues, inverting values' (1996: 264). In addition, my aim for this re-telling is to further explore this story from a Western female perspective thus adding an alternative voice forty years after its debut as a *topeng*.

Regeneration of story-telling in *topeng*

In Bali, there is an acceptance that a classical tradition evolves and that the 'appreciation of classical art[s] consistently requires regeneration, continuity and revitalization to ensure that it does not fade or stagnate' (Geriya 2012: 19).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ A distinction needs to be drawn between the classical period of painting which took place in Bali during the reign of King *Dalam Waturenggong* in his capital in Klungkung (Geriya 2012:19) and the classical period that refers to performance, specifically *topeng*, which denotes the previous century, during the reign of Gaja Madah and the Majapahit empire.

Throughout this thesis I have asserted that tradition re-invents itself within the *topeng* genre and that within tradition small changes occur that reflect the times and interests of the audience. A *topeng* performance is never singly authored; they originate from the *babad* stories and are re-enacted time after time. Even though one dancer may be renowned for a good telling of a particular story, he would never become defined by his performance in the way that Emigh has become associated with *Little Red Riding Shawl*. It is more typical that he would be known as a good performer with a certain mask, like for example Ida Bagus Alit has this reputation with the mask *topeng keras*. Each *topeng* performance in Bali is like a re-enactment in that it should aim 'to artistically and creatively *'interpret'* so that the artwork is (re)made to be original and not to replicate or 'slavishly' repeat it' (Schneider, 2011: 13, italics in original). Rather than aiming for an exact copy or reiteration of any previous event, in Bali it is generally accepted that whilst the basic story structure will remain, all of the surrounding details may change (including the circumstances, the characters involved and especially the jokes and topical additions told in a particular performance). When Emigh performed *Little Red Riding Shawl* in the West as a proxy for the type of story that one would find in Balinese *topeng* this gave Emigh considerable license in his telling of this well-known European fairy tale. Like myself, Emigh's primary audience is Western; however Emigh demonstrates his knowledge of the *topeng* genre by explaining how a Balinese audience would probably know a version of the story being performed already. He suggests that:

What they are looking for is what is virtuosic or extraordinary about the dancing, what are the twists on the tale that are

adapted to the present moment. The story is always about the past but the performances are about the here and now. The world of the past comes to meet you. (Emigh 1987)

Geertz suggests that any re-interpretation of a story by a Balinese performer stems from a desire for empowerment and status of the commissioning family, be it political or otherwise (1980: 161). Clearly there are always agendas and other concerns that are manifest and these grant the *topeng* performer permission to adapt, change, interpret and playfully appropriate many of the typical features that distinguish a *topeng* performance. These features may relate to the humour of the performance in the jokes told, the incorporation of gossip or the amount of stage time of one particular clown. Alternatively another typical feature of a *topeng* performance is the weight of 'the message' and how this could be told, either through philosophy, political anecdote or direct address.

Returning to my own work on this tale, Orenstein asks: 'A girl, a wolf, a meeting in the woods. Who doesn't know the story of Little Red Riding Hood?' (Orenstein 2002: 3). She continues by observing that 'most people don't know the tale as well as they think ... New stories have been made out of the old, and its original meanings are now buried' (Orenstein 2002: 3). Whilst it may be true that audiences in the West have a vague memory of the Little Red Riding Hood story and that in Bali it is the role and function of the *topeng* performer to illumine these lost and hidden messages, seeking similarity does not imply equivalence and the retelling of an old story does not automatically translate to a Balinese *topeng*. It is

a common trait amongst good story-tellers to draw out the story in whatever means possible. As Rubin and Sedana explain:

The *topeng* performer must use, follow and select a fragment of Babad as the main narrative source and, at the same time, is expected to make appropriate dramatic embellishment, enrichment and modification as long as the new arrangements do not violate the main source of existing Babad. (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 116)

Issues of Translation

The challenge in creating *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* is that whilst Balinese *topeng* masked-dance-drama is a very traditional and culturally regulated format, one has to make it somehow accessible so that it can travel, be mobilised and understood, either for an English audience, or simply, as in my case, for my own personal benefit, to enable understanding and empowerment. For want of a better word, I frame my analysis around notions of 'translation' whilst at the same time acknowledging that I am always working within the context of "*sama sama tetapi tidak sama*, (meaning the 'same but not the same')" cultural context. Often, Translation Studies predominantly refers to pure linguistic studies, where equivalence is sought or 'like for like' and here a different use of the term is being employed; one that extends into the arena of performance.

Any attempt to translate a *topeng* piece as a performance *per se* creates problems as it is the 'presence' of live performance that destabilises any assumption of fixed meanings that a textual approach for example may offer. My interest is in the live action of the performing body and the mask, which in combination with the

accompanying dances and mantra is at the centre of any translation process. In the absence of any written score, they constitute the 'text'. The animation of the mask and my performing body indicates that culture becomes a practice of constructed re-interpretations, where notions of culture and identity are dynamic and mobile. This idea is supported by Bassnett as she states that:

Today the movement of people around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language to another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator. (Bassnett 2002: 2-5)

Hindu high priest Ida Pedanda Ketut Kencana Singsara advises, 'the depth or shallowness of a translation depends on the knowledge of the translator' (quoted in Jenkins and Catra 2011: 11). This statement echoes the need for cultural understanding of the source culture as expressed by Zarrilli (2013: 34) and much of the present debate within translation studies is situated in the negotiation of this complex terrain. If one understands translation as a 'like for like' this is immediately problematic as there is never a literal 'like for like' in two different cultural contexts. No language, textual or body based practice can ever be separated from its specific performative context and the notion of 'likeness' is intrinsically subjective. The etymology of translation implies 'to carry across' or 'to (re)move from one place to another,' so that what happens within the space of that metaphorical journey is my main interest.

Turner has indicated that of all ‘the possible meanings being generated in a performance, we interpret what we see, hear and experience in relation to who we are and what we know’ (Turner 2004: 82). During the devising process of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* working with this notion of ‘same but different’ I have found myself occupying the role of both translator and interpreter. Therein lays the dual function of seeing and understanding what is seen, alongside making comprehensive sense of it. Ultimately there is a ‘blurring [of] the boundaries between translation, version, and adaptation within an all-comprehensive, yet fairly vague, category of cultural (re)creation of meaning(s)’ (Bigliuzzi *et al* 2013: 2). Becker’s notion of ‘language acts’ (Becker 1995: 18) is useful as it offers a process based on the idea that translation necessitates a situation where the end is the beginning, not a final product but rather an initial point of departure ‘towards the source as one unfolds the complex process of cultural transfer’ (Becker 1995: 18). Against the theoretical backdrop of ‘language acts’ I would like draw a parallel with the Balinese philosophy of translation. Ida Pedanda states that:

[In translation] the responsibility is to dig down into the deeper meaning of the philosophy, so that it can be turned into action. Not just understanding the concept but using it your life. When I dig more deeply inside myself through inner debate and questioning, that is when I found true meaning, the meaning of the meaning. If you dig inside yourself, there is action, the action of digging, which is useful. (Ida Pedanda cited in Jenkins and Catra 2011: 11)

Relating these two different ideas of language acts and personal excavation one can see that translation becomes a subjective, constantly evolving process. When applied within an intercultural performance practice this allows space to wake up, not just the body, but old memories, thoughts and ideas that in combination shape, store, retrieve and communicate ideas; an idea that is further continued by Becker by his shift from the idea of language to that of 'linguaging'. He proposes that:

A language is essentially a dictionary and grammar. *Linguaging* on the other hand is context shaping. *Linguaging* both shapes and is shaped by context. *Linguaging* can be understood as taking old text from memory and reshaping them into present contexts' (Becker, italics in original, 1995: 9)

In the case of Ida Pedanda, this idea can be applied in the context of taking an ancient text written on a lontar in kawi, old Javanese, and making it relevant to a contemporary audience. Similarly this understanding of linguaging could be made manifest in new *topeng* performances that are robust in their connection to Balinese Babad (the 'dictionary and grammar') but different in the sense of context shaping by other factors such as if the story is completely new. Most significantly for the purposes of this chapter and my discussion on performance, an example of linguaging in the performing body could mean taking an old choreographic gesture and improvising a new structure around it, in the same way that I Madé Djimat did in his creation of the choreography of Sugara Manis/ Mrs.Old Man. He took features of the dance *joged nyintan*, which is an old court dance rarely seen or performed and combined them with gestures from of the character *Condong*, the maid-servant in *Gambu*, Bali's classical dance- drama-opera. Returning to how

I have attempted to translate as a process of languaging a selection of new female masks in *Little Red Riding Hood* I can claim that in terms of choreography the attention to breath, slow movement and an internal sense of dynamism and use of energy can be transferred into other movements that do not originate from *topeng*. Similarly many of the new gestures and movement vocabularies can be explored from the perspective of 'bad translation' (Sa'at 2006: 272) which its references to Western iconography. As a creator, the possibilities multiply when I allow myself to play 'just outside' the boundary of 'good' translation which is often sought by a 'like for like' translation approach.

Furthermore, I am invested in what Indonesian writer Goenawan Mohamed refers to as 'linguistic schizophrenia' (Goenawan 2003: 49) as he marks a distinction between the ways in which private/intimate/ domestic language differs from the social/public spheres. In Indonesia, it is noteworthy to see those situations where the national language of *bahasa Indonesia* is used at the expense of all its' hundreds of regional and ethnic languages and local dialects, which are side-lined to the point of diminished usage. However rather than considering this as a purist loss of tradition, Goenawan believes that this can be a positive and creative space for his generation because this tendency for bilingualism gives him claim to call Indonesians a nation of stammerers' (Goenawan 2003: 44). A stammer, usually perceived quite negatively, is a sharp or suspended inhalation, a breath or word caught in a moment of pause; for the intercultural performer the metaphor of a stammer provides a rich opportunity. Disregarding the spoken word, a

metaphorical stammer offers a moment of irupture and an in-between space that a body holds which allows one to re-position, re-adjust, re-align. I suggest that this schizophrenia, this embodied bilingualism, this sense of doubling, encapsulates some of the powerful ambiguities for the intercultural performer. The raw exposition of this stammering 'linguistic schizophrenia' is fruitful and choreographer Nancy Stark Smith's example articulates my position as she describes her process in the following way:

Where you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the Gap. The more I improvise, the more I'm convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps – this momentary suspension of reference point – that comes the unexpected and much sought after 'original' material. It's 'original' because its origin is the current moment and because it comes from outside our usual frame of reference. (Smith 1987: 64)

Adaptation Strategies for Intercultural Performance

Pavis's model of adaptation in intercultural performances is useful in seeking a strategy to advance any translation process of *topeng*. Capitalising on the language employed by Freud to analyse dreams (Turner 2004: 86), Pavis describes ways of 'condensing' and 'displacing' material within intercultural performance (Pavis 2003: 281) and below I offer a summary.

Condensing: this means that one can focus on one aspect (i.e. from the source culture) and the rest is ignored. One tries to encapsulate the whole by reducing it to a set of selected references that one can make sense of. The disconnected part

or parts somehow reveal some sense of meaning, even if that meaning does not have any one single meaning. An example of this process will be the way in which one gesture from a Balinese choreography can be learnt and that phrase can then be re-applied within another performative score. I have used this technique to create choreography; when I lift my elbow higher than my shoulder and align the palm of my lifted hand with my eye on its furthest most aspect, I create a space under the arm, adjacent to my hip, which I can play with to make other gestures. That 'empty space' can be filled or moved into. Similarly, when mask making, I could take just one feature of a Balinese mask, for example the tendency to define the eye with a downward forty-five degree cut sloping down into the eye socket and enhanced by painting a red eye liner. I could just take that one feature alone and this would be a 'condensation'

Displacing: An unfamiliar aspect of something from the source target performance is replaced or compared it to something similar, i.e. one can liken it to something else. It is possible to exemplify this process by referring to the time when I first started watching *topeng*. At that time I had no idea what was happening but the clowns reminded me of Commedia dell 'Arte and through that connection I made some sort of sense, however misplaced, of what I was watching.

Whilst both condensing and displacing promote a sense of adoption from the 'source' text, and this is a useful adaptation strategy for intercultural performance,

there is potential here to allow for misrepresentation, misunderstanding and circumvent some of the conditions of colonial discourses that I am rejecting. What is of importance is that whichever route one follows, one embraces knowledge in its fullest capacity so that the 'target' culture is not overloaded with unfamiliar aspects of the 'source' culture in ways that impose 'complete transformations...for the benefit of the receiver' (Said 2003: 76).

What is beneficial about this strategy in my analysis of Balinese masked dance drama is that there is a difference between an intercultural performance that uses *topeng* masks as a theatrical object and an intercultural performance that calls itself *topeng*. The former is using the masks as a stand-alone item to add dramatic effect or for whatever purpose and this can be considered as an example of 'condensing'. Even if the mask was playing or representing the Balinese character and not re-interpreted, this would still be taking one single aspect and giving it a sole focus. Whereas displacing is the adoption of the 'whole picture' and this is the adaptation strategy that I am employing for *Little Red Riding Hood*. In terms of my performance, according to Pavis's formula, I am displacing as I am following a traditional format. I have based this *topeng* on a well-known story within my own culture, not because my target audience would not understand the Balinese story of the king of Blabangan but because I am interested to use the story of Little Red Riding Hood to emphasise a particular message that is lost or forgotten within the culture of my target audience. Thus as well as taking those physical and visually tangible attributes of the genre, I am also taking a functional aspect of *topeng*.

'Structured Units'; The Order of the Masks

In *topeng* there is always an order in which the masks present themselves, which start very strongly with the *Penglembar*; these are the introductory set of masks and their associated dances. As the first of the *Penglembar* the performance starts with *topeng keras*, followed by *topeng tua* and then the story is initiated by narrators of various names termed *penesar*. Then there is a series of clowning characters to lighten the mood, often followed by priests and officials who further elaborate different angles of the story. The performance end is indicated by the rituals of *Siddha Kariya*.⁶⁸

It is extremely likely that most Western versions aiming to directly borrow or adopt the genre of *topeng* will include these elements as a basic structure as this helps to 'stake out the means of playing back and forth between the distant past and the immediate present through modulation of the degree of artifice used' (Emigh 1996: 127). Performers swiftly encompass both the world of the present and the world of the past – 'a time that lives on in performance' (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 13). This is important as is the idea that the performer must unfold different layers of understanding within the story as they move swiftly from *Sekala*, the seen world

⁶⁸ The order of the masks can be seen and explained visually in my short film 'Topeng and Temple Ceremonies' (See Appendix 1). I invite the viewer to note the emphasis placed on the order of events and the critical ending of *Siddha Kariya*.

of humans, and *Niskala*, the unseen world of deified ancestors (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 12).

The Introductory *Penglembar* Masks

All masks to perform on the stage area enter through the *langse* curtain⁶⁹ and the first is *topeng keras patih*. As Coldiron asserts, 'it is the mask that determines the performer's level of energy in executing this choreography and the more powerful (*keras*) the mask's expression, the higher level of energy required' (Coldiron 2004: 177). Its bulging eyes, the concentrated, stern brow all give the impression of power. As previously discussed, the traditional mask that I am trained to dance is Ida Bagus Alit's version of the *patih keras* mask, *topeng keras Gaja Madah* which is more '*keras*' than any other mask in any *patih keras* collection. Described by Rubin and Sedana, the general function of this initial mask is to show an 'aristocratic knight or hero in the story' or as 'a chief army officer' (Rubin and Sedana 2007: 112-113). The first mask also emphasises Bali's fighting past and all the great battles fought.

Following a traditional order of masks, in my performance of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* the first mask to enter the stage was *Ibu Berani* (as seen in Image 11).

This mask is my female version of *topeng keras Gaja Madah* (which can be seen in

⁶⁹ Often there is neither a stage area nor a curtain. In this event the performer utilises the space available and makes the start of the dance known by fluttering his fingers, which also has the desired effect of inviting the gods from *Niskala* into *Sekala*.

Image 4). Wanting to capitalise on the role of the strong, warrior hero this mask became the only representation of the woodcutter, who in this version is female, and who later in the narrative slays and kills the wolf.



Image 11: Tiffany Strawson performing *topeng Ibu Berani* as the woodcutter, in *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood*, Autumn 2012, South Brent Village Hall. Photo credit: Oliver Link.

In previous chapters I described the feeling of dancing with masks in the *keras* style and how there was a weighted, almost suspended, waiting power in my stillness positions. In the performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* these postures and slow, strong gestures were lower than previously with my *Gaja Madah* mask and paused in readiness to strike. In animating this mask and creating the character of the woodcutter, I also liberated my arms from the codified shoulder lock and strove to move my elbows to go in alternative directions, incorporating some of the circles and rotations more commonly seen in Balinese female choreography. The result

was that I felt that the movements were more akin to martial arts practices and this supported the need for this mask to maintain '*keras-ness*'.

The next mask to emerge from behind the curtain was *topeng tua*. In Bali, having established the arena of kings and warriors from the ancient past, the atmosphere is then lightened and the audience is encouraged to pity and laugh at a character who is in the late autumn of his life (or possibly even the early winter) but who still fancies himself as being talented and full of skill. Grandparents and elders always live with the family in Bali, so *topeng tua* relieves the social pressures and tensions that accompany this close proximity. Ida Bagus Alit describes this mask as 'an old and distinguished former *patih* (prime-minister) who, although aged, possesses the power of an experienced warrior and the dignity of a statesman' (Coldiron 2004: 178). This character's age is emphasised by being out of breath after his dance, he is confused, out of balance and he slightly stumbles. Plus he has difficulty in locating the source of his itching body lice which he then struggles to focus on and see in his own hand. These gestures are then followed by pats on the heads of children, waves and kisses blown to the audience upon his leaving the stage. Throughout my research, I have found that these gestures and traits are repeated and similar whoever the dancer wearing this mask may be and, interestingly, Emigh offers a similar description of I Nyoman Kakul's performance (Emigh 1996: 123). Anom 'Baris' Putra, a very well-known dancer of this mask, encourages his students to speak an internal monologue throughout the dance that includes asking 'where am I? Do I want to go home? Where is home? Where has the market gone?' He

suggests this helps to show the Old Man's confusion. *Topeng Tua* also spits phlegm and wipes his brow due to all the effort this involves. Performed well, he is a very popular mask and one that the majority of the audience often seems to relate to.

Grandma has the potential to be developed as a pivotal lead 'as the one person with real wisdom' (Emigh 1996: 266). This was because, in the context of *topeng Tua Perempuan* 'Mrs. Old Man' there was the opportunity to experiment as a performer with other and different ways of giving her a choreographic 'voice' or level of expression that I had not been able to explore previously in Bali. In the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Grandma gets eaten by the wolf but I did not want my Grandma to become a frightened victim and wanted her instead to be the feisty character of Emigh's performance who throws biscuits into her audience as gestures of friendliness. By making her feisty, friendly and not afraid I was trying to achieve a contrasting set of characteristics to *topeng Tua Perempuan* and expand the choreography and humour of this mask. In a further attempt to give this senior figure a more prominent role, Grandma attempts to engage the audience with her side of the story. My *topeng tua perempuan* mask was always intended to become Grandma (see Image 12). In Bali the *topeng tua perempuan* mask is a full mask and as such does not speak. The half-mask that I own and have documented in this thesis is unusual and specialised as it is a deviation from the original design. I deliberately commissioned this mask to be made differently because this mask needed to speak (that is, to generate sounds and articulate words).



Image 12: Tiffany Strawson performing *Topeng Tua Perempuan, Mrs. Old Man, as Grandma* at SOAS for the *Indonesian Kontempore* festival 2013. Photo Credit: Charlie Hughes.

However Grandma's voice was extremely challenging to find. At first all she could do was make utterances which although qualifies as vocal, it made her sound weak, inarticulate and senile. For the purposes of this performance, she had a dramatic function to fulfil and had to speak but she did not appear to want to do so. Instead this mask wanted to speak very little. There was a conflict of interests between what I wanted and what the mask could do, or rather a striking disagreement between our different agendas.

Allowing a voice to develop out of repeated physicalisation, eventually the utterance distilled into something more concrete I found what I call 'my little bird voice' where there is an emphasis of the pronunciation of words beginning with the letter 'w'. This emerged after asking lots of questions all in reference to the

character of Little Red Riding Hood such as 'Why did I let her go?', 'What was I thinking?', 'When will she be back?'. There was a return to Anom's internal monologue, asking and then voicing lots of rhetorical, alliterated questions to my audience in this high pitched voice. This was quite melodic and a contrast to the more direct storytelling modes of the later characters who would narrate.

What started with quite a small sparrow-like character soon became a cross between a mother hen and a squawking pelican. The difficulty was that my portrayal of Grandma was becoming more infantile and stupid, more 'clown-like' however I was not finding any sense of female strength in this mask. In the performance at the *Indonesia Kontempore* festival at SOAS this was particularly true as I was unable to dance and physically demonstrate my former skills.⁷⁰ However the Indonesian audience loved this character and responded very favourably I could crack jokes in Indonesian and show that Grandma could be funny. However this performance also raised a number of challenges which will be discussed.

When a performer meets a mask, she is assessing where and how there can be a meeting place. In finding Grandma's movement vocabulary I was unable to look at this mask in a neutral capacity, as I might have when meeting any other mask, my ability to know and understand this mask was already coloured and influenced by

⁷⁰ I had health problems following birth.

my former knowledge of its existence in Bali. I therefore sought out actions and gestures that were, from a Balinese perspective, woman centred. Therefore making *canang* 'offerings' was a movement gesture that I originally explored to find my 'Balinese Grandma' but this only highlighted an important issue; Grandma is not Balinese so this activity soon changed into other more applicable actions. The first was knitting, where I would get the wool all in a muddle, and use the knitting needles to wave and emphasise my point, and the second was embroidering a tapestry. This activity was performed seated on a small stool. I made a big gesture of pulling the thread; it was calm, exhibitiv of skill, patience and experience...until I pricked my finger. At that point associations from other fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty, would literally 'weave', 'spin' and filter into the visual and imaginative frame.

From the perspective of traditional *topeng* in terms of placing her as a *Penglembar* mask after Mrs. Old Man's entrance and the introductory dance, she has served her purpose. In Bali no words would have been spoken at this point as nobody knows anything about the story and none of the introductory characters portrayed will reappear. Perhaps as much as a third of the performance time has already elapsed yet it is now, as Emigh explains that 'a world has been introduced, and a range of human response demonstrated' (Emigh 1996: 125). Yet, in my performance of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* the character Grandma reappears several times and in doing so disrupts traditional convention aiming to show that that Grandma is worthy of several returns.

Penesar; the story-tellers

There are two story-tellers in a Balinese *topeng*, often depicted as brothers, the eldest one is *Penesar Kelihan* who is more 'conceited' (Coldrion 2004: 179, Rubin and Sedana 2011: 113) than the younger one, known as *Penesar Cenikan*. These two characters are known collectively as the *Penesar* and they traverse through a number of 'different personae' (Emigh 1996: 127). Although they often appear together in a *topeng* performance, each may appear as a solo story-teller as well. In my own work I am not so much interested in their relationship but in the role they play, or rather how they deliver the story, which is in various languages ranging from Balinese, Indonesian, Kawi and sometimes English. The purpose of this is to further unite the worlds of the play between past and present in a 'sort of foray across boundaries of time and association' (Emigh 1996: 125).

My version of the *Penesar Kelihan* mask has taken a variety of manifestations. Often this character has been robust and crude drawing the audience's attention to the desire and lust felt between Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. At other times, the storyteller has been a heightened version of myself without any attempt to become a character. In this piece there was the opportunity for my storytellers to be women. Traditionally the storyteller's 'bearing is proud, his voice commanding, his laughter hearty, his gestures and dancing flamboyant' (Emigh 1996: 157). Female characters could be just as pompous and proud and well suited to the role. In my performance I used two masks from a set of three, which I had

originally created in 2010 in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit as an experiment that represented versions of me, 'Tiffany', as I negotiated getting older (See images 13, 14 and 15). I made these masks soon after the *kecantikaan* masks, as part of another but complementary set that explored womanhood.

To find the character of *Penesar Kelihan* in rehearsal, I used all of these 'Tiffany' masks intermittently depending on how lively the play of the story-teller, but soon ceased using the older two; the physicalisation of seventy five year old version (Image 15) was too similar to Grandma and the fifty five year old mask (Image 14) was too slow, thoughtful and got easily side-tracked. The *penesar* role demanded more energy and pace as she has to frequently get up and down and so I chose the mask that represented the more youthful version of myself (as can be seen in Image 13). Also by the time *Penesar* enters the stage, no words have been spoken and the story has not yet begun, so a change of pace is dramatically necessary.



Image13: *Topeng Tiffany* (Age 35) made by Tiffany Strawson in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit¹



Image14: *Topeng Tiffany* (Age 55) made by Tiffany Strawson in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit



Image 15: *Topeng Tiffany* (Age 75) made by Tiffany Strawson in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit

I would momentarily like to detour from my critique of the masks as structural units, and the performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* to share the example of another troupe of female *topeng* performers, *Topeng Sakti* whom I briefly discussed in my thesis introduction. This detour is relevant as it highlights a difficulty in moving away from *topeng's* codified and prescriptive patterns and performance habits. Although the performers of *Sakti* 'are donning male masks

and assuming male personae to escape female subordination' (Diamond 2008: 264) in practice, as Palermo reports, they were always pretending to be men and although 'the women performers had the opportunity to speak about themselves through the impersonation of the male roles, they mostly tried to be as much like men as possible' (Palermo 2009: 47). *Topeng Sakti* illustrates how difficult it is to seek out new interpretations of masked characterisation for women. One reason is the tension between the desire to be free from our *topeng* trained and enculturated performing bodies that are embedded with the pattern of performing as men and the lack of female alternatives. In many performances when I performed the *penesar* storyteller in *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* (as can be seen in Image 16) regardless of where I was or which version of the 'Tiffany' mask I was performing with, the characterisation became manly; the voice became deeper, my body became bulky and *keras*, the elbows automatically started to rise ready to perform an *ansal* movement as I started chanting in the familiar style of Ida Bagus Putra, whose performance I had seen so many times that I had started to imitate and reproduce in my own performance.



Image 16: Tiffany Strawson performing *Topeng Penesar*,
South Brent Village Hall, Autumn 2012. Photo credit: Oliver Link.

This is a culturally coded masculine and all I can say is that at that stage of the research, as much as I would have liked my audience to read my body as explicitly playing a female storyteller, I was aware of my 'masculine' female performing body. I am aware that I do not have a specifically masculine body *per se* but I struggle to leave behind my *keras* training with all its vertical lines, angles and sharpness.

Balinese Clowning: Grup Gedebong Goyang

Seeking alternatives to an embodied memory is a challenge and as a female performer, I have had to turn to other examples for inspiration. The performance company *Grup Gedebong Goyang* use comedy as a way of penetrating a very

particular style of Balinese clowning, which also enables me to return now to the order that masks are presented in traditional *topeng* particularly as the next masks to enter the stage, after the *Penglembar*, are the *bondres* or 'clowns'.

Grup Gedebong Goyang's first appearance on stage at the beginning of their show *Suud Merjor-joran* parodies the entrance of *legong* dancers, who are typically young, nubile and enter single file. Ironically, in contrast, the Gedebongs enter slightly clumsily whilst parading their lavish costumes and make-up: an "over-the-top" version of *pakaiaan adat*, the traditional attire of women attending temple ceremonies. Their motive at first seems purely to make people laugh and create a sense of complicité as they sing, dance and greet the audience with a harmonious "*Om Swastiyastu* (a way of polite and religious 'greeting')". This rapidly becomes discordant, goes wrong, the dance fails, and they break out into bizarre air guitar-like movements and other inappropriate gestures. The illusion of tradition is established and then immediately disrupted in playful silliness that makes the performers look ridiculous. Initially, the audience is confused but then they see the performers introducing themselves using funny, banana names and revealing small, penis-shaped bananas from their cleavages as they explain why they are called Grup Gedebong Goyang. The audience increasingly understands that there is a group of women who understand tradition, convention, and appropriate *adat*, but who cleverly play with all that they know about the Balinese sense of humor which is loaded with sexual innuendo, to make themselves look (intentionally) daft. By attempting to be viewed as "same" they position themselves as "other"

and encourage the audience to both laugh at and with them, through their simultaneous ability and inability to engage with Balinese culture from the position of both inside/outside.

In *Subversive Laughter*, Balinese performance scholar Ron Jenkins claims that one way 'of pleasing the Gods is to present them with prayers and offerings; the other is to make them laugh' (Jenkins 1994: 18). The entertainment factor is very important within a *topeng* show and the parody and fun of the *bondres* provide light relief from the weight of the moral dogma, history and density of the philosophy. As *topeng* performer I Gusti Windia has remarked:

We use comedy to speak to the audience indirectly, under their skins. Then when people leave the temple they will remember the ideas inside the jokes and think about them at home. It is their homework. (Widia quoted in Jenkins 1994: 26)

There are many different modes of clowning, fooling and comedic characterization in Bali. These can be usefully likened to something that resembles the British televised comedy sketch shows such as Mrs. Brown's Boys. This is a useful comparison because whereas the humour is similar and there is slippage from the story or 'action' into laughter between the performers, what is not comparable is the skill, or rather approach, at which Balinese men can take on female characters. Just as there are specific, codified gestures and choreographies for all the masked characters with a *topeng* show, so too is there a codified choreography for the *bondres* characters. The *bondres* movement quality is stocky, rigid, the elbows are held quite close to the chest; the thumb is upright, the hands are loosely clenched

and punch the air to punctuate parts of the spoken story which is told in a variety of voices, languages and song. Once again, the gestural vocabulary is culturally masculine.

In that section I used the 'illusion of tradition' with the masks as a way of embarking on new *bondres* clown masks. However, because I have not learned this technique, I have no physical memory of it and this grants me a freedom to explore other physicalisation in addition to the traditional movement vocabulary.⁷¹ I have found other hand gestures which divert me away from punching and a clenched fist such as pointing, slapping a thigh and clicking. What has happened as this performance evolves is that all these new gestures emerge from a point of neutrality which maintains much of the original physicalisation of the original *agem* or position for *bondres*. In my re-worked version, however, my hands are loosely clenched, my elbows are not so rigidly tight to my body; there is an echo of the source culture yet, judged by traditional conventions these gestures are not very accurately executed. These slight differences are enormously valuable and, however subtle; this is a positive advancement in the creation of change.

⁷¹ Granting oneself permission to 'make-up' is dangerous territory within the field of interculturalism, as one risks orientalising and exoticising the 'other'. However, with respect to my embodied experience and knowledge of Balinese *topeng* choreography and culture, this was an educated guess.

The final mask: Completion of the Performance.

The last mask to enter in a *topeng pajegan* show is always *Dalam Siddha Kariya*, a spiritually potent mask, worn only by those of incredible knowledge and skill. This mask indicates that the ritual is complete and whilst wearing this mask at the end of the ceremony, the performer serves as in a ‘specifically priestly function’ (Coldiron 2004: 70). It is a heightened moment in which the sacred function and entertaining aspects of *topeng* intersect.

In the closing of my piece, I choose to wear the mask of Sita (as can be seen in Image 3), known as *topeng Ratu Putih* or the white Queen and to dance the *dalam* choreography. Although this is the King’s dance, the use of Sita’s mask transform it into a Queen’s dance, a substitution which is entirely possible according to Djimat as both figures belong to the same royal lineage (Djimat 2012).⁷²

Up to that point in my performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* there has been no visible evidence of Little Red Riding Hood herself but plenty of talk about the Queen/ Great Goddess of the Forest, the servant’s Mistress. The character of Little Red Riding Hood became a goddess in my *topeng piece* in order to make connections with pagan worship where any reference to a woman with ‘hair as

⁷² This was a personal communication in an on-going conversation with I Madé Djimat, which as I mentioned in my introduction, dances *topeng Dalam*, the king mask, with considerable expertise. Therefore, I consider him to be an authority on issues surrounding this mask and its potential to transfer into a female version, i.e. a queen.

black as a raven, skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood' is a reference to the maternal cycles of death and rebirth. The ancient worship of the goddess, ancestral knowledge and the power of the maternal line is a way of counterbalancing patriarchy. These in combination pay homage to a Balinese sense of cosmology.

Dancing this mask may be a suitable aesthetic choice but the appropriated choreography of the king is not without issue, mainly because traditionally the mask of the king does not speak, or more accurately does not speak for himself: his message is communicated via other characters. This silence became quite ambiguous as I explored the dance in the heroine's costume of the red cape. Male and female representations of power in both its active and passive forms were brought to the fore in this silence. Speech and its absence of speech indicates a complex matrix of political and social relations based on gender difference for men and women.

According to Harvey, the meaning of silence, although not gendered, can connect four inter-related meanings: power, powerlessness, resistance and respect (Harvey 1994: 52). This is very useful in consideration of the *Topeng Dalam* and *Topeng Ratu Putih*. In my performances it was important for a variety of reasons that this silence was imbued with a silence that promoted power and respect. I found that by concentrating on the slow parts of the dance and playing with the

pace, rhythm and tempo of the movements, I could assert physical control on technically difficult aspects of the dance and this was empowering as a performer which I hope resonated with the audience. This mask was also the last mask to be performed, so there was a sense of triumph that we had reached the end of Little Red Riding Hood's metaphorical journey.

Multiplicity and Empowerment through Improvisation

Those who work with masks often argue that masks have their own desires, impulses and needs. These are obviously connected to the individual performer's interpretation and animation of the mask. Yet, whereas for a Balinese performer the meaning of the mask is fixed, for a non-Balinese performer perhaps there is a greater sense that singular identities and meanings are to be interrogated. In the West mask work is a practice that is framed by ambiguity; with the exception of the Commedia dell 'Arte, there are no singular meanings in the interpretation of the mask. If contemporary culture encourages notions of identity as being in flux, where all things assumed fixed are in the process of change, then it seems possible and appropriate to consider mask work as a 'convergence not of self and other in a binary 'and/or' construct, but a 'both/and many' space of multi consciousnesses' (Eldredge 1996: 8). Similarly, Emigh asserts that '*topeng* shares many of the same techniques and formal concerns of postmodernism' (Emigh 1996: 174) and in this sense the mask can be a site of multiple meanings that can go beyond the fixed codified readings that the traditions of *topeng* determine. As Emigh elaborates, 'of course, Grandmother is me, as the wolf and the little girl... they are all me (Emigh

1996: 267). This corresponds to the general Balinese view as they do not see the mask as separate from themselves, but as I have discussed in Chapter Two, and will develop further in my next chapter, the Balinese performer is likely to express his perception differently and in relation to the gods manifest within his body and not only as an individual concern of the performer.

In this piece, I have to rely on my own limited ability to find and embody a greater awareness and scope of movement gestures in combination with more codified vocabularies that are determined by the *alus /keras* axis. This process relied on play and experimentation and a return to the strategies of the 'workshop' where participants are encouraged to embark on individual creative journeys through improvisation, to find what it individually meant to bring 'life' to the mask from one's own experience.

Practice-as-research is processual and it would be inaccurate to suggest that I have 'arrived' at a moment of complete understanding. Rather, the capacity for beneficial change, the efficacious nature of research, develops slowly. Through the nature of improvisation, in trying to find and develop these female masks in performance I have experienced difficulties, challenges, obstacles, I made 'mistakes' and often there has been a type of silence where nothing happened at all and I felt totally disconnected. I also battled with impatience and the desire to give it all up. However there have been minor 'Eureka' moments that might be

useful in the process of devising of future performances, but this is a slow process with no guarantees of reward. In Chapter One, whilst discussing my training in Bali, I observed how cognitive understanding may be rapidly absorbed whereas embodied knowledge takes time to filter and settle in the body. A high degree of theoretical understanding does not automate the ability to deliver the imagined or aspirational performance. For me, that remains out of reach and so whatever I may claim to have understood it is precisely that unreachable and the unobtainable is what fascinates me. Realising this, I can be more generous in my understanding of why Emigh has revisited the story of Little Red Riding Hood and how it has defined his career. His commitment shows an exemplary understanding of the lifetime relationship to one's mask and like any long term relationship there are peaks and troughs. In this sense, holding an embodied understanding of a *topeng* practice means to 'surrender' and an on-going recognition that it is a sustained practice, not a one off event.

In order to create a performance world with these masks from a traditional perspective (that is, by paying homage to the form and structure of Balinese *topeng*) that also supported and encouraged women's voices and representations, the masked performances discussed in this chapter have already offered a number of key learning outcomes. These masks constitute a new foundation on which to consider the aesthetic logic of a performance. In their character, dramatic function, the role they play and the order they appear create an already built structure which operates as a template and foundation on which to create

intercultural renditions of *topeng*. In many ways these conclusive remarks were both my hypothesis and were already evidenced by Emigh's production of *Little Red Riding Shawl*.

The non-hierarchical strategies of devising assist in the navigation of the politics of hierarchy within *topeng*. Whilst the codification of the mask remains alongside the traditional formula, the freedoms of devising where anything becomes possible allowed for the presence of stronger female characters. The conditions within the devising process that enable and somehow facilitate these freedoms has much to do with the emphasis on the role that the solo performer/maker takes where there is a far greater emphasis and ownership of the material. To unpick this further, this is significantly due to the role that the individual 'self' plays. However in any *topeng* as I have demonstrated there is doubling, different persona and nuanced versions of oneself. In addition there is a shifting sense of presence and slippage between selves when the performer is seen on stage taking the masks on and off. Plus there is always the self in relation to others; the audience. One could suggest that the varieties and freedoms of selfhood, self-playing and self-representation that post-dramatic devised theatre offers, has always been present in Balinese *topeng*. What is uniquely different is that the masks are the initial building blocks; every idea comes from the mask. When those masks are not traditionally male, a new set of options and indeed obstacles arise which this chapter has charted. However as an intercultural performer putting my own female body into my female masks for my own *topeng* rendition of *Little Red Riding Hood* was ultimately

a key stage in the development of my own *topeng* practice. In this sense, there was an inherently different sense of authorship that challenged the hierarchical and autocratic politics of Balinese *topeng*. The mask is the marker and container of codification and the codes of representation with all its politics, cultural traits and histories so when these are changed or replaced with new narratives and characters there is a shift.

By doing this performance as a demonstration of an intercultural performance, the analogy of the gentle process of tree grafting is useful because when a branch is grafted onto a different tree, it is not a complete surrender or invasion, as the original tree loses nothing of its unique qualities. Rather it gains the addition of some new genetic coding and this partly satisfies an intercultural approach. However, from a feminist position, I am aware of a number of key limitations and modification of the tree's overall shape is still necessary.

Although work on this production continues, the performances of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* produced as a practical experiment for this PhD produced significant women centred intervention within the genre. There is a frustration in following the strict linear structure of *topeng*, where the end and the success of the performance are marked by one particular mask, even if she is a female. Yet on the other hand, this structure defines any understanding of the tradition, so the irony is that whilst *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood* may be considered as

culturally accurate, the tradition in which this performance is situated is a patriarchal one. My agency as a non-Balinese performer allows me a certain degree of playfulness and subversion and as such, not following this structure could be the 'rule' that could and should be broken. However breaking rules within any Balinese performing genre is difficult because one's training and conditioning promotes the notion of service at all times and a feeling of subservience to the genre. Breaking rules within the *topeng genre* demonstrates a massive departure away from the conditioning of sticking to the pattern, because as this chapter had articulated the patterning and the presentation of the masks in their particular order is a defining feature of *topeng*. Once this is tampered with, the performance ceases to be *topeng* by its traditional definition. As this chapter has demonstrated, it is a challenge to tease out those cultural attributes that are symbiotic and not mutually exclusive in one's intercultural and feminist performance making.

The Western academic tendency is to translate elements, structures and forms which can be understood and easily digested, to preserve tradition and emphasise knowledge. Pavis' intercultural adaptation strategies work towards this end and predominantly support the intercultural performer who wants to replicate. However, what is also necessary is a disruption of knowledge and tradition and to seek out a space for those practitioners who want to subvert these pre-givens. In my own case, following a linear structure presented a challenge that I could not have prepared for. As I have emphasised, the masks determine a pre-given route, a fact that provoked a strange effect within my body as I performed and prevented

me from embodying the mask fully. Even though I was wearing female masks which I had carved, that I created the choreography myself for and that I was telling a story that I had personally chosen, this 'format' (which is a deliberately static choice of word) still did not enable my performing body to fully inhabit the masks. This phase of research did not provide enough space for personal and intimate engagement with the masks. This unique connection and sense of 'full embodiment' to these (female) masks, which is so vital to the Balinese, still remained a total mystery. This depth of confusion and inability motivates an even deeper and more subjective enquiry in another direction which is the subject of the final Chapter.

Chapter Five

Embracing the Dark Moon:

Dancing from my Liver and Other Internal Body Parts.

During the previous chapters I have discussed the challenges that I have encountered whilst trying to continuously re-locate my *topeng* practice to/back/from Bali and England. In this last 'swing of the pendulum' I will engage with the intricacies of a rather complex site of contestation: my own body. In order to do so, I will attempt to create a link between somatic practice and *topeng*. My aim in this chapter is not to present a comparative study between somatic practice and Balinese cosmology but to focus on particular principles and processes where they align and intersect which influence a certain understanding of movement within my practice as a student of *topeng*. I discuss how I have used principles from both discourses to consider how they support each other and reveal the emergence of a bodymind perspective that encompasses non-duality. This speaks in a layered and intrinsic way about a conscious corporeal dialogue between principally, as my title suggests, my liver and other body parts in relation to the animation of masks that were used in my performance of *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood*. Working in this 'organic' way offers the wider performing community an opportunity to explore Balinese cosmology from a non-cosmic, non-Balinese perspective and (possibly) find a way of understanding that is relevant and

personal to them as individuals. This is not to suggest that Balinese cosmology is transferable or equivalent to somatic practice and experiential anatomy, but what the latter does offer is a system of knowledge and a quality of listening that can be aligned from a different cultural perspective. This internal relationship, enables the connection to the inside/ outside, micro/macro that is an intrinsic part of the fine tuning necessary to harness 'energy' and embody the mask. In the words of *dalang* puppeteer Kathy Foley:

The distance I have travelled, though it seems vast, is no longer than the three-foot trip up the human spinal column... Through the one body we inhabit in this life we can, with the help of these puppets and masks and the ideas they encode, embody the whole cosmos. (Foley 1990: 62)

The hypothesis underlying the argument of this chapter is that through somatic practice and engagement one can move closer to a cross and intercultural understanding of what it might mean to bring 'life' to the mask and how this immersive feeling may manifest itself. In terms of Ida Bagus Alit's instruction to 'give life' to the mask/body I understand that the benefits of somatic practice can be seen as learning to experience the reality of one's body, in its constantly changing moment to moment, learning that there is an inevitability and richness to the sensation of moving. A somatic practice allows for the detail and the nuances of felt sensation and to be given permission to move. This allows the body to nourish, to learn, re-learn, re-member, re-story and re-pattern the body and mind as opposed to being in a state of un-awareness of feelings, thoughts, sensations, memory.

Euro-American and Indonesian Understandings of Soma

Nascimento claims that intercultural 'actor training is inherently an artificial process of embodiment' (Nascimento 2009; 54). Whereas I concur in that the cultural specificity of any 'source' culture may never be fully apprehended or understood, I propose that somatic bodywork can provide the performer with the recognition of a mode of embodiment that can usefully penetrate the principles of Balinese cosmology.

In somatic practice there is an inherent understanding of the inseparable link, between inner and outer, the relationship that is the body. 'Psyche and soma are inextricably connected' asserts psychologist Linda Hartley and 'movement at one level necessitates awareness of change at others too, so that consciousness can be grounded in living reality' (Hartley 2004: 3). Understanding *topeng* and recalibrating my body's ability to respond to the Balinese choreography through the lens of somatic practice enabled me to attune myself to the inner landscape of my bodymind and sense in practice a connection between them.

Body Mind Centring, or BMC, which through the work of Maynard I reiterate as my primary exposure to the broad arena of somatic practice, is a particularly relevant school of thought. Although predominantly based on Western medicine with its allegiance to anatomy, physiology and kinesiology, BMC is also influenced by

Eastern philosophies in the sense that it allows the two ways to co-exist. As founder of BMC Bainbridge-Cohen claims:

It is a study coming out of this time of East and West merging, so we are working with the concept of dualities blending, rather than sets of opposites conflicting. We are constantly looking at relationships and are always recognising how opposite qualities modulate each other. (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 2)

For Maynard, founder of the School of Experiential Learning (SoEL) it is the meeting place of 'mythos and logos, science and art' (Maynard 2015) and from my perspective the language and anatomical facts of Western science grounds the esoteric nature of the Balinese cosmos and these ideas are thus given more tangible form.⁷³

In Bali, the word soma means Monday, and the understanding of it is associated with the moon and lunar cycles, which are celebrated/ worshipped twice a month at *tilem* (dark moon) and *puṇamaya* (full moon).⁷⁴ Here also there is a tension between what is hidden and in darkness and what is revealed in the light (or what I am referring as the inner landscape of the body/subject and the outer/object). In Sanskrit, the word Soma is the Vedic God of bliss and soma is associated with *amrit*

⁷³ Again, I acknowledge the dangers associated with this approach and reiterate how I am not seeking equivalence.

⁷⁴ According to yogic thought, *agni* (literally fire) and *soma* (literally water) are like yin and yang: they relate to a series of opposites and encompass the basic duality behind all existence and yoga seeks to unite the *agni* (male) and *soma* (female) principles of our nature (Frawley 1994: 184). However, this understanding of the term soma is not typical and reflects more Brahmana or priestly knowledge.

or *amerta* the immortal waters, the elixir of life. It is no coincidence that this is the name given to Suprpto Suryodarmo's *Joged Amerta* practice, based on the principles of mindfulness and on notions of 'interbeing' which consist of an awareness of being 'among' rather than 'at the centre of'. Influenced by her own training with Suryodarmo, Reeve's recent addition to the contemporary debate within somatic practice, in what she calls the 'ecological body' (Reeve 2011: 47) that 'takes "change" as home ground [and] suggests an approach to life that acknowledges the potential for transformation, or 'blossoming': a term used by Suryodarmo in *Joged Amerta*' (Reeve 2011: 49). This is a useful lens through which to think about my own moving body as I respond to the dances of Balinese *topeng* as my body is constantly 'situated in flux, participation and change' by which Reeve defines her conception of ecological (Reeve 2011; 50).

Balinese Tantra yoga has close associations with nature (Stephens 2005: 73) which in turn are similar to the principles of *Joged Amerta*. Through Suryodarmo's approach we can gain an understanding of the idea that through movement, breath and experiential anatomy we can become 'one' with Nature and the outside world. As Benedict Anderson explains in *The Idea of Power in Java* (and this assertion applies to Bali too), 'in traditional thinking there is no separation between organic and inorganic matter, for everything is sustained by the same invisible power' (Anderson 1972: 7). This perspective may seem esoteric or mystical but to quote Foley, 'it is an ecology of mind which the traditional [Javanese] worldview finds simple and pragmatic' (Foley 1990: 65). Our bodies

therefore become material 'abodes' or as Foley continues 'limited and temporary containers of this force' (Foley 1990: 64).

Although the languages and structures used to describe it in somatic practice differ, there is a clear parallel in the way in which a number of correspondent phenomena is conceptualised in Bali. Referring back to Ida Pedanda's notion of translation he promotes the metaphor of personal digging into 'the meaning of the meaning' (Ida Pedanda cited in Jenkins and Catra 2011: 11) and this level of excavation is necessary in order to understand how these differences are expressed. Bainbridge-Cohen asserts that:

Perception is how we relate to what we're sensing.
Perception is about relationship – to ourselves, to others, the Earth and the universe. (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003:114)

The differences in how we perceive lie in how these practices are culturally articulated. Bainbridge-Cohen claims that '(w)e all have sense organs which are similar, but our perception is totally unique' (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003:114). This is important as it highlights the unique and individual nature of somatic practice and indeed the sensations of the masked performer.

Touching and being Touched.

Working from the premise that when we touch, we are being touched in return, immediately there is a relationship between self and other, however slight and this

can be developed rather simply. Fraleigh explains this sense of relationship by clarifying that '(s)omatic explorations through touch [aim] to facilitate functional, elegant, and spacious movement [that] can bring us back to our bodies – our bodies back to our minds' (Fraleigh 2000: 57). Unlike a massage, for example, the giver is not seeking to change or manipulate the body of the receiver, although muscular tension and bones beneath the skin can be sensed. An adequate way to exemplify this process can be found in the prelude to 'tapping' which is an adaptation of an Elsa Gindler exercise. The instruction for this exploration was to place a hand on a participant's sacrum making sure that the ridge between the centre of the palm and flesh of the thumb joint is positioned in the naturally lower centre of the sacrum which can be found with various degrees of skill in the lower back. When this position is found, in my experience there is a 'marriage' of hand to sacrum contact. The instruction is 'to be present.' In this context, this instruction implies to bring one's attention to noticing what one observes, which involves tuning to how this feels. The exploration then continues with the receiver gently rotating the palm of the hand and hopefully, there is a visceral 'slip' when the contact is such that the flesh of both receiver and practitioner somehow finds a bond that is 'sponge-like', pulsating alive within the dynamic of skin on skin, the weight or rather lightness of the practitioner's touch has permeated through the dermal layers of the receiver and slippage occurs. It is simple to explore and only requires a disposition to listen and an attentive focus, yet for both the receiver and the practitioner it can be an extremely profound and strange to consider how simple skin to skin contact could facilitate such a range and depth of sensation.

This quality of touch is a subtle one as my immediate thoughts after one such exploration evidence:

Whilst exploring this 'sponging touch' on [the other participant's] sacrum, I noticed the range, scope and variety of movement going on down there, skin beneath skin, without even moving my hand. It was a profound and deep experience of touch to penetrate from skin to skin and beyond skin, beyond skin again. Skins ceased to exist and it was just fleshy cells pulsing about.

This is an example of how touch can be a general yet very accessible and practical way in which one's body can become sensitive and tuned to impulses, 'energy' or as Bainbridge-Cohen says 'the force that is the body' (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 63). This growing ability and understanding of the 'other', I argue, invite a process of resonance with the nature and with the Cosmos.

Dancing my Liver

Aiming to highlight the relevance of somatic practice in my process of engagement with *topeng* I would like to offer the transcription of a conversation that I had with Ida Bagus Alit in November 2011. What was exchanged there demonstrates the ambiguity of the answers that I am attempting to comprehend:

TS: I have an interest in the feeling of what happens in the body whilst a performer is wearing a mask. This interest is to do with the individual physical experience, including thoughts and emotions and internal feelings. In Bali it is impossible to think about that without reference to *Taksu* and the sacred. I am interested in knowing your response to that.

IB: You studied carving with Ida Bagus Anom for one and a half year. You then studied with me and then you started dancing. This is all the same path. It is the right path. When you were making masks, after the technique, you were making and dancing from your heart, and from your liver, from your feeling. So you already know the answer. You must dance with that. That is my response.

This advice to 'dance from my heart, from my liver' was intriguing. Associations to the heart are fairly universal, but I was barely familiar with the position of my liver or its anatomical function, let alone its properties in relation to performance practice.

During somatic explorations, one often identifies and talks about parts of the body as separate from each other. Bainbridge-Cohen describes this succinctly in an interview with Nancy Stark Smith by stating that:

In order to embody ourselves, we need to know what is not ourselves. It's a relationship... What I would call balanced embodiment would include, 'This is the end of me; this is the beginning of something else.' (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 63)

Differentiation and integration is important as this aids understanding within somatic practice. As Fraleigh explains '(t)he first entails the ability to free oneself from social and genetic determinism, the second implies the individual's rapport with otherness, ancestry, nature, and the communal variance'. (Fraleigh 2000: 56).

Therefore in order to fully understand the role of the liver, what follows is a detailed explanation of how the liver is perceived from two different perspectives

and an attempt to show how these were unified through my engagement with somatic movement practice within my *topeng* performance and performing body.

Western Perceptions of the Liver

The liver is the body's second largest organ, weighing three pounds. Only the skin is heavier. Most of the mass of the liver is located on the right side of the body where it descends toward the right kidney and nestles below the lungs, above the stomach, the gallbladder is below and to the right, and the spleen is above to the left. The liver performs many essential functions related to metabolism in the transformation of carbohydrate, lipids and proteins; carries immunological processes in collaboration with the spleen and lymph nodes; aids in the storage of nutrients, vitamins and mineral obtained from blood; produces vital proteins in the blood; detoxifies as it rids the body of toxins and excess hormones and finally aids the digestive process through the production of bile. These functions make the liver a vital organ without which the tissues of the body would quickly die from lack of energy and nutrients. In addition, the liver has an incredible capacity for regeneration. Our cultural associations with the liver are limited but could correspond to the Balinese view in terms of the words 'galling', meaning annoyance or resentful or in the word bilious, associated with nausea, spitefulness or bad temper. Although trying to find a Western understanding of the liver, using Balinese tropes does not stand up to vigorous scrutiny. According to Bainbridge-

Cohen, in her report of the feedback from the many thousands of participants that she has worked with, the 'liver is the organ of power and stability, endurance, detoxification, dealing with "heavy" emotions that require complex processing; anger, awareness and action filtered through qualities of deep rootedness' (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 39).

This view clearly makes connections between Western physiology and anatomy and the Balinese 'heartmind' view of the liver that Hobart articulated. The language of BMC usefully bridges this culturally different understanding of the liver.

South East Asian Perceptions of the Liver

In all the eleven countries of Southeast Asia the liver takes on more significance than it does in the West. In Malaysia for example the liver (*hati*) is considered the 'ruler' of the internal organs of the human body (Peletz 1988:139, cited in Hobart 2003: 245). In Indonesia, the national language of which is based on Malay, the word *hati* is often used intermittently in exchange for the word 'heart, however the word *jantung* is also used for the organ of the heart, or core, or centre so I am making a distinction here.

The idea of the liver being a manifestation of the supreme lord Iswara, or Siwa (Shiva) as practiced in Bali, relates to the idea that dance connects one

meditatively to the Vedic tradition also. The idea is that in Bali performance and meditation are two symbiotic strands by which to experience the same level of consciousness which exists beyond the spacio-temporal. Finally these two aspects combined lead one to the possibility of experiencing 'turiya', described by Sreenath Nair as a fourth state of consciousness (Nair 2007: 157) that alternates between 'silence and activity' (Malekin and Yarrow 1997: 37). Nair suggests that this combination of stillness and action emphasises the 'transformational characteristics of consciousness' (Nair 2007: 161). and, developing the research of Ralph Yarrow, he relates consciousness with matter to create an 'energy filled void' (Nair 2007: 161). Nair identifies that this level of consciousness is best evidenced through mask work, as the mask creates various levels of selfhood within the performer who perceives the 'real-self' and the 'mirror-self' as separate, but connected. Nair claims that, 'seeing through a mask, in this sense, gives the actor the possibility to achieve a witnessing quality of consciousness by staying in the space between herself and her projected masked self' (Nair 2007: 160). If the liver, or rather the 'void of the liver' is the organ that is the centre of all cosmological systems, it is conceivable that 'turiya' can be accessed through the action and inaction of masked performance. Relating this to the specifics of Balinese masked performer, medical anthropologist Angela Hobart explains that in Bali:

To be happy is literally to have a happy liver (*demen atine*) and its inverse is to have a sad liver (*sebet atine*). Being distressed may be described as having a sick liver (*jejeh atine*). To have a hot liver (*panas atine*) means to be enraged. A startled liver (*engone atine*) connotes surprise. There are numerous such expressions... In the village sphere, it is the liver that is the basis of all things (*dasar atine*) – thinking, feeling and believing. Having a happy

liver would imply that the person's actions are balanced and integrated, and the gestures and voice refined. (Hobart 2003: 224-225)

I speculate that Ida Bagus Alit sensed in my performing body a disequilibrium which, if I could identify, I could resolve. In Bali, according to Hobart, when the three elements of earth, wind and fire, (manifestations of Iswara, Brahma and Wisnu) are upset there is no longer cooperation between the liver, the seat of consciousness, and the rest of the body (Hobart 2003: 222). As the seat of consciousness, or the 'lotus seat of the body' as it is called in Bali, the liver is the organ at the centre of all cosmological systems, or rather to complicate things further, the 'void of the liver' (Hobart 2003: 217) is the origin of the divine within the body that is 'transfigured into cosmic space' (Hobart 2003: 217). Hobart claims that the liver takes on the role of the 'heartmind' (Hobart 2003: 217). This understanding is based on the premise that in Bali, organs have the possibility and potential for discreet feelings, a concept that I will explore further through practice from a somatic perspective. In BMC there is also an understanding that each organ or body part has a mind, which is connected to the whole. Bainbridge-Cohen claims that 'the movement of mind within and through an organ, reveals the specific mind of that organ. (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 29 - 30)

Therefore, organs are affecting our motivation and inner drive for movement, which is then extended through the limbs. 'Occupying our inner space, they provide us with our sense of volume and full-bodiedness' (Bainbridge-Cohen 2023:

29), they are what creates the impulse to move and they support vitality through breathing, nourishment and elimination.

I would like to evidence some of these statements by reporting back the findings of a one-to-one somatic bodywork session that Maynard facilitated with the exploration of my liver which took place in February 2015. I entered the practice room feeling very low in energy, overwhelmed by my workload and visibly quite low. We followed a bricolage of different explorative means to access and literally make contact and feel my liver beneath my ribs. This included cellular touch (a process that will be explained below) and also holding a balloon of warm water close to my liver that became its substitute, in all its fluidity with its delicate membrane, until I could get both the confidence and the sense of that nuanced feeling of making contact with my own interiority. This touch was supported by a gentle hissing sound that I was invited by Maynard to make. Eventually, with great care, I lifted my liver through the lightest of touches and was able to 'jiggle' it. In between each level of the exploration there was an invitation to move, reposition, write, draw and do whatever activity for however long I needed to, but with a focus on my liver at all times (an example of the typically 'casual but deep inquiry' that Maynard facilitates).

Whilst in this mode of exploration I had extremely strong reactions whilst moving from my liver, I experienced a 'new force that propelled me aggressively forward.

Initially sideways and circular movements were not enjoyable and as soon as my awareness embraced this desire to move forward, it felt like there was an 'umbilical cord,' twisting, 'growing around a foetal column of the liver, spleen, stomach'. Although I am still in the process of identifying the meanings of how the liver supports my moving body and what it can offer to my performance what is becoming clearer is that meditations around the philosophies of the liver-'mind' turn knowledge into experience and into a kind of body wisdom or intelligence that is gained and only available through the 'bodymind'. I have re-entered this exploration and had differing responses all of which I am in the process of analysing. However what I suggest is that, by engaging with alternative conceptualisations of the liver, and through a symbiosis of performance and meditation, this organ offers a different perspective of consciousness that are applicable to the Balinese understanding of the liver.

Renewal, Cleansing and Preparing the body for Training

What has become clear, however, is that the liver can support dance training and can play a crucial role. Making sure that one's liver is healthy offers a solid foundation to start gaining more understanding. Prior to long phases of concentration, many people from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures find it necessary to complete domestic chores in order to 'start' a given task. Clearing the mind as a preparation for performance is a ritual activity that foregrounds attempts for sustained work. Similarly, as part of 'being' in my body, I

engaged in a number of body based activities, that at the time were synonymous with promoting physical and mental strength to support new approaches of re-entry into the *topeng* choreography. I practiced hatha yoga asana (Sivananda style) and meditation, plus I experimented with a range of cleansing practices known as *kriyas* based on a yogic training that I had completed in 1995 in Neyadam, India. Amongst a variety of cleansing practices I was disciplined with the practice of amaroli; drinking my own urine with all of the dietary restrictions this entails mainly the elimination of toxins in the body; sugar, caffeine, alcohol. I also had a tailored nutritional regime in recognition of the increasing importance that fuel and sustenance play in training. In many ways, these regimes were a way of re-educating my body from a recycled, inside-out perspective, in order to review my consumption and participation in the world. The function of these cleaning practices that became ritualistic resonate with the Balinese *mewintan* ceremony that cleanses the performer in readiness for work (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 17). Focus on self cleansing practices which also include exhalation, digestion, perspiration and excretion of solids enable a deeper understanding of the internal ecology of the body. I concur with Fraleigh's claim that if 'I pay attention to the poetry of my body; it brings home with insight the desire to take care of myself and take responsibility' (Fraleigh 2000: 58). These practices seemed to support this idea of poetry and a more intimate pursuit of knowledge.

Corporeal acts, feelings and sensations are the result of a deeply interrelated mix of both cultural and physiological processes. However through certain training experiences,

for want of a better description, one can learn to identify each organ and which organ seems to become the focus points for holding expression and how 'energy', or literally the force of life in one's own body, can be manifested through those organs. Then one can choose to actively switch on an expression through the activation of an 'organic' response.

Adding a somatic approach to my work with *topeng* masks was not without difficulty. In regards to the liver, to continue my reflections it is appropriate to consider the following questions in relation to my practice: what nourishes the process? What should I store and what do I need to eliminate? What is toxic to me? What/ how can I immunise myself and protect my work? Am I angry? How can the work regenerate and be vitalised? The various issues listed previously relating to power, stability, endurance, elimination and anger all surfaced. Exploring movement from the sense of one's organs without ambition and simply by observing what is occurring one can develop an ability to foster a connection to what unfolds, an inner condition to notice what is being perceived, which according to Suryodarmo 'gradually lessens the sense of identification and attachment'.⁷⁵ Thoughts, fears and harboured emotion surfaces but the potency of these feelings lessens whilst allowing for their presence within the practice. Movement can be a supporting vehicle to move through memories associated with

⁷⁵ This was advice that Suryodarmo gave me during a workshop in May 2011.

difficulty and dysfunction, thus enabling a connection to the experience with less resistance, clinging and desire.

Opening the Ear and Eye Mind

Apart from that which somatic practice can offer the individual within the study of movement this section will deal specifically with the application of a somatic practice within and for the specific purpose of performance with *topeng* masks. However there is a subtle contradiction because what I am discussing in here is the meeting place between an internal somatic conversation between the mask and my body which nevertheless happens to be observed by external witnesses. In this context I am using the mask as a vision tool which means responding to the mask entirely based on what I can see through it. (In many Balinese masks the eye is a carved ball with a thin line underneath it which means that vision is extremely limited. In a strict performance sense, there are techniques that play with the angle of the mask so that it looks like the mask is outward facing when in fact the performer can only see a foot in front.) Leaving aside for now the agendas and concerns that an audience may have, my interest is in using the mask as a tool in a somatic context in order to explore the feeling of the mask which abstracts and negates away notions of the mask's character. Descriptions of full transition to a somatically inspired performance will follow, but first an analysis and breakdown of the in-between stage is necessary.

In the same way that, generally, within Balinese dance, stillness and pause are animated with a finger 'wobble' which keeps the body 'alive' also in Balinese mask work there are a specific range of neck and head movements that animate the body. When I warm up for practice, I move my neck from side to side, I rotate my head around its spinal axis. I use my chin, my nose, my forehead to steer and guide my head through space thus maximising my awareness of the angles within and the degrees of my range. A more thorough warm-up of this area avoids injury.

As I do this, occasionally my ears pop. The pressure in my inner ear is equalising and air is escaping down the eustachian tube into my throat which means that the otoliths (little stones in the ear) are falling towards the cilia (the hairs in the inner ear). Another function of the vestibular mechanism in our inner ear helps us to 'establish a sense of space, groundedness, enabling us to relate to the earth' through this literal sense of gravitational pull (Bainbridge-Cohen 2003: 117).

As I start to move in the mask, my ears sometimes continue to pop and the experience and knowledge of the biological functioning of the inner ear registers and there is a choice to respond to gravity in the sense that my ear adjusts my balance. Because it is in my head, which is in close proximity with the wood of the mask that has already started to absorb my sweat, my aural ability is altered and all this changes my perception and this signals to me that I need to re-balance within my *agem*, my basic position. All this assemblage of information occurs

within moments of putting on the mask and I rapidly recalibrate my body position in relation to gravity.

As I 'don' the mask and start to engage my head and body as described, I also hear crunches in my neck as spinal fluid releases and pops what feel like crystals of tension all down my spine. Rather than aim to 'do' these choreographic head and neck movements that Balinese dancers can so automatically achieve, it has been useful to allow my head to be a passive receiver and to 'absorb' (Marshall and Oida 2002: 20) movement from the rest of the body. In doing so, this process also affects my gaze.

Often one feels a far greater sense of the 'inner landscape' with eyes closed, movement and breath are more collaborative and eyes closed encourages internalisation. The following vision/sight exercise deliberately problematises this which is beneficial to the artist maker. Opening the eyes and having a deliberate conscious awareness shifts the range of choices and one must re-calibrate how to sense and perceive this interiority. In a mask, I am limited to how much I can see. Usually mask work is technical and there are specific ways of wearing and using the mask at an angle to promote characterisation for the audience. In contrast, to use the mask as a tool through which to explore vision and sight liberates a different criterion for its use and working in a somatic context offers precisely this invitation.

At this point of the exploration of the mask, I engage in an exercise regularly used in Somatic practice: the exploration. An exploration would start lying in a supine position gently massaging a closed eye, gently allowing movement in all directions between fingertip and eyeball in its socket. The eye rests in a pocket of fatty fluids, it is held in position by the extrinsic ocular muscles (Snell and Lemp 1998: 136), it rotates in 'an orbital cavity' (Snell and Lemp 1998: 136) just bigger than an inch square, it is cushioned and protected. Light projects through the pupil and the lens to the back of the eye. The retina, the 'nerve fibres of the optic nerve' (Snell and Lemp 1998: 2) converts light into electrical impulses. Behind the eye, the optic nerve carries these impulses to the brain. When working with masks, having a sense of the anatomy of the eye, aids the possibility of imagining that sight comes from the very back of the head and that this propels a different experience of seeing. Instead of automatically opening the eyes, I allow light to be received through the thin membrane of skin covering the eye, and then extremely slowly opens the eye. The exploration continues by being guided by what happens next; as there are shifts between focus, proximity and distance, detail or an overall view, movement is entirely guided by a curiosity to explore sight, with no other agenda. It is important to stay actively engaged with the task and change direction or seek an alternative view, allowing for a different response when the task becomes disengaging. Boredom motivates change. To stay actively engaged one can employ the idea of somatic tracking which is a process of sensorial/physiological recall that expands one's awareness of felt sensation in the bodymind. This can include the kind of thoughts and feelings which can lead to a way of observing and focusing

one's attention consciously with one's eyes open, cultivating a deeper inner connection to one's sense of self in relationship to world/the whole. While participating in the moment, the participant also wants to harvest the body memory of that movement, document it and apply it. The sketch in Image 19 is marked immediately after an exploration of vision and sight and conveys with a sense of immediacy the sensations of my 'being witnessed' and perceiving the mask from within. Writing from the body and the process of 'mark-making'⁷⁶ explains how these 'performance texts' become intrinsic to scoring and the dramaturgical process of devised work.



Image 17: Journal extract following 'Mask as Vision Tool' exploration. Tiffany Strawson

The sketch shown in Image 17 marks the extension of arms and legs, over-sized feet which express the connection I experienced to the floor, the figure of eight swirls show the movement through space, the small lines emanating from the

⁷⁶I suggest that 'mark-making' is a scribble which is neither deliberate drawing, or writing but a process of quickly and without thinking making literal marks on the page.

chest express the spaciousness I felt in the movement of my heart and lungs. Most obviously, the hands document how my sun-facing palms are my sensors, extensions of my eyes and how all parts of my body are working in collaboration. I am reminded of Zarrilli's use of the Malayalam folk expression 'the body becomes all eyes' (Zarrilli 2002: 166) although I appreciate that his use of this phrase fits into a specific practice which is different to somatics.

Shifting a Somatic Practice into a Devising Process

Guided by the facilitation that Maynard offers within the Solo Lab workshop a picture/sketch/mark is created and I use this in my own exploration as a 'resource'. By looking at this sketch I then can take one aspect or detail to create three different, new movements. My first detail that I choose is the less obvious small lines darting out of the chest. Focusing on these, simply reminded me to breathe. When I re-enter the mask as a vision tool I am responding then to the specificity of my score which invites the possibility to improvise with the 'darting lines' in combination with what I can see through the mask. I showed back this movement activity to a witness whilst I was wearing the Mrs. Old Man mask. This witness simply observed me track through this task. Her response was framed within the specific parameters of 'I see, I feel, I imagine...'. She remarked that she saw 'the pitter-patter of feet', she saw me 'seek with extended hands, extended fingers, and saw space around my torso', she saw 'the rise and fall of my diaphragm and how my breath propelled me through movement.' She felt like I had a 'sense of

curiosity that I was searching for something and was somehow displaced.’ Finally she imagined that I was ‘a mythical creature, not of this world, with the capacity to shape-shift’.

These observations offered extremely valuable information and granted me a type of feedback where I could bring closer attention to how my body and the mask is ‘read’ from an external, yet non-judgemental, position. One can draw information from the experience of this task and then re-apply it in a different context. For example, I then did this somatic exploration within the framework of the specific movement gestures associated with Mrs. Old Man. The task of using the mask as a vision/sight tool within the choreography of this mask proved to be extremely interesting. Usually in performance this mask has a submissive gaze, as its wearer looks at the floor one foot in-front, giving the illusion that the mask is gently looking out several feet in front. However, in my own exploration/performance I was drawn to look at my audience, keeping my head up which softens my neck; actively imagining my vision came from the back of my head and was mediated comfortably through the mask. This was read by the witnesses, which in this somatic context is a preferable word to audience, as assertive which added a new dimension to this mask. In this application the Balinese movement gestures provided the ‘call’ and my body quite literally meeting this call with a ‘response’.

Responding to the fluids in my body

It is outside of the scope of the present chapter to provide a detailed anatomical discussion of the fluid systems, but the knowledge derived from them certainly informed many explorations over the course of a residential weeks (the 'Unseeable Animal' course) which focused on this system. Intensive and deep focus precipitated an experience, which I would like to share from my field notes written in the immediacy of the aftermath of the exploration:

Fluids in me, passing over bone, through flesh, ripples, surges, weight; I can feel it. Not cellular fluid but synovial fluid pouring out of my joints, lubricating my marrowous bones, ebbing, flowing, oceanic tides, luna fluids down my arm as I lie, waxing moon pulling water down to the roots, to my core. Drenched, pourous, sponge-like ripples. Want to move, want to shake and re-organise the waters. Want to pee, want to drink, want to re-new and all over again float in this elixir. Synovial. Syn-ov-ial. Oval. Ovaries, over me, pouring. Lush.

As a result of these explorations with the mask as a vision tool, I started to imaginatively engage with the concept of how I could further soften my gaze and invite other body parts to be my eyes, which I could adjust like a camera to zoom, focus, pan, snapshot. Using the *Ratu Putih* mask, (the mask I use for *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood*) I was very drawn to the intimacy of the eye based on how little I can see through that mask and the sensation of the mask on my face. The internal curvature of the mask is not deep enough, meaning that I can feel the wood on my eyelash which makes my eyes water. Sometimes tears mix with sweat and (inspired by the work of my fellow tSOEL participants) these bodily fluids invite me

to consider my 'vag-eye-na' and soon my body is dancing from the eye of my vagina. Movements are small, but they are fluid movements as I consider how both my eye and my vagina are intimate, dark and moist. Though this practice I can specifically consider and connect with Fraleigh's claim that her work seeks to 'revalue the darkness mythically associated with nature and woman' (Fraleigh 2000: 55). In this way, it feels that for the first time, I am occupying the masks from a subjective, female position.

Imaginatively extending the exploration further still, I incorporated all of my bodily fluids within the range of potential options for bringing 'life' to the mask. Mrs. Old Man mask was originally called in Balinese *Sugara Manis* meaning 'the Sweet Ocean' so this seemed particularly relevant. The choreography of this mask deliberately includes '*ngikal*' movement which should show the wave like, watery quality of Wisnu. In Body Mind Centering Bainbridge Cohen argue that:

Fluids are the system... of movement and mind. They underlie presence and transformation, and mediate the dynamics of flow between rest and activity. (Bainbridge Cohen 2003: 3)

The application of this sensation to the choreography of *topeng Sugara Manis*: Mrs Old Man mask adds a new dimension to the dance and leads the research towards the use of somatic movement within the context of performance. When I am performing Mrs. Old Man mask I am being governed by certain choreographic gestures and working within the vocabularies and principle of the soft and refined

alus movements. However working in this somatic way there is less focus on the choreography (which, at this point, it should have become second nature to its performer anyway) thus permitting space for another way of experiencing the movements. There is more attention to the quality of how I am performing and not the 'what'. Performer Taavo Smith succinctly articulates this dimension of somatic awareness within performance. Smith suggests that 'if you can find quality - either by harmonizing your movements to your mind (e.g. freeing impulse), harmonizing your mind to your movements (e.g. deepening sensation), or by reaching for quality, a movement informed by mind, directly - your work is done' (Smith 2010: 23).

Engaging with the mask in this way, allows greater choice to 'dip out' of the very prescribed choreography and show more of the character of the old woman and bring out her unique sense of humour that I so much missed during a great part of the devising process. Whilst performing the most recent Solo Lab (November 2014) with Mrs. Old Man mask I/she would for example, attempt a particularly difficult choreographic transition and stumble to show her inability through age. In this way I was having a corporeal dialogue between the Balinese choreography of the mask and of how, through a somatic lens, I was responding to the feeling of that codification. This was inevitable mediated through my body and was read by my audience as incorporating more Western gestures. The embodiment of this mask was pursued through a process that fused a somatic approach within the parameters of the choreography allowing freedom to change, pause, to respond

and this in turn allowed space for other characteristics to emerge. Feedback indicated that there was an interesting tension between moments of the mask dancing with ease and flow, contrasting with moments where the choreography broke down and we saw an old woman attempting to dance. Whilst exploring and testing out these ideas dramaturg Barbara Bridger suggested that: “Essentially [Tiffany] polarized the contrast between the two approaches, but managed the balance and tension between them very successfully, achieving a rich, layered performance”.

After the performance of Mrs. Old Man mask I also received feedback from Maynard, who has observed my somatic movement practice over five years and was in a position to offer another dimension. She claimed that she saw in my performance:

Manifesting the invisible or in this context perhaps the sacred or a sacred character (if I may describe your mask work as this). This is not just you but the connection to yourself, or the sense of that which is you, is not lost either.

What this offers me is a return to the conversation that Ida Bagus and I had in relation to dancing my liver. Artistic discourses around the performing arts in the West do not often directly use the term spirituality but in contrast talk about ‘embodied knowing’, or about ways of ‘expressing the ineffable’ (Njaradi 2014: 8). In this sense, analysis of the liver in more detail has done little to ‘demystify the body but has helped to embody the mystery’ (Olsen 1998: iii) of the masks. From this perspective investigations in, with and through my liver, other organs and body parts has necessitated some intimate research which ultimately has enabled

me to open up a part of myself that perhaps needed to claim the masks in a way that the other research approaches documented in the previous chapters could not have achieved. As Fraleigh claims 'when we trust our innate intelligence [of the body], it speaks, or brings us images and feelings in unpredictable ways' (2000: 57). This feedback offered by Maynard evidences that investigations of my liver, other organs and body parts, through somatic bodywork potentially provides a different understanding and way of engaging with *topeng* one that connects with notions of Balinese cosmology in terms of seeing Self and Other as part of a cosmic whole. By engaging in the theory and most of all, in the practice of somatic body work this way of experiencing the body from within has brought me to a closer understanding of what I call a 'bodymind-soulbody' that sees myself as a being connected to the whole world where Self, Other, Place, all seem to accrue new meanings.

Somatic practices offer an extended range of movement philosophies in which to approach both devising new choreography and an alternative way of apprehending the choreography which already exists. This excavation through and of a practice leads me to reflect on how these findings contribute to wider discourses and ideologies of performance practice and how for example, the liver (or other organs) may contribute to stereotypical or conventional fixations with limbs, in Western approaches to performance training (be that in the West or in Bali). A somatic approach may lead away from the exterior 'technique' of movement towards an 'interior', non-representational language and whilst on the one hand this may constitute a move away from the virtuosic, on the other hand

it may offer a closer glimpse at a truer meaning of what 'to bring life' may mean, or to that illusive notion of 'energy' or presence'. Enlivening the mask, or seeking the elusive 'life' or 'presence' that Balinese artists aspire to may be unobtainable, but the process of 'presencing' and 'enlivening' is available under a set of rules or structures that are guided by comfort, the opportunity to pause, to close one's eyes, to re-address the exercise at any stage of its development and at any time. In this sense, the 'path' that I was advised to follow by Ida Bagus Alit relates to a fuller sense of belonging and ownership of one's own practice. While I do not doubt that there is an echo or trace of Ida Bagus Alit's movement in my performing body, the way that I move through space using the mask whilst embracing a somatic sense of movement assists the development of my *styl sendiri* my own style, of dancing *topeng*. Somatic movement allows a play and rich dialogue to explore the tensions between the original dance choreography and my awareness of myself as a performer experiencing my sight, breath, groundedness and all the qualities of the moving body. Fraleigh claims that this is what empowers her dance:

When I make any movement truly mine, I embody it. And in this sense, I experience what I would like to call "pure presence," a radiant power of feeling completely present to myself and connected to the world'. (Fraleigh 1991: 13)

All this, is certainly a complex process. However, if we can master this ability to be this sensitive, this awareness can heighten the sense of being on multiple of levels within the body. There is a temptation to suggest that this relies in being 'present' or 'alive' or 'awake' when in my experience, whatever is going on just 'being' or

being 'aware' is enough. Tuning into the reality of every felt sensation no matter what it purports to be, is what a somatic movement practice can offer in preparation for performance. Bringing the mask 'to life' is no more or less than learning how to feel one's own life force, without judgement and in the knowledge that it will change all the time. This relies on a commitment to being present in the 'here and now' and to being responsive, rather than on the development of presence, yet without ambition as the one follows the other. This ability to be present and therefore exhibit the quality of presence is often seen in children or animals and it is the acquisition of this ability to live moment by moment that is captivating in performance.

These concluding statements do not seem profoundly new; perhaps they offer more insight in terms of my personal development as a performer in the cessation, or rather the process of change, of egotistical desires, ambitions, targets or goals that I feel I need/ed to achieve or prove. These feelings lessen as I give them my awareness. This undeniable sense of subjectivity has ultimately emerged from a very intimate research methodology that this practice afforded, which has fostered a sense of understanding in how to train, nurture and develop the feeling of 'being' so one can learn to better harness it at will. This could be balance, openness, a sense of neutrality, making the body and mind clean or cleansed, I believe it is a personal process and unique experience for the individual. However, in that moment of harness, other modes of knowing, being and understanding the

world from the body-mind or consciousness is possible and in that sense, from the Balinese perspective, one dances with one's liver.

Conclusion

Within the short history of scholarship dedicated to the genre of *topeng* that was started by Emigh in the 1970s, what is universally agreed is the capacity of the genre to support an intercultural performance practice. This typically takes the form of improvisation, multiplicity and individuality within the codification of the cultural traditions. How my research contributes to these shared conclusions is articulated through an exploration of practices, imperative questions and a disciplinary approach that is also pertinent to discourses regarding psycho-physical training, embodiment and gender. As a result my research highlights new findings that are applicable to contemporary performance practices concerns (some of which I have emphasised in each one of the previous chapters).

Previous scholarship of *topeng* has not so vigorously conceptualised the subject position of the researcher as part of and in relation to the object of study. Throughout the work I have attempted to balance the role of my own voice as a reflexive practitioner and the larger theoretical issues present in my field of study and this constant 'self-positioning' has been the trigger for many of the subsequent findings. In here, I have not emphasised the conventional scholarly distance that divides 'us' and 'them', and as a result this research asserts a specific identity position and self-referential enquiry throughout that sees myself in relation and in a constant dialogue with the masks, choreography, stories, mantra and ritual practice of the *topeng* genre.

One of the most significant contributions towards the scholarship of *topeng* that this thesis offers and which has emerged out of my own practice, is a recognition and re-alignment of the significance that ritual (more than any other aspect) takes in all aspects of *topeng*. This understanding and embellishment has been made possible as much through a practice-as-research methodology as it has through an auto-ethnographic approach to that methodology.

At the onset of this research I argued that it was critical to be holistic and to include the numinous aspects of Balinese *topeng* alongside the more formal elements of the genre in the intercultural study of *topeng*. This strategy more closely aligns to the cultural context, role and function of Balinese performance and as a result this thesis (and the performances that accompany it) were produced with deep consideration and critical analysis of the Balinese *topeng* mask and the genre as a whole. Through this research one of the most significant contributions towards the scholarship of *topeng* that this thesis offers is a recognition and re-alignment of the significance of numinosity and how, as a non-Balinese performer, and as a woman, we may access it without any attempts to seek out mystical experiences, re-enact activities that hold no individual meaning or to exoticise the genre. Understanding the cultural specificity of the *topeng* genre has been made possible as much through a practice-as-research methodology as it has through an auto-ethnographic approach to that methodology; a methodological approach which situates this research as the first *topeng* study of its kind. Framing both an intercultural critique and my own practice around Balinese cultural concepts,

counteracts the dominance that historically European performance has taken within the field. This is an important development in the history of *topeng* scholarship and has led to a number of key findings, all of which have implications within contemporary Theatre Studies discourses. This is applicable not only to the community of intercultural *topeng* practitioners but also extend to the broader fields of intercultural performance and training. These contributions to knowledge are principally the close relationship between performance, training and ritual which I frame as an 'as/in' dynamic, the relationship between being a mask maker *and* a performer of *topeng* masks, the use and application of somatic approaches in understanding the phenomenological responses to the mask and also the need for a new set of female masks and new performances that are woman centred. In the following sections, I will discuss a number of key findings/outcomes generated by this research process.

Engaging in cultural philosophy; what *rwa bhenida* offers in terms of 'dynamic balance'.

If one's starting position is to occupy a culturally different agenda, theory or what is more likely in the case of Bali (where there is not such an emphasis on intellectualism), a different cultural understanding or philosophy, one immediately shifts the criteria of analysis of performance. Originally my research questioned how to bring 'life' to the mask, how to embody it from a non-Balinese perspective. In order to answer that question, it was imperative to know and understand the cultural specificities which make the mask sacred in Bali. One of

the cultural undercurrents within the practice in its traditional form, is the principle of *rwa bhenida* (the idea of dynamic balance between two juxtaposing poles) which is discussed in Part Two of my Introduction. In terms of Western scholarship of *topeng* this is a frequently neglected topic, as it is often identified as 'balance' on a rather simplistic level, merely as part of, or within the choreography (Barba and Savarese 2006: 32). By establishing that the fundamental philosophical (in preference to theoretical) approach to *topeng* is based on this Balinese cultural concept, this research is *dis-placing* the framework of the discussion, and offering a distinct landscape for the complex negotiations of this intercultural process.

The Balance and Dynamics of 'as/in' Performance, Training and Ritual

The (constant) negotiation of *rwa bhenida* is of particular value because it positions Balinese cultural philosophy as central to the Western performer's understanding of *topeng* as well as it signals its potential and its wider application. This research identifies that the application of balance within a practice of *topeng* allows for the equal presence of dance and drama and mask-work, singing and mantra, meditation and prayer, training and performance; and immediately reassesses the importance of a combined training.

The application of *topeng* demonstrated in this thesis is interdisciplinary and beyond the initial description of 'masked dance-drama.' This assertion is explored through the mode of ritual, re-positioning this aspect firmly and clearly. The

implications of ritual to contemporary debates about *topeng* and interculturalism also contain the potential to reconsider the definition of the genre. Repositioning not only the distinct disciplines of mask, dance and drama (which obviously intersect) but also the Balinese philosophical positions, offer a performance practice of *topeng* what has been absent from ongoing Western dialogues within the genre. That said, issues of exoticisation, misrepresentation and misunderstanding are never to be forgotten and remain key to any intercultural performance. In the case of Balinese *topeng* the discreet differences in terms of disciplines between dance, drama and mask work cannot be so neatly separated out. To explore with greater acknowledgement, the discipline of ritual within *topeng* allows for more dynamic interpretation and application of how an intercultural performance makers may engage with and explore the genre. This is important because by singling out the disciplines of mask, dance and drama there is a loss of context, which is the heart and backbone of Balinese *topeng*.

The thesis also articulates issues concerning the defining terms of this particular genre. I suggest that Balinese *topeng* classifications of mask, dance and drama are useful yet limiting because these terms represent only that which, to a large extent, is seen by the audience. This fits an (entertainment) aesthetic that derives from privileging the visual, in contrast to what is felt or experienced or even what is witnessed in its traditional sphere of performance. However, by reducing this form to those external markers, its distinct disciplines may be recognised, neatly accessed, separated and understood by non-Balinese and thus appealing to a

Western framework of identification. In this sense *topeng* as the ‘masked dance-drama of Bali’ is a useful definition of ‘what’ is *topeng*. Yet, for the intercultural performer wishing to take this form more seriously, this definition only partially describes the ‘how’ it comes to life. It is absolutely correct that the *topeng* performer performs in a mask, dances, tells stories and entertains. It is also true that these activities constitute aspects of how *topeng* is apprehended through ‘doing.’ What is not clear is the technique or disciplines involved with ‘being’ a *topeng* artist and of the process of a student of this practice who seeks to connect the different components of mask, dance and drama. Looking beyond defining disciplines of the genre that stick rigidly to mask, dance and drama one sees a different perspective that shifts the focus onto the relationships between training, performance and ritual. When these are apprehended through a ‘*topeng* lens’ there is something very unique to offer in terms of English contemporary ritual performance practices.

This research has demonstrated that the rituals associated with Balinese *topeng* masks spark a renewed interest in contemporary performance that might or might not involve masks. This ritual practice will not be exercised by mundane appropriation or a forced belief of a spirit contained within the mask, but by developing a new understanding of performance and training as ritual. In this context the mask is understood not as an object of transformation, but a tool where change is made tangible through experience and possible through repeated

training. In this sense the mask is not dissimilar to a portal through which one can learn to rapidly configure thoughts and feelings, be they physical, psychological, emotional states of how the body knows and understands the world.

Embodiment of the Mask; A Somatic Approach

There are two key 'intercultural' strands throughout this thesis: one about intercultural performance in general and the other firmly rooted to the specific cultural complexity of working with and through the Balinese performance culture and tradition. To make 'sense' of many of the phenomenological responses and experiences of the mask I engaged in more typically Western practices⁷⁷; learning and educating myself specifically in somatic body work and experiential anatomy. To my knowledge, this approach rooted in somatic practice, has never been applied to an intercultural mask practice. Therefore the research of this thesis has facilitated a new approach to interrogate questions relating to the embodiment of the mask. The value of this engagement offers a 'twice filtered' lens through which to research and view the *topeng* mask as an embodied intercultural process.

By bringing together Balinese principles of balance and Western theories of embodiment, this research project has demonstrated how a somatic approach can enable a performer to find an internal sense of harmony, comfort, ownership and, most importantly, to feel the force, knowledge and power of her own body. This

⁷⁷ As I have identified there are practitioners such as 'Prapto' who do employ somatic principles within their practice.

force is manifested on many levels when the performer is in tune with the mask and a sense of flow, abandon and moment to moment sensation. A somatic approach also offers a deep understanding of one's internal life, including one's organs. Such an 'organic' response and engagement – in the case of this research, specifically the liver – allows for completely new conditions of practice and a deeper personal understanding of the mask unique to each performer. Under the tutelage of my teacher, Ida Bagus Alit, the liver takes on profound importance and it typifies a Balinese view of the world and its cultural performance practice; therefore, this new development is a significant leap into a different (and arguably closer) understanding of how to engage with cultural specificity and the numinous aspects of the mask.

Extending beyond *topeng*, there are broader implications of using the techniques and languages of somatic body work within mask work. When a performer works with a mask the face becomes less important than the awareness of one's body. This research has suggested that a somatic practice enables a mask performer to train and experience the mask in a different way and experience a greater level of body awareness, or surrender, or abandon, which can lead to a fuller embodiment of the mask. This is more akin to notions of Balinese *taksu* discussed in Chapter One ('Performer Aspirations; Why train?'). However a somatic approach also invites new questions, which remain unexplored within this thesis and which I describe in the latter part of this conclusion.

Engaging in somatics not only gave me the opportunity to make sense of embodying the mask. It also recalibrated how I can now continue my training. Rarely do intercultural Western performers start training in their chosen form early (enough). Frequently, Western performers adopt a performance culture other than one's 'own' later on in life, so consequently there are often issues of difficulty and challenge. Added to that, unless one can live in proximity with one's teacher, and can access frequent lessons and contact time, it is easy to fall victim to bad training habits, infrequent training and inaccurate execution. In this thesis I address these obstacles and offer a route of transformation whereby using a *comfort* driven and somatic approach to movement (combined with adopting training as ritual practice) it is possible to go deeper into the challenges of training that a traditional Balinese and intercultural practice demands. This is thus a key finding of my research and it is particularly useful in terms of understanding the process of ageing and decay of the performing body.

The Role of Mask Making in Relation to Performance

Previous *topeng* scholarship has not thoroughly documented the training element of the discipline, or explored a way that offers a nuanced understanding of the relationship between mask making and dance training. A combined 'all-in-one' training that includes mask-making offers new insights into performance and training; this unites the two complementary but distinctly different disciplines.

Contemporary discourses such as mindfulness-based performance offer this study a new and different perspectives. As a mask-making scholar I have developed a unique maker's perspective and embodied knowledge through repeated small carving actions and extensive periods of sitting. The practice of mask-making is slow, meditative, repetitive and banal; it involves usually living with one's teacher. Compared to the energetic pace of the dance trainee, who perhaps lives elsewhere but visits daily and who accompanies the teacher to ceremonies in temples. Having done both 'training schemes', I appreciate the differences between the two processes of learning. Both training schemes teach how to culturally use and understand the mask and the purpose for which it is made; principally for a ceremonial performance to a human as well as non-human audience. Whilst both making masks and performing with masks offer a deep understanding of the cultural context of how a mask is used in performance, a combined and 'all-in-one' training offers a breadth of knowledge that allows for an even wider cultural understanding in both the mask's conception and execution. This mutual and symbiotic approach to mask-work, in its making, training and then performing establishes a significant place for the genre of *topeng* within a wider analysis of Western intercultural performance training. This is because it raises a number of interesting issues such as the question of what does practical mask making training offer in terms of performance ethnography? From my position of observing participant⁷⁸, I was able to see and experience a unique

⁷⁸ Usually an ethnographer is a participant observer, however I have reversed this because I was very actively involved in my practice, long before I started to ethnographically or consciously research it.

emic perspective, that is, an inside point of view, caused by the long, slow attendance and participation that mask making demands. This perspective was constructed around myself in relation to what was happening around me and has consequently led to a number of questions and observations such as: How does performance training relate to other craft-based creative disciplines? How could this relationship be explored between the body that 'does' and the hand that 'makes'? What are the embodied implications of such a process? From my experience of mask making I can say that the answer to these questions lie entirely with the concept of creation, imagination and conceptualisation and the obvious greater connections between these processes. These connections lead to an on-going creativity that develops, transforms and expands a practice. As I have indicated, the process of mask making is meditative; success is best achieved when the mind is calm. Therefore another interesting issue to consider is the connection between this sedentary and meditative crafting activity and the twenty first century perspective of mindfulness-based performance. It will also be useful to consider how these activities intersect and more importantly, what can this collaboration offer a performance practice. According to Middleton 'the study of mindfulness-based performance is a confluence of disciplinary streams; an 'interconnected system of intentions, techniques and qualities which implicitly or explicitly entail an ethical, spiritual and developmental framework that support the integration of Western and Eastern cultures' (Middleton 2016). This being so, if a mindfulness-based performance modality is 'non-action' (Middleton 2016) then what potentially this means is that a slow, crafting process offers a new

discipline of attention between contemplative practices and artistic processes. It may allow the performer to take a refuge in the crafting process from a place between performance and everyday life.⁷⁹ To have a refuge *within* a performance practice (in preference to outside of one's practice where external factors offer relief and safety from the difficulties, challenges, blocks and obstacles that a practice may reveal) offers a real shift in terms of how we conceive work. To return to the original question in terms of mindfulness-based performance, this notion of 'refuge' could offer training and performance a new sense of alertness of intentions, of circumstances, of the real necessity of an action and finally of non-illusion and the weight of self-image.

A New Set of Female Masks and Performances that are Woman Centred.

The performances that have been developed for this thesis are the result of specific encounters. At the beginning of this process I questioned how to engage and apply *topeng*, its related traditions and performance techniques, to contemporary performance training and performance and how, as a woman to engage with this genre, as it is still traditionally the preserve of men. What the research unveiled through practice was the complexity of achieving this and how it became necessary to create a new set of female masks and find new ways of

⁷⁹ I am stressing the symbiosis between the process of masked performance and mask making, even though in here I am giving priority to the role of performer. As such, I could equally claim that a combined mask training in performance/craft allows the mask maker to take a refuge in performance from a place between crafting and everyday life. This latter description more accurately describes my own position.

embodying them in a manner that was appropriate and sensitive to my own cultural identity whilst demonstrating a commitment to the genre.

As well as producing recognisable *topeng* performances that fit the codification of the *topeng* genre (such as with *Topeng Little Red Riding Hood*, a more conventional adaptation) this research has also produced experimental approaches and hybrid performances (*home* being an example). These performances operate on two levels, as stand-alone events which can also be seen in conjunction with each other. This possibility of hybridisation and adaptation invite new understandings of the genre for the performer and student of both mask and intercultural practices.

The thesis charts these considerations through a process whereby I designed and self-crafted masks in the *topeng* style, which are the first of their kind to form a collection. This claim is not only because they are contemporary and intercultural creations but equally as importantly because they are all female masks. Documented for the first time is a new Balinese mask '*Topeng Sugara Manis*' (meaning the Sweet Ocean) which also has an Indonesian name '*Topeng Tua Perempuan*' (meaning the wife of the Old Man Mask) whom I name Mrs. Old Man. Her creation partly inspired a reconsideration of the role of female characters in traditional Balinese *topeng* and prompted the research to question why there are so few female masks and how to reposition a more women-centred approach.

Whereas female usually refers to biology and not gender, in Bali masks are called female as opposed to feminine and refer to the representations of women. In Bali the idea of feminine (and masculine) is equally available to both men and women and this is manifest in the movement qualities that are '*keras- halus* (meaning the axis of strong and powerful to soft and refined). Such an understanding is valuable for feminist practice because it offers the idea of multiplicity, in preference to duality and the elimination of any dichotomy as binaries disintegrate. However because of the extremely small number of female masks in the tradition of *topeng* (only three to the best of my knowledge) it is important for this aspect of gender representation to be revisited and alternatives offered. This is currently not an agenda in Bali that is worth pursuing as the majority of Balinese women performers do not have the impulse to specialise in *topeng*, and there are problems of associating Western feminist theories and discourses on the performance traditions of Bali. However this is relevant for a sense of intercultural progression and development particularly as many non-Balinese students who travel to Bali are women and not men. However this is not to suggest that male performers would not benefit from a wider range of female masks to play; the irony here is that traditionally there are no women characters in the *babad* stories. If the genre is to have more geographic appeal beyond Bali, there need to be the masks to support equal representations.

These new masks and performances offer alternative stories, voices, representations and images of 'woman' all of which demonstrate agency, power

and a central position in contrast to an almost complete absence of women in traditional Balinese *topeng*. The strategy I proposed within this mask collection is to assert a vision of similarity plus difference and in doing so to subvert patriarchal representations of women. What this research unravels is the resounding sense or echo of a stereotype within the mask design and the usefulness of those stereotypes as these can be disruptive and instrumental in showing change and alternative dimensions to a similar and familiar mask design. Often, in *topeng*, with a new mask there is a concern of how to animate it without specific choreography. The new set of female masks are distinctly separated from the codification of the dance and insist that the performer improvises her own movements and tells her own story and this 'blank canvass' enables and grants the (knowledgeable) performer permission to work from scratch creating her own spectrum of movement and gestural vocabulary.⁸⁰ This is ideologically important as it reverses cultural codification, disrupts patriarchal stereotypes and offers an alternative to paternal training regimes.

In terms of the specifics of this particular research, and of the autobiographical trajectory it has taken, questions of gender representation have also provided very practical solutions to the ethical dilemmas of working interculturally. Returning to the idea of Lo and Gilbert's dynamic model of intercultural practice which they visualise as a 'spinning disc held by an elastic band' (Gilbert and Lo 2002: 45) which

⁸⁰ I acknowledge the dangers related to this approach and 'making it up' as one risks orientalising and exoticising one's source material. This approach could only work with a deep knowledge base of the genre if one was to define the work as '*topeng*' otherwise it would simply be an example of animating a *topeng* mask.

grounds a fairer and more inclusive sense of “two-way traffic”, what this research has identified is that there are questions, many of which remain unanswered about the politics, ethics and/or aesthetics of working in and between cultural boundaries. The collection of female masks and their new choreographies break down to a degree the non-hierarchical and patriarchal frameworks by which traditional *topeng* works. Not just because of the emphasis of ‘solo’ practice and the sense of ownership within a devising practice which has been discussed, but also because of the degree by which the ‘self’ is in the position of control. Here this intercultural version of *topeng* is nuanced by variations of self in terms of persona and the individual mask which I myself have conceived and portray in performance. That is by my shifting performance presence and the intangible energy that I, as the performer, demonstrate by physically inhabiting the space. A process which is also made possible by the relationship between myself, the masks and the interaction that takes place with the audience through improvisation. In this sense one of the important contributions to the field of interculturalism that this research is making is that it incorporates Amine’s notion of ‘double critique’⁸¹ which is an ‘effect of the genealogy wherein one stages his/her confrontation of the Self and Other, East and West’ (Amine 2013 online). By casting myself in a position of other within the domains of traditional *topeng* both as a woman and as a non-Balinese, and by playfully repositioning the roles of selfhood and other, I

⁸¹ Khalid Amine’s notion of a ‘double critique’ operates within the spectrum that weaves ‘in and out of the philosophical lines of influence belonging to both East and West’ (Amine 2013 online). It calls for a re-thinking of the power differences between and the binary construction of East and West.

have deliberately disrupted the concept of othering that has been the default of some prior intercultural exchanges. Whilst these boundaries between self, mask, place and other are all ambiguous what this ultimately mean for the intercultural *topeng* performer is that there is an enormous sense of agency, which can be empowering when she has experienced injustices and unethical practice within the experience of training.

My practice as 'New Interculturalism'

At the heart of the thesis is the positioning of the research within the broader and emergent form of 'new interculturalism'. Mitra suggests that new interculturalism manifests as an 'embodied corporeal language' (Mitra 2015: 29) As well as including autoethnography as one of its specific features, Mitra also suggests that there is a 'perpetual identification with a state of in-betweeness; between cultures, between nations, between disciplines and between the different versions of... self, with a recognition that many other selves and many others co-exist' (Mitra 2015: 29). There have been many factors that have complicated my sense of being 'in-between' and, at times, it has been rather uncomfortable and promoted a sense feeling 'in limbo' (and even a feeling of paralysis). Referencing back to the image and name of Lo and Gilbert's 'spinning disc on an elastic band' as an intercultural model of exchange, I am reminded how the disc on the elastic band occasionally 'stops' or gets stuck and tangled in the middle. Ultimately the two hands that operate the disc have to entwine, get tangled, and stretch the tension so that the disc can move again. In such a way, this research has addressed,

acknowledged and embraced 'in-betweenness' by engaging with all that entanglement, In so doing there is an attempt to disrupt binaries between East/West, male/female, youth/age, mask-maker/performer, Bali/England and by working between the disciplines of dance/drama. Whilst being 'in-between' there is always plenty one does not know, however one's gaze or focus can also sharpen, shift and tune into an new set of ideas and knowledge. Within my practice I can exchange any dis-comfort of being in-between with a growing confidence, where my practice can fluctuate between peripheries, centres, and even, to situate itself in the 'gap'. It can occupy all of these positions equally and all positions become changeable, plural and temporal.

The idea of 'in-betweenness' is also bound up with notions of mobility and it should be pointed out that the way in which that sense of mobility is constructed/experienced, is particular and specific to each intercultural practice. In my own practice, the issue of home was vital to me as an intercultural performer as I straddled two different experiences of home and entertained a mixed sense of belonging to either one or the other. The constant insider/outsider position is complex and is commonly experienced by those who are privileged to travel and be mobile and can experience their identity position shift from place to place. Mobility is thus more than getting from A to B. It is clear that there are different kinds of mobility that can be practiced, contested, represented and which lead to new understandings of the social or cultural dimensions to the ways that we move between geographical places. Fixing notions of mobility to a sense of geography is

thereby problematic, as geography is stable and rooted to boundaries that, however politically un/stable, are rooted to time and place. Home and indeed mobility is better understood as a verb, as an embodied practice that literally takes us 'beyond' boundaries.

Future Directions

Nowadays there is a resurgence of interest within the research fields of training, embodiment, devised performance, ritual, and interculturalism. Yet there is still a gap in knowledge that unites these diverse yet related discourses in relation to the mask.

The connections that exist between the disciplines of performance and ritual are well-documented and this thesis goes further by asserting that there is potential to extend the rubric to include training. This is of value to contemporary performance training and marks a shift between the definitions of a performer in training and the professional actor. Ritual is such an important aspect of *topeng* training and sets it apart from the process of preparation for a Western performance. *Topeng* is a performance that the performer is continually rehearsing and training for and in this sense there is ritual, training and performance all as one. This is a broad statement which requires further unpacking and testing out over many performances. Future research could identify how *specific* theories and practices of ritual connect training and performance within an 'as/in' framework and how this be applied outside of Bali

and made useful to a twenty-first century intercultural performer. This thesis has offered a particular approach but it is in no way definitive and I am interested to extend these questions to other intercultural *topeng* practitioners, particularly to those working beyond the South East Asian context. What this has illuminated are further encounters of symbiosis and mutuality in terms of an 'as/in' relationship between performance, training and ritual. This relationship has potential for further development and as such I identify this as one of my key and most strategic aspects for further research.

One of the ideas this thesis has explored is how by employing a somatic practice the non-Balinese performer may further understand the philosophical and cultural aspects of the *topeng* mask that apply to training, ritual and performance. However there remain interesting questions. For example, there is potential to expand this research in somatic practice and develop training that situates the intercultural performer within a culture specific training. This could be achieved working in collaboration with a qualified somatics practitioner who could guide and assist this exploration. Certainly in terms of working with one's liver, indeed any part of the anatomy, there is far more to harvest from the start this research is making. As the body changes, so do our approaches and relationship to the mask. This somatic training could expand alongside the evolution of intercultural *topeng* performances, which can then be analysed from the perspective of ritual. However this brings up complicated questions relating to virtuosity (entertainment) and efficacy (ritual) as often there can be contradictions within a somatic practice that

relates to performance. This is a broad statement which relates to my own experience however I do believe that these concerns are typical and shared within the somatics community, especially in view of how a somatic approach 'fits' within the boundaries of theatre. The research I suggest would be timely, relevant and offer something new in the field of *topeng* study which would have resonances beyond the field into a wider arena of intercultural performance and masked performance.

I called this thesis *Embodying Topeng: Gender, Training and Intercultural Encounters* and the research has been framed as a series of 'encounters' which by definition often involve a degree of the unexpected, or an experience which is often riddled with obstacles, challenges and/or difficulties. On reflection it seems as if many of the issues this research brought up are concerned with precisely those challenges which I experienced and could find no scholarship to navigate them through. In the mid 1980s Eugenio Barba started collaborative workshop projects in Bali (Barba and Savarese 2006: 11, 136, 199) with a focus on physical balance within the choreography and scholar John Emigh performed *topeng* with alternative narratives (1996). This evidenced interest, degrees of application and that the techniques may be applied within training and performance. However there was potential for this to be revisited, revised, collated and made applicable to the wider concerns of the twenty first century performer. Although individual actresses alluded to the embodiment of the mask (Carreri, quoted in Watson 2002: 77) and contributed to debates surrounding the much contested notion of

'energy', these projects did not attempt to connect Western embodiment practices to their own situated and personal experience of masking or investigate the deeper significance, placing and application of ritual and within the genre. This research in a small but significant way, counters the approach that Western, and especially European and American theatre has taken in intercultural performance scholarship regarding *topeng* and offers new ideas, concepts and approaches by which to engage in this inspiring Balinese ceremonial performance.

Glossary of Balinese and Indonesian words and phrases

<i>Adharma</i>	That which destroys 'dharma'.
<i>Alit</i>	Micro, small, simple.
<i>Agama Hindu Bali</i>	The Balinese religion which is a fusion of Hinduism, Buddhism, animism and ancestral worship.
<i>Agung</i>	Macro, big, complex.
<i>Alus or halus</i>	Refined, soft, gentle; often used in relation to choreographic movements or mask features, particularly those of lighter shades. The opposite to 'keras'.
<i>Amrit/ Amerta</i>	Elixir of life, immortal waters of life.
<i>Ansal</i>	A swift movement indicating a change in the gamelan, whereby the performer raises both elbows and reaches the palms of the hands in an upward gesture.
<i>Bahasa Indonesia</i>	The Indonesian language, (literally the Indonesian tongue).
<i>Banjar</i>	Hamlet; a sub-section of one's community or village.

<i>Baris</i>	A non-masked, warrior dance performed traditionally by men who carry spears.
<i>Basa Bali</i>	Small talk with a high level of subtext.
<i>Bayu</i>	Energy or force/power manifested in wind or breathe.
<i>Bebancian</i>	A gender type that lies somewhere between male and female and typical throughout Southeast Asia.
<i>Berani</i>	Brave, courageous.
<i>Bhatara</i>	Gods and spirits above the human world.
<i>Bulé</i>	A disrespectful word meaning 'whitie' in reference to foreigners and tourists.
<i>Cakra</i>	Balinese alternative spelling of the Sanskrit word 'chakhra' meaning wheel or centre (of internal power/energy).
<i>Canang</i>	Offerings, usually referring to the small offerings made daily, usually by women.
<i>Dasar entine</i>	The organ of the liver, when it is considered as the foundation of thinking, feeling, believing.

<i>Demen antine</i>	A happy liver.
<i>Dharma</i>	Righteousness, justice, truth. Practically this manifests as one's duty, job or responsibility.
<i>Engone antine</i>	A startled liver.
<i>Feminis</i>	Feminist (pronounced 'peminis').
<i>Ida Bagus</i>	The prefix given to men before their chosen name which indicates the highest social caste, which is Brahmana.
<i>Griya</i>	High caste house or family compound.
<i>Grup Gedebong Goyang</i>	Group of gyrating bananas.
<i>Gunung</i>	Mountain.
<i>Hati</i>	Liver
<i>Idep</i>	Thoughts and actions invested into performance.
<i>Ikut upacara</i>	To accompany or follow to a ceremony.
<i>Ilmu gaib</i>	Mystical, secret, esoteric knowledge.
<i>Ishwara</i>	The God that the Balinese refer to as Shiva, interchangeable with Siwa.
<i>Jabah tengah</i>	Outer part of the village temple.

<i>Jejeh antine</i>	A sick liver.
<i>Jeroan</i>	Inner part of the village temple.
<i>Joged pinyintan</i>	An ancient form of courtly dance.
<i>Kabatianan</i>	Spiritual practice.
<i>Kaja-Kelod</i>	References to directions meaning 'mountain-seaward'.
<i>Kala-Buta</i>	Gods and spirits on the ground and below the human world.
<i>Kasar</i>	Rough, course, hairy or fat.
<i>Kawi</i>	Ancient Javanese Sanskrit; the language of mantra and historical documents spoken by priests and performers.
<i>Kebalian</i>	Balinese-ness.
<i>Keluarga</i>	Family.
<i>Keras</i>	Strong, stiff, powerful; often used in relation to choreographic movements or mask features, particularly those of darker shades. The opposite to ' <i>alus</i> '.

<i>Kos</i>	A type of accommodation, typically small and cheap and often used by migrant workers.
<i>Langse</i>	The curtain, or symbolic curtain, that separates the stage or performing area, with the non-performing area or back stage. It represents the permeable division between the <i>Sekala</i> and <i>Niskala</i> , the Seen and Unseen worlds.
<i>Latihan</i>	To Train, practise and/or rehearse.
<i>Leteh</i>	Unclean.
<i>Loeh-moewani</i>	Opposites of male and female.
<i>Lontar</i>	Palm leaf documents of a palimpsest nature.
<i>Madya</i>	The middle part of one's body.
<i>Malu</i>	Shy or coy.
<i>Memperlepaskan</i>	To untangle or release.
<i>Menhari (tari)</i>	To dance.
<i>Mesakapan</i>	Married to one's mask.
<i>Mesolah</i>	To characterise.

<i>Mewintan</i>	A ceremony to prepare the performer in readiness to work.
<i>Milpil</i>	A soft, turning gesture used in both male and female dances.
<i>Minyak kelapa muda</i>	Virgin coconut oil.
<i>Nawa Sanga</i>	Balinese cosmic map or direction points.
<i>Ngigel</i>	Leaning to dance.
<i>Nayog</i>	A balanced, pushing, flowing movement.
<i>Ngunda Bayu</i>	The concept of energy relating to dance.
<i>Niskala</i>	The Unseen World of spirits, gods, goddesses and deified ancestors.
<i>Nista</i>	The lowest part of one's body.
<i>Nygaben</i>	Funeral ceremony
<i>Odalan</i>	A temple ceremony or an anniversary of a temple; often associated as a type of birthday every six months.
<i>Om Swastiyastu</i>	A polite, religious greeting.
<i>Orang turis</i>	Tourist/s
<i>Pahat</i>	To carve/ carving.

<i>Pajagen</i>	The solo performer version of <i>topeng</i>
<i>Pakaian adat</i>	Traditional clothes (worn on religious occasions like ceremonies).
<i>Panas antine</i>	A hot liver.
<i>Pelinggih</i>	A seat (for the ancestors).
<i>Penasar Cenikan</i>	The younger of the two narrating brothers.
<i>Penasar Kelihan</i>	The older of the two narrating brothers.
<i>Penglemba</i>	The introductory dances/masks of a <i>topeng</i> performance.
<i>Perjuang hakhak perempuan</i>	Fighter for women's rights.
<i>Pro ra sa</i>	The symbolic colours of the holy trinity in an offering.
<i>Purnamaya</i>	Full Moon.
<i>Rwa Bhenida</i>	The two differences, the balance of two poles.
<i>Sabda</i>	Voice (within the context of performance)
<i>Sama sama tetapi tidak sama</i>	The same but not the same.
<i>Sanggar</i>	A home based workshop or training centre.
<i>Sebel</i>	Unclean.

<i>Sebet antine</i>	A sad liver.
<i>Sekala</i>	The Seen world (of humans).
<i>Sirih</i>	Betel Nut.
<i>Suud Merjorjoran</i>	'Stop fighting'
<i>Taksu</i>	Divine charisma; the fusion of art and spirit.
<i>Tamu</i>	Guest .
<i>Tari(an) upacara</i>	Ceremonial dances.
<i>Tiga jnana</i>	The three ways of communicating (with the Gods in a performance).
<i>Tilem</i>	Dark Moon.
<i>Tinggal di rumah</i>	Living in the house/home.
<i>Topeng</i>	Literally meaning 'pressed on the face' but referring to both the mask as an object and the actual genre.
<i>Topeng patih keras</i>	The prime minister mask
<i>Topeng dalam</i>	The king mask
<i>Topeng Gaja Madah</i>	The prime minister mask (Ida Bagus Alit's own design)
<i>Topeng Penesar</i>	The narrator.

<i>Topeng Ratu Putih</i>	The white queen, often referring to Sita.
<i>Topeng Sugara Manis</i>	The 'Sweet Ocean' mask.
<i>Topeng Sidhakarya</i>	Sidhakarya, the last mask to enter in a <i>topeng pajagen</i> .
<i>Topeng Tua</i>	The old man mask
<i>Topeng Tua Perempuan</i>	The female version of the old man mask (his wife).
<i>Tri murti</i>	The unification of Wisnu, Iswara and Brahma.
<i>Upacara</i>	(Sacred or religious) Ceremony.
<i>Utama</i>	The highest physical part of one's body.
<i>Wibawa</i>	The highest level of performative attainment said to express a spiritual aura
<i>Wirama</i>	A level of performance whereby the performer master the choreography in relation to the music and dramatic function of the mask.
<i>Wisnu</i>	Balinese alternative name for the Hindu God Vishnu.
<i>Yadya</i>	Sacrifice.

Appendix 1

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Women in Balinese *Topeng*: Voices, Reflections and Interactions

Margaret Coldiron

Carmencita Palermo

Tiffany Strawson

At the “Women in Asian Theatre” conference held at the University of Lincoln in September 2014, a panel focused on women performers of the Balinese masked dance-drama *topeng* (the word *topeng* refers to both the genre and to the mask object). Evidence indicates that the form has been in existence since at least the ninth or tenth century BCE (Goris 1954: 1, 55; II, 121; Bandem and de Boer 1995: 45); it is performed in ritual or ceremonial contexts as a complete dance-drama by up to five dancers using a variety of masks or, in the context of a secular concert or a tourist performance, a single mask may be performed as a solo character-study. The stories for the dramas are derived from the *babad*, legendary chronicles of Balinese kings. *Topeng* is traditionally performed by men, and nearly all of the characters depicted in *topeng* masks are male, but in recent years a few women have ventured into the genre, challenging convention.

There has been some excellent recent scholarship examining the emergence and development of women’s roles in a variety of Balinese performing arts, Catherine Diamond’s wide ranging (2008) examination of women in traditional and non-

traditional performance, Emiko Susilo's dissertation on women's gamelan (2003), Jennifer Goodlander's recent *Asian Theatre Journal* article on female dalangs (2012) and Carmencita Palermo's study of women in Balinese *topeng* (2009). These works chart the enthusiasm as well as the inhibitions and frustrations for these female 'pioneers.' The preponderance of males in Balinese performing arts has been regarded as "traditional," but (as has been evidenced in many other cultures) tradition often develops out of habit or need rather than by any divine plan (the divine plan is usually invented subsequently to justify the tradition.) Women historically have not been *topeng* performers because they had no time either to train or to perform. Their domestic and ritual duties (including preparation of daily and ceremonial offerings) took up all their energies (Palermo 2009). Dances in the temple and, latterly, in hotel and tourist shows, are generally performed by young girls and boys while mature married women usually perform only the processional ritual *pendet* to welcome or bid farewell to the gods at a temple ceremony. However, when Western women began to come to Bali to study some of the traditionally male arts in the nineteen-seventies, and showed real skill, the notion of women in these male roles began to seem less outlandish.¹ⁱⁱⁱ The advent of the performing arts academy²ⁱⁱⁱ (which trains both young men and young women in traditional arts) along with increased wealth, modern labor-saving devices and the New Order directives about gender equality have all given women context and opportunity to enter into these formerly male-dominated fields (Goodlander 2012: 54-60; Diamond 2008).

Since the 1970s an increasing number of foreign students, both male and female, have travelled to Bali to study traditional music and dance drama. Some of the early trailblazers wrote books and articles about their experiences and many have become important scholars and teachers of Balinese culture in the universities of Europe and the United States. Where they led, many more have followed. Two women in particular have served as agents of change. Rucina Ballinger travelled to Bali in the early nineteen-seventies to study music and dance, and in the course of this studied *topeng* with I Nyoman Kakul of Batuan. Kakul also taught many other foreign students, including John Emigh, Ron Jenkins and Deborah Dunn, all of whom went on to write about their experiences with *topeng*. Ballinger stayed in Bali, married a prince from Mengwi and has since become an insider/outsider critic and prominent commentator on Balinese arts. She is also one of the only women to have performed in the spiritually powerful mask of the widow-witch Rangda, traditionally performed only by men because of their perceived superior “strength.”^{iv}

In the 1980s Cristina Formaggia, an Italian who had studied *kathakali* in India, arrived in Bali and felt she had found her artistic home. She studied *topeng* and *gambuh* (classical court dance-drama) with I Madé Djimat in Batuan and became an accomplished performer. Although a foreigner, she was gradually accepted by the Balinese and performed regularly in temple festivals alongside some of the most esteemed local artists for more than twenty years, until her death in 2008. She was highly respected for her skill and discipline and her work in preserving and

recording the ancient court art of *gambuh*. In collaboration with Ni Desak Nyoman Suarti^v she also established an all-female *topeng* group called *Topeng Shakti* in 1997-98,^{vi} which had among its members some of the most important and respected female performers from Bali. They performed at the Bali Arts Festival in 2000, in the Magdalena Festival in Denmark in 2001, and in 2003 at Festival De L'Imaginaires" at the Maison Cultures Du Monde in Paris.

Another agent for change has been travel outwards, not only in international tours of Balinese performing groups, but also Balinese performers travelling to Australia, America and Europe to study. Performers, such as I Madé Bandem, I Wayan Dibia, I Nyoman Sedana and I Nyoman Catra have contributed to international understanding of Balinese arts, and returned to Bali to become influential teachers. This cross-cultural exchange is now a constant in Balinese arts, so much so that students from the West and elsewhere in Asia regularly travel to Bali while Balinese artists, including those mentioned above, are invited to be artists-in-residence at universities or with performing groups in Australia, Europe, Asia and the United States.

Carmencita Palermo, Tiffany Strawson and Margaret ("Jiggs") Coldiron are all scholars, teachers and performers of Balinese *topeng* who trained with master teachers in traditional village settings in Bali. Palermo is originally from Sicily and, after living in Indonesia on and off for ten years, is now based in Tasmania. Strawson, from the UK, also has developed her knowledge of Balinese masks by

travelling between Europe and Bali, funding her passion by freelance teaching and directing theatre projects. Coldiron is an American who trained as an actress and has lived in London for many years working primarily as a teacher and director in professional actor training programs. From very different backgrounds, they are united in their passion for *topeng*. In preparation for the conference they embarked on a three-way discussion about how and why they, as Western women, came to be so fascinated by this foreign and traditionally male genre and how they see their own position within the world of Balinese *topeng*, both as women and as foreigners. It is set out in the form of an extended interview with some additional interpolations from the papers presented at the conference. The aim was to find whether there were commonalities in their experience of this traditionally male form and whether, through an examination of their own experience with *topeng*, they could develop any theories about why Balinese female performers who have the skills and experience to perform the genre, generally do not do so.

Q: Why did you decide to study topeng?

Carmencita Palermo: I first watched a *topeng* performance in Italy when a troupe performed as part of the International School of Theatre Anthropology/ Odin Theatre in 1990. That time the Italian mask performer Pino Confessa was part of the troupe lead by I Madé Bandem. Then I watched it again in Bergamo a couple of years later. This time Cristina Formaggia was performing with I Madé Djimat. For some reason Italians were always involved. I felt a strong attraction, and as a performing arts student I believed I was seeing a living form of commedia dell'arte,

a living and necessary performance and not a re-invention of tradition. This strong feeling stayed dormant for a long while. When I went to Bali to do research on *kecak*^{vii} for my master's degree in 1994, I didn't even dare to think I could learn to dance. I Wayan Dibia suggested that I live in the village of Bona to carry out my research, where I Madé Sija and his family lived. Sija is a significant figure in Balinese traditional arts, known primarily as a *dalang*, *topeng* performer and specialist in making offerings. At the time, he was one of the people responsible for the local *kecak* group that performed daily for tourists and his whole family were involved. I followed the family to rehearsals for the *kecak* competition at the Bali Arts Festival, but also I followed them when they performed *wayang kulit* shadow puppets or *topeng*. I was absorbing in silence everything I Madé Sija was doing, including making masks, but I did not dare to even try to ask to learn. I was so fascinated by his ability to change character through a piece of "lifeless" wood on his face, but I did not dare to imagine that I could do the same. However, in the last month of my studies something shifted. I made a mask with Ida Bagus Oka from Mas, and then I made a mask with Ida Bagus Alit from Lodtunduh. Ida Bagus Alit insisted I learned a dance, so I had a couple of lessons but didn't have the time to do more. That unfinished business made me feel that I must return to Bali. I won't forget the moment when I Madé Bandem told me about the Dharmasiswa program (scholarships offered by the Indonesian government for foreigners to study Indonesian arts in the arts academies of Indonesia). As soon as I landed in Italy I made my application at the Indonesian Embassy. I wanted to go back to Bali and learn *topeng*, and soon after I returned to study for two and a half years.

Tiffany Strawson: *Topeng*, as opposed to other mask traditions in Bali, was a fusion of dance and drama and seemed to me to be more akin to familiar European forms like *commedia dell'arte*. Moreover, *topeng* did not involve trance so seemed more accessible. I imagined I would go to Bali for two months, enjoy the experience of seeing another culture and travelling and I would learn a new set of skills to add to my theatrical toolbox. I supposed that I would “get it out of my system.” Little did I realize that my first trip would ignite a love affair that would last until now! I imagined that I wanted to learn about performance and theatre, but it was the culture, the ritual and the spiritual significance of the mask that had the greatest impact on me. It gave the performance an overwhelming sense of completion and purpose that was completely new to me. After my first visit, I decided to study *topeng* with more dedication and saved up to return. I sold everything to get back as soon as possible. My second visit to Bali was also intended to be two months, but I stayed a year and a half because I felt as if nothing else was more important. My family and friends were upset and confused wondering what on earth I was doing out there. I felt as if I were making very clear, difficult choices that would influence my life. Although I wasn't making very great progress on that visit, I didn't understand much of what was happening around me, I was culturally confused most of the time and always seemed to be making mistakes, I felt a compelling sense of belonging to the masks and the performance.

Margaret Coldiron: I went to Bali for the first time in 1991 where I saw a tourist performance of *topeng* Tua (the Old Man mask—a character study of an elderly

statesman, once a vigorous warrior, but now beset by old age) and I was utterly entranced. I was teaching neutral and half masks in the Copeau/ St. Denis style at the Drama Centre London at the time. I loved masks and I was thinking of doing a masters' degree, so I thought I could make *topeng* my subject. However, when I began to find out more about the form and realized it would be impossible to learn more in London, except from books, I decided to make it my PhD study, along with the masks of Japanese *nô* drama.

Q: Was it the masks that interested you first? If not, what?

CP: Absolutely yes, it was the masks and the challenge of making alive something “dead”—that was my challenge.

TS: It was definitely the masks. I was disillusioned with the mask scene in the UK, as there is a symbiotic relationship between underfunding and lack of popularity for mask work. At the time mask work seemed to be associated mostly with children's theatre. I wanted to go somewhere where the mask tradition was alive, vibrant and part of popular performance. Initially I was not interested in learning the performance aspect myself; as a “craftswoman” I just wanted to learn how to carve. Only after eight years or so was I encouraged to dance, to bring “life” into the design. Since I have started to gain a better understanding of the masks, the context of ritual space, spiritual worship, sounding mantra and all of the qualities that fuse to make a performance have become entangled. As with any level of specialism, the more one learns, the more there is to be learned.

MC: I've always been fascinated with masks and how they work and I'm still discovering more all the time. Like Carmencita, I was astonished by the way these masks came alive in performance and seemed to have such a strong sense of “attention” and focus. Perhaps it's because the features are so strong, perhaps because the eyes are very prominent and have a very clear gaze that one feels their power when they look at something. Even just hanging on a wall or animated by a hand they are full of life.

Q: Which mask is your favorite? Did your favorite change when you learned the dances?

CP: When I started I loved all strong and funny characters! I was good at those and the Balinese were very encouraging because I could be so funny and my feet were “like a man”—so it was easy for me. It was me! My first regular teacher was I Nyoman Cerita, whom I met when I was attending the STSI^{viii} in Denpasar; I also studied with I Gusti Suweka and I Ketut Suteja who taught *topeng* and *baris* [warrior dance].^{ix} Soon I started taking daily lessons from I Ketut Kantor in Batuan while I was regularly visiting and following I Made Sija and Ida Bagus Alit and seeing their performances. The fact that I was officially enrolled at STSI gave me a certain amount of freedom to follow several different teachers.^x They all gave me the opportunity to perform, and since strong funny characters are so free and flexible, nobody would really question who my teacher was. After a couple of years I realized I had to “step up” to greater challenges and my journey sent me in search of the refined characters. The technical precision of I Nyoman Cerita helped me

explore *topeng* Monyer Manis, a refined comic character created in Denpasar in the nineteen-fifties. My daily lessons with I Ketut Kantor and the long conversations I had with I Made Sija helped me slowly able to explore the masks of *topeng* Tua and Dalam, the refined king.

TS: I do not have a “favorite,” but I do feel a very much stronger connection to the mask *topeng* Keras Gajah Mada, a mask designed by my teacher Ida Bagus Alit from Lodtunduh. This is partly because this was the mask that he assigned me to because of my body type, and I am in a sense, 'married' to this mask, having done a *pasupati*^{xi} ceremony. Ironically, I have since realized that most of Alit’s students start off learning *topeng* Keras,^{xii} mainly because it is his favorite. Although I cannot claim to feel spiritually in tune with this mask, or even fully confident in my ability to bring it to life, I am fascinated by the multiple obstacles and challenges this mask presents to me both culturally and as a woman. I find the more refined characters such as Dalam (the refined king) easier, but I cannot claim that it is my “favorite.” I love dancing all of them as part of a sequence, each having their own nuance, character and choreography. I enjoy finding in my body the fluctuation between *keras*—meaning strong and powerful—with *halus*, meaning soft, sweet and refined. I also enjoy the intercultural potential of these principles of energy and, because of my explorations, I carved a variety of what might be termed “post-traditional masks.” I was interested to see what would happen if I changed the strong male mask of *topeng* Keras Gajah Mada to a female to reflect the twenty-first century in which the president could be a woman, for example Megawati

Sukarnoputri of Indonesia (2001-2006). I therefore imagined a new mask in collaboration with Ida Bagus Alit and re-named her Ibu Berani, which translates as “Mrs. Brave” or even “Mother Courage.” Ibu Berani indicates that she is a warrior, a fighter, but it was also a nickname of my own, so I felt a deeper investment in this design from the outset. I found that these qualities and associations gave me a connection to the mask before I had even started to envisage how I would carve the wood and how it would speak to me. Although in Bali, bravery for a woman is mixed up with all kinds of culturally specific associations and not necessarily viewed positively, as Unni Wikan describes (Wikan 1990). In this mask, although the red colour and strong features that are characteristic of *topeng* Keras are somewhat toned down, they are still present. It has a strong masculine energy of *keras*-ness, but because it is a new mask that I created, when I began to explore it physically my choreography changed and ‘bridged’ my instinctive movement with the strong movement world of *topeng* Keras Gajah Mada so that I found in positions of stillness my positions were naturally lower and breathing was easier.

MC: *Topeng* Tua was my favorite mask and that was how I began but, like Tiffany and Carmencita, I really started by learning to make masks; I was not brave enough to start with dancing. I felt it would be “inappropriate” or even “offensive” since I was both a foreigner and a woman, so I began by learning to carve with Anak Agung Gedé Ngurah, a mask carver and community leader who lives next door to Ida Bagus Alit. Then one day Alit came by as I was carving and told me that it was no use trying to learn to carve if I didn't know the dances, so that's when I started

to learn to dance. It was difficult. Although I'd studied various kinds of dance over the years (tap, ballet, jazz, contemporary and Flamenco), I'd never approached anything like Balinese dance and I was starting very late—already forty. Perhaps *topeng* Tua was a good place to start! It was awfully difficult. I didn't understand the music, and learning in traditional village style meant simply copying the teacher—no explanations or analysis. I had spent fifteen years teaching character analysis and Stanislavsky acting technique, so it took a long time to be able to read things directly into the body without any kind of “intellectual” barrier that would question everything. Now, after many more years of study and practice in *topeng*, I have learned a great deal and it is much easier— I have also progressed. I still love *topeng* Tua, but I now identify strongly with *topeng* Keras and find it fascinating to explore his various iterations. I have identified at least ten variations in this mask and I own three versions of *topeng* Keras—one that is somewhat refined; the Gajah Mada designed by Ida Bagus Alit (to which Tiffany refers); and one that is rather demonic that I have decided is Patih Pasung Grigis^{xiii}. They are all very different in their challenges. I also have *topeng* Lucu (a comic mask with pursed lips) and *Topeng Bues*,^{xiv} which I really love--he's a bullying, aggressive coward, a kind of comic thug. I have also worked on Dalam which, when I began, was the character I did best (at least according to the village children who regularly invaded my lessons.) However, this mask is a big challenge because it is very technically demanding, requiring exquisite refinement along with a great subtle power that must be carefully contained. It has been a journey, and the journey continues.

Q: What is the feeling you have when wearing the mask?

CP: The moment in which I feel totally one with the mask is what I aim for, and it does truly happen but only when I manage to be one with the music and with the audience—that's a truly blessed moment!

TS: Wearing a mask, in my experience, is the most extreme example of performance; somehow the feeling of “performance” is heightened—the adrenalin, the joy, and the purpose. So, when I am wearing the mask, it's hot, sweaty and becomes uncomfortable as the dance goes on, but I forget all that because it is one time when I feel present and in the moment and responsive. I feel vibrant and fully in the body as I embody the mask. One of the few common elements in the discourse on mask characterization in the literature and in my discussions with performers was that in order the mask to be alive the performer had to be “one with the mask” *menunggal* or *mesikang* or *kawin*, being married with the mask.^{xv}

MC: The feeling of the performer while wearing the mask was the subject of my doctoral thesis—but I don't really feel I have any kind of definitive answer (see Coldiron 2004.) It seems to me a matter of *desa-kala-patra*, a traditional formulation in Balinese culture generally translated as place, time and circumstance. (Herbst 1998: 1-4; Gold 2005: 6)^{xvi} It sometimes amazes me when I am performing how little I am feeling “in character” and how aware I am of all the other stuff like “Where's my headdress?” and “Have I done that bit of choreography yet?” Nonetheless, people will say afterwards how incredibly

convincing the performance was, how expressive the mask was, and how amazed they were that there was a woman underneath. Sometimes I can just put on the mask and go, and it is like a kind of waking dream—that is, if one is really inside the music and the character. The face and the spirit of the mask character are important but, as I have gradually discovered, you really have to be *kawin dengan musik* (“married with the music”) and I am very grateful that I started playing gamelan, which has given me a much more visceral understanding of *topeng*. In European dance traditions, I feel that we tend to separate choreography from music somehow. Of course, great dancers have a special sensitivity to music, but choreography is so often about steps and counts and getting it “right” that it took me a long time to realize that the “feeling” of the character and the choreography is in the music. When one performs with live gamelan the “choreography” is improvised based on a basic movement vocabulary and, as the dancer, you must drive and inspire the musicians to give the appropriate accompaniment. It is a symbiotic relationship, and wonderful when it works well. So, what is key for me now is listening to the music over and over until it is in my bones. Balinese people get this for nothing because they've had these tunes in their consciousness all their lives, but for us, I think, it takes time.

Q: Is performing in the speaking masks like *Penasar* (the servant/translator who serves as chief storyteller and engine of the plot in *topeng*) or *Bondres* (the comic village characters who interact with the *Penasar* to reveal the story^{xvii}) different from the non-speaking masks?

CP: Penasar? That is not for me yet and is my biggest challenge. My teachers have tried to teach me the songs and the use of the voice. I Ketut Kodi made a younger version—smaller and lighter color—of the Penasar mask to suit my voice. All my Balinese teachers tried to teach me in the same way, asking me to imitate in traditional fashion and to try to reproduce it as closely as possible. Both male and female teachers had the same approach and I am very grateful for their efforts because I learned a lot about teaching from the Balinese point of view, but I do not wear the Penasar mask. I perform *bondres* at performances and when I tell my stories and, because I'm more a dancer than an actor, my *bondres* are absolutely crazy and physically extreme. This is because there is not an actual traditional training dictating the rhythm. I follow the breath of *bondres* and what the masks dictate in the performative context. I do notice that with *bondres* things can be completely out of control and their energy depends a lot on the interaction with the audience and other performers on stage. The full masks have a more established pattern, even those that do not follow a traditional Balinese choreography.

TS: Speaking masks are different for many reasons—for a start, the relationship to the gamelan changes and as the music is softer. This means that the energy is less charged, as it has to make room for dialogue. Also with clowning in a Balinese mask I slip into general, more universal techniques, so for me *bondres* or Penasar do not feel very much different from any other (western) character that plays a specific role or function.

MC: Penasar is a huge challenge, especially vocally. In spite of having been a stage actress and having a fairly low voice, it is not easy to produce the power and consistency required. I did some lessons in *tembang* (Balinese singing) with I Wayan Dibia,^{xviii} which I would like to do again on a more regular basis, just so that I could do it with the ease and aplomb that the Balinese men have. I've seen the female *topeng* groups *Topeng Shakti* and *Luh Luwih* and I think that people like Ni Nyoman Candri^{xix} and the others are just as strong as the men. When I saw a women's *arja* (a dance drama form sometimes called "Balinese opera") at the Bali Arts Festival in 2012, I didn't even realize at first that the Penasar was a woman! Performing Penasar in front of a Western audience is perhaps a little more difficult than for a Balinese audience, because one has to communicate a lot about the genre within the context of the performance, in character. It is a very big job to hold the story together, especially if you are performing some of the *bondres* masks as well—you have to remember everything that has gone before, whether or not one was on the stage.

Q: *Topeng is traditionally performed by men, and most of the masks are male-- have you learned or were you attracted to women's dances? If not, why not? If you have learned women's dances, what have you done? How is it different from topeng?*

CP: I learned the basics of everything that wasn't too pretty. I spent two and a half years at STSI and had to do something there, but never mastered any of them and didn't really want to, except "Rejang Dewa," a bit of "Panyembrama," and I loved "Terunajaya."^{xx} I did

much better with *baris*, the warrior dance. *Baris* is considered the basis of the *topeng* dance style and fundamental to build up the right muscles and learn basic technique. Dancing without a mask is totally different—different body position, different breath and distribution of energy. The mask requires a more precise control of the movements through very defined use of breath that, as one of my teachers used to say, “pushes the life out of the mask.” Some performers refer to this process as “yoga” since it involves the careful distribution of energy through the body/mind.

TS: I have learnt *legong*, but I found it too stereotypically “girly” and boring. I am not a dancer and dance doesn't come naturally to me. I see dance as a particular vocabulary for a language that I don't really speak, but which is necessary to communicate the specific character of each mask.

MC: I don't perform female dances. It's partly vanity—I had seen English friends doing Javanese dance and I knew I didn't want my white body on display doing Indonesian dance. I was forty when I started anyway and didn't feel that my body/persona was appropriate for female dances—and they are very difficult! In *topeng* I feel totally covered, therefore totally transformed. In *topeng* it's not *me* on display but the mask, and inside this body-mask I can lead the gamelan and create the character. Another advantage is that *topeng* is essentially improvisatory, whereas the female dances are strictly choreographed. Once one knows the vocabulary for a given character, one is not stuck with the choreography. Since *topeng* is generally a solo affair I feel safe knowing that if I make a mistake I can capitalize on it and not worry that I'll mess anyone else up. However, I feel that it would be helpful for me to learn female style, because I teach and should to be able to better demonstrate the contrast between male and female modes. To this end I have taken one or two lessons in female style dances and I sometimes practice with Lila Bhawa Dance Troupe. However, I prefer the male or *bebancihan* dances and would love

to learn Teruna Jaya—though perhaps in another life. Nonetheless, I have gained a real appreciation for female dances through playing the gamelan for performances.

There may be something in this about one's physical build and having a relatively large, robust frame in an environment (in Bali) where all the people seem very petite, graceful and beautifully formed. There is no question but that as a western woman one can feel big and awkward trying to form one's body to female dances, especially in the company of Balinese dancers. There may also be an element of assertiveness and directness in the personalities of women who choose to do *topeng* that is more appropriate to that genre than the more apparently "submissive" female dances.

Q: How difficult, then, has it been learning topeng?

CP: Learning is a long journey without end. I absorbed from the first day I entered I Made Sija's house—sitting for hours waiting for him, mingling with women preparing offerings, watching so many performances, listening to so much music. Then I tried with my own body, learning with children, learning at STSI, learning in a one-to-one relationship with my teachers. It means trying to embody principles you think you understand, and coping with the feeling that you'll never get it. Then all of a sudden you feel you've got something. Then, when you see Balinese students who are not really as good as they should be, then you realize that maybe there is hope, at least at physical level, that you can be better. Then you have the music and the vocal training to take on. To keep up with the training with psychophysical knowledge is the challenge. Wearing someone's face, as I Ketut Kodi described wearing the mask, is a challenge without end.

TS: It's extremely difficult. In addition to the challenges that the actual dance presents, there are lifestyle and social factors that include 5:30 am starts (when performing at ceremonies). Also, most teachers carry a reputation, which, as a student, you adopt or unconsciously uphold. In particular, certain teachers are known to fraternize inappropriately with female students and, regardless of one's professional attitude, many people assume that if you are following your teacher you are sleeping with your teacher, and this can be problematic if you live in Bali long term. It takes an added strength of character to rise above this.

MC: I've been at it now since 1997, so that's nearly seventeen years, and I would say the first ten years were the hardest. It is very hard not being in Bali regularly and if Ni Madé Pujawati had not come to London and begun teaching, I would probably have given up. I'm very glad I've been able to continue because, of course, the more you do the more you learn. Having regular opportunities to perform has also been a huge help. The most important element, for me, has been learning the music—learning to play and understand the gamelan. In the beginning, when I was learning with Alit accompanied by a cassette, he would shout at me to "Listen to the gong!" Well, on his tiny old cassette player I couldn't distinguish the gong at all and I knew nothing of the construction of Balinese music, so I had no idea what to listen for. When I started playing gamelan in 1999 I was determined to learn like the Balinese and refused to use notation to help me out—I just learned by copying and listening. When, gradually, you come to an understanding of how the music works and are able to listen for all the components, rather than just the "tune," the dance makes a lot more sense. Likewise, with dancing—the character and the music must be inside your body. Now, finally, I *know* where the gong is and when I must give the signals to the drummers, but learning how the music and the dance work together has been the most important lesson for me.

Q: Do you teach or perform with masks outside Bali?

CP: When in Bali I have mostly performed traditional Balinese *topeng* for ceremonies and festivals. Outside Bali, in Australia, Indonesia, Europe, South America, I mainly perform my own work and teach mask characterization as whole and don't focus exclusively on Balinese tradition. This happens because, while I'm consciously an ambassador for Indonesian culture, I also want to make it clear that my approach is cross-cultural. The female professional Balinese performers I have interviewed throughout the years demonstrate that their experience is nearly the opposite. For example, Ni Madé Wiratini, a well-known *arja* performer and teacher (and wife of I Wayan Dibia), has performed traditional *topeng* overseas to support her husband, but she would not perform in Bali. Why? Amongst other reasons, she would not want to risk losing face by exposing herself to a knowledgeable (and highly critical) audience in Bali. Another example is Ni Madé Pujawati, a Balinese dancer based in the UK who never performed a traditional *topeng* in Bali. The multitalented Pujawati only discovered the pleasure of performing *topeng* working with Margaret Coldiron in London. Encouraged by I Wayan Dibia, Ni Madé Pujawati has now acquired a set of female masks to produce a solo *topeng* performance, but since she is focused on performing with her London pupils she hasn't had the time to work on this new production. The only all - female traditional group that has performed both in Bali and overseas (as far as I know) is *Topeng Shakti*, which has been inactive since their leader, Cristina Formaggia, passed away in 2008. One of its members, Ni Nyoman Candri, is pursuing her dream of using her father's masks by performing with male performers from time to time for ceremonies. She also has once performed the sacred *topeng Siddha Kariya*, which is fundamental to complete the ceremony. Rucina Ballinger, who was part of the original *Topeng Shakti* group, went on to found a comedy group made up of foreign, middle-aged women, Grup Gedebong Goyang, but they do very

contemporary sketch shows and don't use masks. The other two all-female *topeng* groups from Keramas that were active around 2003-2004 performed a few times for ceremonies and at the Bali Arts Festival, but then time and conditions did not support their activities in the community, and they never performed overseas. Currently there are no all-women *topeng* groups in Bali, but there are women who perform with masks. Ni Ketut Arini is over 70 years old, an "icon" of Balinese dance and keeps experimenting with the use of the mask. Bulan Jelantink, another prominent figure (a qualified medical doctor and active performer in a range of media), tours Indonesia and overseas with her mask-dance creations. The successful and sustainable examples of Balinese women performing with masks seem to be outside the *topeng* tradition. In Bali, there is not the real change in attitude regarding *topeng* that has occurred in gamelan music. Now one sees so many women and girls playing gamelan *gong kebyar* and performing *gender wayang*, but this revolution has been the result of a long process that started with the first music teachers going to the USA. The work at Çudamani in Pengosekan during the last 17 years has meant that people now regard it as "normal" to see women playing gamelan in Bali in ceremonies. I am not sure if we'll ever see the day when it will be more "normal" to see a Balinese woman perform *topeng* in a Balinese ritual context than a female foreigner. For some reason, foreign women are still more able to be accepted—perhaps because we are always learners and do not cross any boundaries.

TS: On the rare occasions that I have performed with a gamelan here in the UK, I am not convinced that the dance travels so well. These are sacred dances and the intention and context in which they are performed are culturally specific. Nobody in the UK appreciates that this is a male dance, and that the masks are part of a series that tell a story, so it becomes viewed in isolation and my concern is that it becomes "exotica" and

a bit meaningless—a kind of exhibit. Of course, in Bali keen attention is paid to technique, particularly in the dancing community, but also there is an understanding that the intention of trying to do one's best as an offering to the gods is also important. Naturally that context does not exist when performing for a Western audience. I love teaching with the masks though. They are always so popular, and are loved even though people don't know their meaning. They are so universal because they are archetypes.

MC: I teach all sorts of mask work and one of the things that has helped me learn how to do *topeng* has been teaching it to others. I do some workshops with the comic *bondres* masks in a way that is like the way that I teach other character half-masks, so it is all free improvisation. I am lucky in that I can perform on a fairly regular basis in London with Gamelan Lila Cita, and for Indonesian tourism events. Although *topeng* functions as a sacred and semi-sacred performance in Bali, I found that Balinese performers regarded every performance as a 'gig'—whether for a temple ceremony or a tourist event. There isn't a great deal of difference in approach to the task since in each circumstance there is a careful balance between showing off and reverence.

On three occasions I've given *topeng* "residencies" lasting up to a week, and on two of those occasions I worked with Ni Madé Pujawati teaching *topeng* to participants (sometimes professional actors and dancers, sometimes students) and then giving a full public performance. That was wonderful, challenging and fun and I'd like to do more. Interestingly, although Ni Madé studied all of the *topeng* repertoire in her time at STSI, her first performance in Balinese *topeng* was in the UK, when Ida Bagus Alit and his nephews came to perform at Dartington and in Cardiff in 2007. I know that she felt rather

daunted at the prospect of performing with these established male (and high caste) performers, but it was a great success for performers and audience alike. I think this helped give Ni Madé Pujawati (and myself) courage to promote ourselves as people who could present a traditional *topeng* performance. She never performed *topeng* in Bali because her real calling and love was to perform the Condong (lady-in-waiting to the Princess) in *arja*, but in the UK this is not really possible. She is, essentially, a singer and comedian and these skills are great for *topeng*. During the time she lived in Bali (until 2000) the idea of women—Balinese women—performing *topeng* was still virtually unheard-of, and she felt she could never be as good as the great male performers. In Europe, however, the field is wide open.

Q: What kind of performance do you do and why?

CP: My main production, *Women's Breath*, is made up of several female masked characters that interact with live musicians. These are usually musicians who join me in the place where I perform. The rehearsal time is usually only around two hours, and during this brief time we learn one another's vocabulary and that allows us to be in an improvisational dialogue during the performance. Depending on the training of the musicians they may also interact physically with me in the performance. With this approach I keep an important element of the traditional Balinese *topeng*, which is interaction with the music based on a real dialogue between performer and musician. The performer decides when to call for a slower or faster tempo or a louder or softer sound, but he/she can do this only at a specific point in the cycle of the music by communicating with the drummer. Because I change the musicians that I work with, the relatively simple structure of my performance changes every time I perform. In Australia, interacting with

a didgeridoo or a Tasmanian leather instrument gives different results from those that come from interacting with *capoeira* musicians in Brazil, for example. I aim for a truly cross-cultural dialogue in the process of the performance to create an interesting and beautiful conversation that the audience can fully enjoy and be part of.

TS: The performance I am working on right now deliberately fuses *topeng* with a western fairy tale. I am showing that the form is useful and transportable. I am also hoping to pay homage to John Emigh, the man who is responsible for making *topeng* more widely known within Euro-American academic circles. In the mid-eighties he did a version of *Little Red Riding Hood* which put *topeng* “on the map” in some ways and now, a generation later, I am retelling the same story, but from an eco-feminist perspective. So, despite my own dedicated training in Bali, the piece is inspired by an already altered version of *topeng* (that is, Emigh’s *Little Red Riding Shawl*, see Emigh 1996: 261-267, which details the various versions and developments of this piece). This mutation interests me because it explores a different, intercultural journey.

Although I am not convinced *topeng* travels well, there are two ways in which I feel that the form can really benefit one’s performance practice. I find that daily training can inspire psychophysical responses and promotes a certain “mindfulness” in one’s attitude to performance. This can be achieved both with and without the masks—each method leading to different, but still useful, results. Secondly, I feel that the principles and structures of *topeng*, and the masks themselves can inspire new directions for contemporary devised material.

MC: When performing with Ni Made Pujawati, we did a pretty standard *topeng* story with

a standard structure. The story is based on the legend of the fourteenth-century king known as Bedahulu—interestingly, this is the story that inspired another of John Emigh’s *topeng* adaptations, *The Pig-Headed King*.^{xxi} We took the Bedahulu story from de Zoete and Spies’ *Dance and Drama in Bali*:

“Tapa-Oeloeng went one day on a pilgrimage to Penoelisan with his *patih* Pasoeng Grigis. And while he sat in meditation, his head mounted up to Svarga [heaven], leaving his body behind. Now the head stayed away so long that Pasoeng Grigis became anxious. And while he stood there in his perplexity a man came by carrying a pig. Suddenly Pasoeng Grigis had an idea; he bought the pig for fifty *kepings* and cut off its head and stuck it on the raja’s body. When Tapaoeloeng woke from his meditation and saw his face mirrored in Lake Batoer, he wept bitterly and refused to return to Bedoeloe. He would rather, he said, live like a wild pig in the forest. At last Pasoeng Grigis persuaded him, promising to build him a pavilion so high that no one should be able to see him from below. So the king always sat up aloft in his high pavilion and if anyone looked up he shot an arrow and killed him.” (De Zoete and Spies 1938, pp. 295-296).^{xxii}

In due course, the great general of the Majapahit Empire, Gajah Mada, comes to the court of Bedahulu and contrives to see the face of the king. The king is consumed by anger and bursts into flame, and his powerful meditation means that his soul goes straight to heaven (*moksha*). Bali becomes part of the Majapahit Empire and everyone lives happily ever after. It is an interesting story for non-Balinese audiences because in the course of the story one can impart a lot about Balinese religion and culture and make use of several comic *bondres* masks. Naturally we include a “tourist” character (me, in my best/worst Texas accent) who wants to take photos of the king’s procession and there is the rather

foolish and stupid pig farmer who takes the money he has made on the sale of his pig's head and gets dancing lessons from "Susi"—a canny young woman who also invites members of the audience to dance with her and then the Penasar comes on to bring the story to a close. Our performances are for family audiences and in a purely secular context, so we don't have any reason to use the spiritually Siddha Kariya mask, which normally is the last mask in sacred or ceremonial performances in Bali.^{xxiii} All of the characters are male, except Susi, but since our audiences aren't generally aware that *topeng* is traditionally performed by men, they don't seem to question our gender. Since I'm taller, I play the strong roles of *topeng* Keras and Penasar and Puja plays Dalem, the refined king, and Susi, but she also plays *Bedahulu* when he appears with his pig's head and some of the male *bondres*. Because of the circumstances of performance, I really don't feel that our being women and playing these male roles is in anyway remarkable or inappropriate. Finding a sufficiently powerful and convincing voice for the Penasar is challenging, however, and something I continue to work on.

Since our residencies are about introducing people to Balinese *topeng*, I feel it is appropriate that we do a very traditional story in a traditional way, rather than trying to create some kind of east-west fusion piece. Nonetheless, I rather regret that I have not had much occasion to go outside the basic nature of *topeng* performance to explore other possibilities with the masks. I wish I were still carving because it would be interesting to do some more creative, original work in the way that Tiffany and Carmencita have done. That said, I did work with Agung Ngurah develop masks for Thiasos Theatre Company's production of Euripides' *Hippolytos*, which brought together West Javanese *jaipongan* dance style with Balinese masks in an adaptation of an ancient Greek tragedy.^{xxiv}

I was pleased when one of my students recently came up with her own *topeng* Tua Wanita (old woman mask) piece that she performed for a summer festival. Ni Madé Pujawati and

I have discussed doing a *topeng* version of the story of *Jokasta* that would mix *topeng* and *arja* with *wayang* (shadow puppetry), but so far it is still in the planning stages.

Q: How do you contribute to the performance practice in Bali?

CP: My being in Bali learning, performing and interviewing is already an interaction that transforms the course of performance practice. For my teacher I will always be a little pupil to take care of, or the person who can organize funding for a project.

TS: I'm not sure. Sometimes, especially in the early days, I felt I just an accessory to my teacher, and at other times my presence, as a woman and as a foreigner, seemed confusing to others. This double othering is an interesting perspective to review any notion of periphery and centre. Sometimes I felt very self-conscious of the elevated position of the performer; being given drinks, snacks, food, sitting on an elevated platform, and being treated as part of this high caste entourage of which I was a part.

As I got used to performing and could begin to stand my ground and not embarrass myself or my teacher, I realized that for many Balinese people, especially the younger generation, the interest that foreigners take in Balinese culture can validate its special appeal in the hearts and minds of local people. It makes them feel proud, possibly even culturally superior, and this re-generates interest. I remember, when I was on the Bali Arts and Culture Scholarship program, performing in the Taman Budaya (Cultural Centre) in Jogjakarta—we were expecting a very small audience and then two thousand university students showed up and there was a television audience of six million! The purpose of all

this carefully managed attention was to say: “Look, here are a bunch of westerners performing *your* dances! It must be cool if they do it!”

MC: I don't think I personally have any effect on Balinese performance, because I don't spend enough time in Bali. However, I'd like to think my “scholarly” work, giving papers at conferences on traditional and contemporary Balinese and intercultural performances, and engaging in dialogue with other performers and people at ISI in Denpasar, might have some knock-on effects down the line. I am doing more to promote Bali and Balinese performance as a teacher and performer in the UK and elsewhere. I hope to raise consciousness about the artists, genres and culture and also send people to Bali to study and find out for themselves.

Q: *What do you transmit when you teach outside Bali?*

CP: I try to focus on principles thorough which it is possible to make the mask alive. I mix Balinese technique with commedia dell'arte technique to put together an approach that is cross-culturally comprehensible. I always underline that I'm an Italian who currently lives in Australia who has spent years in Indonesia. Wherever I teach I'm the “Other” talking about the “Other.”

TS: I always feel a certain duty to be an ambassador of culture for Bali. I am not sure what I transmit, but people have remarked on my obvious passion as I can talk about it and I can tell funny stories until the end of time! When teaching *topeng* it is always difficult to teach in depth (in the time available). Often one has to focus on breadth and this can feel

like a compromise, but perhaps the performer feels something of what the mask can do or what the performing body can experience. This is incredibly satisfying to share.

MC: I try to transmit a love for the masks, for the form, for the deep spirit of the idea of bringing the mask to life and a respect and reverence for all of it. In practical terms I teach people how to stand and walk and understand the meaning of the movements so they can fill them with conscious motivation. Likewise I hope to transmit the meaning and character of the masks, how viscerally different it is to be *topeng Keras* as opposed to *topeng Dalem* or *topeng Tua* and then the more subtle differences between different versions of the “Strong Prime Minister.” However, a lot of the time I find myself just telling my students to keep their elbows up. That sounds so reductive, but in the end it is mastery of technique that allows one to be creative and make art.

Q: *Why do you do what you are doing?*

CP: I do it to gain that amazing pleasure of being one with the mask, the music and the audience.

TS: It has to do with love. If there was no love, I would have stopped years ago for practical reasons, but I feel a very strong calling to be in Bali, to carve and to dance in these masks. My interest is, I confess, not simply about performance. I am not a religious person but I do feel some kind of spiritual connection with Bali and these masks, and it feels like a pilgrimage that is necessary. If I don't go, after a while, I ache to be in Bali. I feel a longing that becomes hard to bear. I feel a need to hear the gamelan, put on a mask and dance in a ceremony. A Balinese person might say those like us, who give up our comfortable lives

here and leave our families to go and live among the Balinese, that perhaps we have lived in Bali before, maybe somehow our souls are Balinese. I just know that I simply feel content in the world of *topeng*, and there is little else that makes me feel as happy or as fulfilled, even if there is no audience.

MC: Yes, well, I agree with all of this. I feel it is now deeply a part of me and isn't just a passing phase or a transitory interest. The wonderful thing about *topeng* is that you can never be too old for it. You might not have the physical power to be a very energetic *topeng* Keras at eighty, but I can imagine being able to have a powerful enough stillness to make it work. I love teaching because I want to spread this passion and enthusiasm.

Q: *Why do you think there are still so few women performing topeng in Bali?*

CP: Time is a big factor, but there are other reasons; in interviews I have done recently, many women expressed the need for a clear leadership to make a successful performance group. If we consider how *Topeng Shakti* started, we see the vital importance of Ni Desak Nyoman Suarti in the initial phase, and then Cristina Formaggia—they had the vision to put the group together and create work. Motivation is also important, so the prospect of having international tours stimulates a lot of interest in performers. However, a group whose work does not appeal to local taste or fashion is not sustainable.

There is another factor, too, which is the lack of funding for producing new performances. Performers and musicians need funds for transportation and food, and without this it is very hard to gather enough people to work on a new production. An additional factor in

maintaining a company's motivation is to have some well-established competition that will make the group strive for greater achievement. In the case of *topeng*, although it can have a lot of comic elements, *topeng* is just not funny enough. Contemporary audiences in Bali, just like audiences elsewhere in the world, really want to laugh, and so far the all-female groups haven't really reached that level of "comicality" to achieve real success. Finally, there is the matter of fashion. So, when the first all-woman *topeng* group started, they were popular and several groups sprouted up, but the novelty wore off. This is typical of many forms of Balinese performances, so we should not be too much surprised by the apparent death of all-female *topeng* phenomenon.

In general I would say that strong female figures such as Cristina Formaggia, Ni Desak Suarti and Rucina Ballinger, who are willing to apply for funding and use their connections to organize international tours and promote their groups are the means by which women's performance will thrive. Unfortunately, when the agenda of these powerful artistic entrepreneurs changes, there will be a shift in interest for the groups they lead. This trend could be seen in the nineteen-seventies and eighties and is still a factor today. I believe the best contemporary example of an artist who has the leadership and networking skills to make a success is Emiko Susilo, who leads the dynamic Balinese music and dance group Çudamani based in the village of Pengosekan, and the well-known Bay Area-based gamelan group, Sekar Jaya. She is successful not only because of her artistic and organizational talent, but also for her family links. The daughter of distinguished artist/scholars Hardjo Susilo and Judy Mitoma, she is married to composer and musician Dewa Berata, with whom she leads Çudamani. Her journey has not been without difficulties, but she has been able to create a sustainable group because they focus on training children and young people. Her own children are an example of her success as a

role model since her daughter is an excellent drum and gender player, which are roles traditionally belonging to men, and she is a wonderful dancer. However, it may take many more generations to see widespread, practical involvement of women in *topeng*. As a genre, *topeng* has had to roll with the times; change is inevitable and the incorporation of new ideas is one reason why the form still exists today with such vigor and popularity. I am excited to see what new contributions women will make for the future of *topeng* in Bali and beyond.

TS: This is an excellent question! I think the notion of women being able to take traditionally male roles in performing arts is slowly becoming something that Balinese women, and men, are willing to accept. Nonetheless, it is an act of bravery to get involved. I agree with Carmencita Palermo, in that “fashion” is involved and, at the heart of this, it is to do with women and girls not wanting to look ugly or seem too masculine. *Kecantikan*, the aesthetic of beauty, is so deeply rooted in the Balinese psyche. The culture does not really allow for a range of different female images, as may be seen elsewhere—in Bali, fashion dictates that beauty is feminine, long hair, lots of make-up and “sexy.” The alternative image of a woman, in popular theatre and on television, is an aged and overweight clown figure—there is little in between. Despite women taking on more responsibility with the household economy, gender roles are still pretty prescriptive when it comes to *adat* (customary behavior) and the conventional social norms. Balinese women who enter the male-dominated *topeng* world are likely to have their motives questioned—the assumption might be that they want to do it so they can have an affair. I had the opportunity to work with Rucina Ballinger’s performance troupe Grup Gedebong Goyang during their tour of *Suud Merjor-joran* (which translates as “Stop Fighting”) in 2012. They are not a *topeng* troupe, but a group of expatriate Western women who

perform comedy sketches in a typical *bondres* (clown) style. Frequently young girls and women in the audience would be invited to join the group on stage as “guests.” They would always politely refuse, because they did not want to appear to be too bold, too experimental, too different. We must bear in mind that culturally in Bali, individuality is not encouraged.^{xxv} Now there are, of course, many Balinese women with strong, assertive personalities who are willing to take risks: Cok Sawitri, a journalist, poet, playwright, novelist and activist who is one of the most innovative and controversial figures on the Balinese arts scene, is just such an example. However, it may take many more generations for widespread, practical involvement of women in *topeng*. As a genre, *topeng* has had to roll with the times, change is inevitable and the incorporation of new ideas is one reason why the form still exists today with such vigor and popularity. I am excited to see what new contributions women will make to the future of *topeng* in Bali and beyond.

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END NOTES

¹Of course the situation was not quite this simple, there had been a great deal of intercultural flow in both directions and, in Indonesia, female participation in traditionally male arts activities such as playing gamelan was encouraged by New Order policies and increasing tourism; see Palermo 2009.

ⁱⁱ The institution has been known variously as ASTI (*Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia* = Academy of Indonesian Dance), STSI (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia* = Indonesian Arts College) and currently as ISI (*Institut Seni Indonesia* = Indonesian Arts Institute.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Women are perceived as more vulnerable to powers of 'black magic' or negative spiritual energy, since menstrual blood is believed to attract demonic forces. Former President Sukarno's daughter Sukmawati is said to have studied for the role in the 1970s, but did not perform it. Ballinger performed the role with the all-female group Luh Luwih, based in Pengosekan, south of Ubud. The group first performed the exorcistic drama Calonarang at the Pura Dalem in Pengosekan in 2003 with American dancer and musician Emiko Susilo in the role of Rangda. Ballinger took the role in 2004 at a performance at the Pura Taman Pule in Mas. Ballinger was praised for her boldness in taking on the role, but did not perform in a sacred mask. (Diamond 2008: 252-253)

^{iv} Ni Desak Suarti is best known as a jewelry designer of international standing, but she is also highly regarded as a traditionally trained dancer and she is an important supporter and funder of the arts in Bali.

^v The title plays on the Indian and Balinese interpretations of the Sanskrit term referring to both the female counterpart to Hindu deities and supernatural spiritual power.

^{vi} *Kecak* is a dance drama form invented in the nineteen thirties through a collaboration between the European artist and polymath Walter Spies and Balinese performers from south Bali. Its most distinctive feature is the rhythmic vocal chant, derived from the trance ritual of *sanghyang dedari* that accompanies the drama.

^{vii} *Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*, the higher education institution of Indonesian arts.

^{viii} These teachers are all part of the department of puppetry (*Pedalangan*) Whereas Sweka, from Karangasam province in north-eastern Bali focuses mainly on traditional forms in his work, Suteja is passionate about finding a language for contemporary dance in Indonesia, influenced by the time he spent pursuing his Masters' degree in Jogjakarta.

^{ix} Traditional training in Bali follows an informal guru-sisya type of system in which a student is 'apprenticed' to a particular teacher and does not follow or take lessons with others.

^x Whereas in Indian Hinduism, *pasupati* refers to the god Siva as Lord of the animals, in Balinese Hinduism, the term refers to a ceremony of purification in which the protective powers of Siva are invoked to impart spiritual energy to an individual or object.

^{xi} The mask of the strong Prime Minister, a powerful warrior whose movement is very energetic, but contained; it is the first mask to appear in a *topeng* performance.

^{xii} The Prime Minister of Dalem Bedahulu, the king with the 'different head' (beda=different; hulu=head), a magically powerful Balinese king whose head, when he meditated, would leave his body and float to heaven. The story is outlined later in the article.

^{xiii} An arrogant and aggressive character that Slattum describes as "the archetypal town drunk." (1992, p. 42). The mask has heavy features, a broad nose and a wide mouth with thick lips.

^{xiv} A description of this state, as noted in Palermo's PhD thesis (p8) can also be found in Etienne Decroux (1963) and Dario Fo (1997 [1987]: 41-42)

^{xv} Putu Wijaya, in his remarks at the opening of the 2011 *Pesta Kesenian Bali* (Bali Arts Festival), which had “*Desa, Kala, Patra*” as its theme, had this to say: “For the Balinese ‘Desa’ (space) is essential to indicate origins, links and directions. By tracing their space the Balinese discover their linkage to their homes, origins “*braya-pisaga-semeton*’ (society, neighbors and family) and even with their guests. The space is also linked to ‘kala’ (time). Night and day, morning and afternoon, today and tomorrow can change, take form and make those links to time perfect. Finally ‘patra’ (identity) also means situation and condition, indicating that space and time can be harmonized with what is taking place.” <https://islandmeri.wordpress.com/tag/desa-kala-patra/>]

^{xvi} *Bondres* are the comic masks, usually half-masks, that function as storytellers in traditional *topeng*, but *bondres* has also become a entertainment genre in its own right that features only the comic masks.

^{xvii} Professor I Wayan Dibia, a noted scholar and performer who is an authority on a wide range of Balinese performance genres, particularly *arja*, *kecak* and *barong* performance. He co-authored, with Rucina Ballinger *Balinese Dance, Drama and Music: A Guide to Performing Arts of Bali*. (Singapore: Periplus, 2004).

^{xviii} Ni Nyoman Candri, a noted *arja* performer, was central to Cristina Formaggia’s *Topeng Shakti* group.

^{xix} *Rejang Dewa* and *Penyembrama* are adapted from traditional temple dances to welcome the gods to serve as more generic ‘welcome dances’ appropriate for tourist performance. *Rejang Dewa* is particularly interesting because it was an adaptation of a sacred dance made for secular use, which has now returned to the temples as part of religious ceremonial. *Terunajaya* (“victorious youth”) is an archetypal dance of the virtuosic North Balinese *Kebyar* style and is considered *bebancihan*—between genders—and so may be danced by men or women.

^{xx} This piece was composed in collaboration with I Wayan Suweca in the nineteen seventies, in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, and became a “universal parable of political overreaching and tyranny.” The pig-headed head of state in Emigh’s initial version represented Richard Nixon. (See Emigh 1996 p. 259)

^{xxi} His version is slightly different from the version that Emigh based his piece on. In the De Zoete and Spies version, *Tapa-Oeloeng* is a good king and only becomes a dangerous tyrant when he gets his ‘different head.’

^{xxii} For a detailed discussion of the story and significance of this mask see “‘*Topeng*’ Sidha Karya: A Balinese Mask Dance” by I Ketut Kоди, I Gusti Putu Sudarta, I Nyoman Sedana, I Made Sidia and Kathy Foley, *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Autumn 2005), pp. 171-198.

^{xxiii} Further discussion of this production can be found in Coldiron, 2007.

^{xxiv} Tiffany gave further details: “Daring to be different takes a lot of risk. Another example of this is something I discovered in leading drama workshops with Balinese children, playing the simple game ‘Grandma’s Footsteps’. The game requires that somebody wants to win and that somebody will push themselves forward, faster and more strategically than the other players. The game would take ages to play, or completely fail, because nobody, male or female, would want to assert their difference. Nobody would want to win. It was very endearing because it reminded me of how, from such a young age, even children do everything together communally in Bali.”

Appendix 2

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Grup Gedebong Goyang: Female, Funny and Foreign

Founded in 2003 by dance ethnographer Rucina Ballinger, in Bali, Indonesia, the original aim of Grup Gedebong Goyang (Gyrating Banana Tree Trunk Group), aka "G3", was to offer entertainment to lift the national gloom after the Bali bombings in 2002. The group has since evolved as a politically-conscious comedy troupe that performs at least once a month to Balinese audiences in temple ceremonies, private functions, the Bali Arts Festival, and more recently two different comedy talk shows on Bali TV (one on Metro TV and 'Pas Mantab' on Trans 7). The group is very entertaining and extremely unusual, as all other live performance in Bali, with the exception of music, is dominated by the abundance of cultural performances within a ceremonial or touristic context.

Situated within the current politics and the "unfinished business" (Gilbert 2012) of decolonization, this research is interested in two specific questions. How does Grup Gedebong Goyang's use of comedy successfully convey comedy from a female perspective and how is the foreign interweaving itself into the aesthetic discourses of Balinese performance? Most importantly I discuss how the work is received and perceived by Balinese audiences and the intercultural implications of such performances. This paper specifically aims to review and provide an analysis of a regional tour of *Suud Merjor-joran* (Stop Fighting/Competing) which was first

performed in Bali in 2012 at the Bali Arts Festival in Denpasar. *Grup Gedebong Goyang* literally means “Group of Gyration Banana Tree Trunks,” which in the Balinese language refers to women who have lost their waist lines; the subtext is also that their vaginas have shriveled. The Balinese sense of humor is loaded with sexual innuendo and playfulness, yet navigating this without causing offence is treacherous. The most unusual aspect of the group and certainly a key characteristic to their comedic success is the fact that the performers are white, Western, middle aged women, all of whom have chosen to live and settle in Bali. The current group members are Alex Ryan, Antonella Desanti, Rucina Ballinger, and Suzan Kohlik. Ballinger claims that what the group is aiming to do “is make people laugh while thinking about specific issues. It is not necessarily a link between the expat community and the Balinese community but between the four of us who are married to local men with the local Balinese community” (Ballinger 2012).

They are four strong women, all very different, from four different countries. The common similarity is that they have all married Indonesian men and had children and live in Bali, where they try to blend their own cultural lives with Balinese, who, as will become clearer, have their own very unique and strong sense of cultural center and identity. All four women deal daily with the challenges that accompany that goal.

What becomes apparent with this group of women is that they have used their extraordinary range of skills to maximize their individual potential in order to settle long term in Bali and integrate their own unique family life and circumstances into a Balinese community and household where as women, they are expected to fulfill or at least take responsibility for specific cultural duties in relation to daily, ritual offerings. The performers of G3 also manage independent careers, and aim to maintain a strong sense of selfhood and cultural identity in their own lives. All agree that this is a vital part of a shared survival strategy of living in a foreign country.

Originally from the United States, Rucina Ballinger has been at the forefront of the cultural tour guide scene in Bali and setting up, facilitating, and organizing charity work. Ballinger is author of several publications, including *Balinese Dance, Drama and Music* (2004) which she co-wrote with I Wayan Dibia. Ballinger held a particularly prestigious position within her *banjar* (hamlet, part of the village) community as the elected *peratus* or traditional head of her *banjar*.¹ This is the first time in Bali that a foreigner has taken on this role. In regards to training and performance experience Ballinger has trained professionally as a dancer and has performed various Balinese dances in a variety of contexts.

Antonella Desanti, owns a successful Italian restaurant in Ubud along with three boutiques that promote her own fashion designs in jewelry and clothes. Alongside

these projects Desanti has been involved in producing and managing intercultural *wayang* collaborations between her home country of Italy and admits;

I did study dance and when I came the first time to Bali to it was to study dance, not to get married, but I did get married! I know a lot more now about Balinese performance, particularly *wayang*, from the theory and from watching so many performances over the years and now I love performing myself. (Desanti 2015a)

Originally hailing from Australia, Alex Ryan has set up her own recycled lumber business and is an active environmental campaigner to reduce single-use plastic bags in Indonesia. In terms of her experience as a performer, Ryan trained as a child in various performing arts and as a young woman focused on an early musical career, touring professionally with a girl band across Australia. On arrival in Bali Ryan did try to get a new theatre group going but soon became frustrated in that the participant's humor did not extend beyond their ex-pat lives into the wider community. Since joining the Gedebongs, her role within the group is to compose and co-ordinate the music and singing arrangements. "We all play to our own and each other's strengths which is what is so inspiring," Ryan asserts (2015).

Last but not least, is Suzan Kohlik, who alongside Ballinger is one of the original, founding Gedebong members. Kohlik is Swiss and is an independent pottery artist and business woman who has invested many years in the development of independent international schools. Kohlik claims that she has no specific training in performance, but that she was a street performer and heavily involved in the art world of San Francisco before she left in the 1980's to settle in Bali.

Ballinger generously suggests that "we have all learned the dances by doing them" (Ballinger 2015) but there is a clear distinction between her skill and that of the other three which they all acknowledge. Figure two shows Ballinger dancing; a feature which is integrated throughout the performance. However what comes across in performance is that there is not intended to be the same level of virtuosity by these performers as compared with Balinese women; it is evident that, with the exception of Ballinger, they are amateurs. As Kohlik comments:

It works well for us because it's all part of the humor [...] that we can't do it right. We want to use traditional forms and show that at least one of us knows it, but that we are *bulés* and there's nothing wrong about not knowing it and that we are making fun of ourselves. (Kohlik 2015)

Most Balinese people, especially those living in South Bali where the majority of the Grup Gedebong Goyang "gigs" are, have heard of this group of these *lucu* (funny) women who speak Balinese. Many have seen them on their television sets, or have heard about them visiting neighboring villages. Regardless of their daily work lives, locally all of these women are now far more frequently recognized as Gedebong performers and are hailed in the street by their respective Gedebong stage nicknames.²

Intrinsic to the success of G3 is the rock 'n' roll backdrop and element of "funk" appeal provided by a group of professional Balinese musicians.³ They respond to the musical demands and arrangements that Grup Gedebong Goyang request. They are a handsome group of young men with whom the performers can banter

on stage with and their presence offers a visual joke as the whole picture seems so incongruous. It also is a reassurance to a Balinese audience unfamiliar with G3's work, who may perhaps be intimidated or confused by four Western women performing at temple ceremonies, that at least there will be something there to connect with if the jokes and the performance fail.

The Group's reputation has been established over many years of having "signature" theme tunes, costumes, and jokes that an audience would instantly recognize as indicative of their unique style. Every performance starts the same with a repeated and familiar entrance which establishes the illusion of tradition which is then immediately disrupted in playful silliness that simply makes the performers look frankly ridiculous. The group's first appearance parodies the entrance of *legong* dancers, who are typically young and nubile female, and enter single file; the dramatic function being that the audience gets to appreciate the beauty of each dancer. Ironically, in contrast, the Gedebongs enter slightly clumsily while parading their lavish costumes and make-up: an "over-the-top" version of *pakaiaan adat*, the traditional attire, of women attending temple ceremonies. They sing and dance and greet the audience with a harmonious *Om Swastiyastu* (a greeting evoking divine blessing), which rapidly becomes discordant, goes wrong, the dance fails, and they break out into weird air guitar and other inappropriate gestures. The scene is set for something *seperti apa tidak sama*: similar, but not the same. Initially the audience is confused but then they see the performers individually introducing themselves with their silly, funny,

banana names and revealing small, penis-shaped bananas from their cleavages as they explain why they are called Grup Gedebong Goyang. The audience grows to understand that here is a group of women who very much understand tradition, convention, and appropriate *adat* (tradition), but who cleverly play with all that they know to make themselves look (intentionally) daft. They break the barrier of "us and them" with their audience by making people laugh and by winning a sense of *complicité*.

The Suud Major-joran Tour

I would like to describe the work of *Grup Gedebong Goyang* in reference to the debut performance of Suud Major-joran in June 2012 at the Bali Arts Festival. The group's hour show is a mixture of original sketches woven together with song-and-dance routines alongside improvised banter with the band, the audience, and each other. Following the *Om Swastiyastu* legong re-mix and introduction, the group immediately start a competitive, snide argument about how well they perform which is broken up by an agreement to "stop fighting". This sets the tone of the show. What follows are jokes which demonstrate their in-ability to stop fighting and being competitive.

In a *Grup Gedebong Goyang* performance this mixture of dialogue, song, and dance is an immediately winning formula because it is a familiar mode of theatrical presentation in Bali. To avoid complete cultural alienation, the dramatic moments are usually lifted from a familiar scenario of traditional village life,

temple ceremonies, relationships or particular dynamics between family members. Similarly the songs are all familiar amalgamations of contemporary pop songs and music videos, all of which undergo change.

For instance in the original of *Cuma Khayalan* (Only Fantasies), Jakarta pop artist Oppie Andaresata sings about how she wants a celebrity lifestyle, full of luxury. The Grup Gedebong Goyang version of this number is also a parody titled *Cuma Khayalan* with specific references to Balinese aspirations. Ryan sings how she wants to wear the best French *kebaya*, eat a specialty chicken where the bones are so soft they are edible (this is an exclusive dish and only available in certain parts of Denpasar), and wear big "Krishna" diamonds. All of these are very typical, fashionable "wants" for the average Balinese woman with a healthy interest in materialism. For the chorus, the backing singers (Ballinger, Desanti, and Kohlik) all harmoniously sing "aku mau kawin cokodor", "I want to marry royalty," as if nothing below that will ever do. The song, both in the original and especially in the way it has been changed with carefully chosen Balinese aspirations, cleverly highlights the growing desire to consume, to get more, buy more, have more. These desires are unfulfilled and unobtainable in the Gedebong version of the song and made hilarious due to the fight that breaks out in jealousy between Ryan and her backing singers. This is an example of the fusion of something culturally familiar made funny and turned on its head so that the audience, should they be inclined, may question, challenge, or simply recognize aspects of their own life, identity, or culture through another filter of experience.

After a few laughs and jokes, when a sense of togetherness has been gained after another funny song, this time a version of Project Pop's "*Dangdut is the Music of my Country*", Grup Gedebong Goyang embarks on a sketch called "Berita Lokal" (Local News) that deliberately uses comedy to socially critique local and regional news and politics in the format of a television news broadcast. This mode of drama, while common on the British television, is a new idea in Bali and consequently very entertaining. The purpose of this news style sketch is to emphasize injustice and corruption in a humorous way.

One example is the skit about how Lady Gaga's scheduled 2012 concert in Jakarta got cancelled due to her "*goyang-ing*," her gyrating and sexy dancing. Here there is a play on the word *goyang* (to swivel the hips), inferring that long before the promise of Lady Gaga's arrival, Jakarta was already gyrating, and twisting, suggesting that it is full of corruption. This is a joke that the Denpasar audience loved, while in the villages, for example in Sobangan, near the town of Mengwi—where people are not so interested in general Indonesian politics—laughter, the general sign of success, erupts in response to more regional and local topics.

While the content of the basic structure is consistent, the artists can however anticipate what will be more popular due to these village/town or local/national divides and adapt their material to the circumstances. For example, G3 would deliberately emphasize a specific topic or theme to an audience, by spending

longer with the improvised material. This ability to craft the performance, negotiate directly and play with each specific audience's responses in "real time" has developed over many years. It relies on not only confidence in their ability to improvise, but also knowledge and a great deal of advance research so that what appears to be causal, is the result of interviews, reading the local and national papers, watching TV and getting ideas from there, and also by talking to their hosts and asking what they want the performance to include. However ultimately as group member Alex Ryan asserts, "Every audience is so different, we never know what to expect and how a joke will go down. It totally depends" (Ryan 2013).

Each performance is by special invitation as a village may be celebrating a specific marker point on their local calendar. With this in mind, every performance has at least ten minutes of completely new material devised for this purpose. For example, the Sobangan performance had been commissioned to promote education in the village so the performers became mischievous Balinese school children receiving their free hand-out bags and discussing their futures. Another way the group adapts each performance is in how they speak. There are slang words and ways of pronouncing that are more common in the villages for example in the extension of the word "oww". Similarly, in the town, where showing one's proficiency in English is fashionable, glocalized English phrases and words are interjected with an Indonesian accent. Phrases such as "I love you" or "Do you speak English?" are considered very funny.

Their popularity is of course in part to do with the content of their material, on which I will expand, and in part because of their attitude and cultural understanding of how professional performance works in Bali. What they are doing very well is simply responding (as any troupe of Balinese performers must) to continually changing circumstances where they have to deliver their show come what may! Pouring rain, reduced stage-time in their scheduled slot due to a change in the priests delivery of mantra, no electricity (which equals no amplification on which their sound is reliant), bad traffic en route due to a ceremony in a neighboring village; there are innumerable factors which complicate the success of any performance. To be fair, the performers are probably working harder than an average Balinese group, to meet the extremely high professional standards of the Balinese audiences, due to the energy it takes to constantly culturally re-adjust the “show” to these differing circumstances and prove their competence as women and as foreigners. For example, the Sobangan village performance of Suud Merjor-joran occurred in the midday sun. Although the performers were sheltered under a makeshift stage and canopy, there was no shade or respite from the heat for the audience. Hence the viewers, all seeking shade stood under trees which were about two hundred meters away, creating an enormous gap between the performers and the audience. The performers naturally had to work hard to extend their performance out to the trees. However they needed to avoid becoming inevitably huge and monstrous in their delivery, which is a difficult skill to achieve as women who want to reach out to their audience and not repel. So as well at the difficulties of creating and developing

material to perform, there are the constant, shifting goal posts. While this is true performance anywhere, I posit that the cultural specificity of Bali creates particular challenges that demand a spontaneous response that cannot be prepared for in rehearsal.

In another successful skit the Gedebong discuss the making of offerings, which all Balinese women have to do. They discuss how big and elaborate offerings should be, and if one should use local or imported fruit to please the ancestors.

DESANTI: (*Puffing out chest*) Tiang dueg ngae banten (I'm clever at making offerings).

BALLINGER: Banten apa nyi bisa ngae (What offerings can you make)?

RYAN:...Banten ane paling GEDE dan SULIT tiang bisa ngae PO RO SAN (I can make the biggest and most difficult offering: Po ro san)!

KOHLIK: Pasti Mbok anggon buah impor ajak roti kembung (I bet you use imported fruit and cupcakes).

DESANTI: Yen Jumah tiange Bhatara sing deman ken buah impor. (At my house the gods don't like imported fruit).

BALLINGER Oh senang ken buah local sekadi boni, sentul, badung, keto (Oh they like local fruits like boni, right)?

In the scene where this dialogue comes from, the Gedebongs are showing off about the size of their offerings, and their elaborate nature assuming that biggest is best and that imported and expensive fruit is more desirable. This is a highly topical discussion in view of Bali *ajeg*⁴ and the pressure most households feel to make *canang* (offerings to the spirits) bigger and better. However, the joke rests in the fact that 'po ro san' is easy to make and one of the simplest types of

offerings, often made by children. It is however the most important part of the offering, as this type of offering has the symbolic colors of tri murti (Brama, Visnu and Shiva). By elaborating on the importance of the symbol, however simply represented, 'Balinese people like to see that we know the meaning of it and it reminds the audience that it is the symbol, not the size that is important' (Desanti 2015 b). Similarly the Gedebongs often talk about the fact that is important to use local fruits and not imported fruits in the offerings and they list many random fruits, including boni which is a small red or dark colored berry, that would never be used by a Balinese woman in the making of offerings. The response is interesting because the knowledgeable foreigner is making a valuable comment whilst making themselves look foolish and this is a typical strategy of the group. Having just before established in the same scene that Rucina Ballinger is royalty or Ibu Jero, the others attack her for her high caste ways, implicitly suggesting that she does everything over the top, for example by getting a *pedanda* (brahman priest) to oversee the sacrificial pig's birthday, when a *pemangku*, an ordinary village priest, would suffice. Suzan Kohlik exclaims "Beh, oton celeng gen ya ngalih Pedanda—ngae pra(preh)gaymbal, bebangkit, caru rsi gana" (Ooooh, she's paying a lot of attention to animals, for the pig's birthday she fetches a *pedanda* and makes all these high falootin', expensive offerings). Here the audience's laughter is two-fold; they are subtly invited to see the folly of many caste-related issues, for example the decadent need of some high caste families to prove or show off their status. However this is offered at a safe distance through the mediation of the white, Western wife's experience. It is "she" that is made the

joke and not Balinese culture. The use of self-deprecatory humor, as Bunkers (1985: 84) suggests, often functions as a way of establishing a common ground and rather than creating a hierarchy, the audience feel united, laying the foundation for other, more positive, forms of humor. So in this way the Gedebong build relations with their audience directly and talk about things that Balinese people understand.

Despite the dialogue concerning sacred offerings, included in this scene are more disguised vagina jokes, in that the suggestion that the sort of cakes used in the offerings, known as *roti kembung*, look like female genitals. This joke, which is dependent on knowledge of very old-fashioned cakes, once again references not only the performer's detailed knowledge of Balinese food, but also her obvious lack of youth. This is a source of laughter, partly because of the sexual innuendo and partly because the reference comes from an older woman. When Ballinger discusses these cakes, her body language is sexy; open displays of provocation are not a common sight in public and this challenges the audience. Perhaps as a Western woman, she can get away with it, as this behavior on the one hand re-confirms a negative and fairly typical stereotype of the "Western woman," but paradoxically the audience has already witnessed from Ibu Jero a high degree of cultural understanding and "Balinese-ness"; we can almost imagine that she is Balinese and has grown up in Bali eating those cakes of long ago and is speaking for an unrepresented cohort of senior women.

Generating Material

Being Western, being women, and being funny all seem in Gedebong's performances to collide, confusing, challenging, and ultimately delighting the Balinese audience. A brief description of how the group generates material is will explain how accurately Grup Gedebong Goyang's dramatic sketches relate to Balinese women's real life stories.

Grup Gedebong Goyang develops their material alongside their Balinese friends and families within the community in which they live. Ideas are nurtured slowly and informally over time. Concepts are generated either in the kitchen while cooking or in community settings while making offerings, *canang*, an obligatory female activity. The seeds of the performance are then "tested out," usually on husbands, children, and other Balinese friends, who can offer a critical perspective or suggest a better phrasing. Then scripts are drafted and re-drafted, improvisational scenarios are identified through an extremely thorough process. So jokes evolve and are tested out; they are woven out of and looped back into the fabric of life as it is for Balinese women. What Grup Gedebong Goyang avoids is showing the plight of Balinese women through their own Western-filtered feminist perspectives; they all agree that would be inappropriate. This is not to say that themes of justice and parity and strategies of empowerment are not present; they are just delivered in a more culturally sensitive manner so that Balinese women can feel empowered and everyone, including men, can laugh out loud.

This generating of ideas initially appears to be a very casual, but is deeply scrutinized through a process of elimination. Some ideas have taken many years to perfect, with many versions of different scenes being created for specific performances and tested in front of live audiences. Intuitively the group is able to sense from their audience's reactions what works and what plummets. Performance "failures" are clear indicators that working democratically as a collective, without an outside director, has disadvantages. Ballinger confirms that they would like to work with a Balinese woman with experiences of performance in the role of director who could offer more objectivity and insight (Ballinger 2015). However what emerges is a sense of a Balinese cultural practice within performance making, which is a concept of training as, in, and through performance (Strawson 2014). As part of a performer's learning process they try out what they can do in front of a live audience, ready or not! Successes are then refined and errors are not repeated. Though everywhere performers learn through stage time, perhaps in Bali, due to the abundance of opportunities to perform, children and novices learn more about their craft from "trying out" than in other places.

Making Western Theatre in Bali

Grup Gedebong Goyang is the only Western group in Bali making theatre specifically for the Balinese. There are other non-Balinese theatre companies in Bali, for example Theatre FireFLY, based in Ubud, and Bali School of Dramatic Art,

a.k.a. Bali SODA, based in Kerobokan. However, unlike Grup Gedebong Goyang, their target audience is not Balinese and their artistic policy is not Bali-centered. Both these companies aim to provide a drama “service,” the opportunity for expatriates to participate in and to watch professionally-produced Western theatre.

Let me focus on logistics and access of these groups. Both FireFLY and Bali SoDA predominantly appeal to the expatriate community, many of whom marry local Balinese and have racially mixed children. The average fee of 3.5 million rupiah per production, (approximately \$350 at 2013 exchange rates), and ticket prices of 150,000 rupiah (\$15) prohibit the local Balinese community from participating. In the southern area of Bali, which is the rich part of the island due to tourism, the average Balinese adult makes perhaps 1 million rupiah per month (\$100), so this drama fee excludes most Balinese people’s participation and ticket prices are daunting. These performances are usually promoted through the international schools or in the English-language *Bali Advertiser* which serves the expat community. So it is not a part of the artistic policy of these two companies to include the local community.

They do not provide subsidies for participants who cannot afford to pay the full quota. Bali SoDa and Theatre FireFLY do not support the involvement of Balinese as the company directors do not speak completely fluent Indonesian much less

Balinese. Translators would require payment and resources are simply not there to facilitate this.

Grup Gedebong Goyang operate in complete opposition to the expat theatres and their entire ethos is to appeal to a Balinese audience. Many expats do not speak Indonesian, let alone Balinese and so could not receive the deeper meaning of their performance.

Grup Gedebong Goyang's Singularity

The Gedebongs agree that they use comedy to empower disenfranchised groups within the Balinese community, especially women. Kohlik explains how in Bali “normally all the jokes are about penises and male activities like cock fighting or gambling. What we do is to try and provide an alternative perspective that is women-centred” (Kohlik 2012). Therefore making offerings, mother/daughter-in-law relationships, market prices: all this and much more is available as material.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe in detail the complex representation of gender in Bali or how Balinese women are negotiating new roles within what is traditionally the preserve of men. Catherine Diamond's wide ranging (2008) critique of women in traditional and non-traditional performance offers a perspective on contemporary Balinese performance practices for women. Suffice to say that although in Bali there is a fair amount of work available to

female performers and there is a high representation of women on stage, as Kohlik indicates, there is little stage work from a female perspective that is woman centered.⁵

Humor and Clowning:

In Bali there is already a long tradition of female clowning as seen in genres like *arja*. There are also Balinese women who have established new masked dance-drama groups such as *Topeng Shakti* where many of the *bondres* "clown" jokes delivered while wearing these comic masks are women-centered, as the women perform a genre traditionally dominated by men. Unlike a Western philosophy of clowning, Balinese comics do not operate from a sense of personal transformation or reveal any hidden facet of inner personality. S/he is just goofy, funny, the butt of jokes, and the kick start to new ways of understanding a usually well-known story, and often highlighting aspects of current local situation or political dilemma.

The Gedepong comedic style is an extension and development of this clowning combined with elements of Western televised comedy's sketch show, where the same groups of performers take on many different roles as opposed to having one solitary "clown" character. So for example, in one Gedepong sketch we see a performer as a news broadcaster wearing spectacles, in the next she is an old woman with a towel on her head.

This not to say that female clowning in Bali is simple or without patriarchal containment. A paradox emerges in the case of Bali. While women clowns are common on stage and are granted freedom to discuss sexual issues, there is an unsaid limit as to what is regarded decent and appropriate. The delivery, innuendo, structured flirtation, and physical play are all carefully delivered and only by experienced and brave performers push the limits. Like their Western equivalents, female clowns in Bali have had to negotiate their material and delivery so as not to alienate their (male) audiences.

Balinese women reveal their humor in private; so while certain varieties of women's humor are discouraged in the public domain, when women are in the company of women, they might mock or imitate men, or encourage transgressive views that would never be aired/dared in public. What is clear cross-culturally is that as women get older they are afforded greater freedom of speech and behavior. Certainly there is no evidence of a rush of young Balinese performers to join in with the Gedeblings, despite invitations and offers.

To understand the relationship between humor and being foreign and female, I would like to reflect on the risk factor inherent in performing original material in live performance. As Eric Weitz (2012: 80) points out while one's body and its unique features, personal make-up, and particular comic sensibilities are the stuff of clowns, clowning is always precarious and risk-ridden. In the Grup Gedeblong Goyang performances, the strategic use of humor and vulnerability could account

for the bond they foster with their audience. Difficulties they face as women and as foreigners actually allow them to forge this link through laughter.

Language and Making Connections

Humor and the use of language make connections. The performers of Grup Gedebong Goyang exhibit their cultural sensitivity in many ways; the most obvious strength is that they speak not only Indonesian, but also Balinese, ranging from basic conversational to completely fluent. This *basa gado gado* or mixed vegetable salad of language astonishes the audience. Balinese is an intensely complex and hierarchical language that is extremely difficult to master. In Bali the “placing” of language is immensely important because the identity of the Balinese culture is so much defined by language. Despite Bali thousands of foreign visitors each year, Bali has remained “inward looking, self-assured, complete” (Ballinger, cited in Ryan 2013). Bali has a very strong interest in culture, but this tends to be one-sided with “no context for another’s culture” (Ryan 2013). Even though there are many nationalities living alongside each other in Bali and diversity is celebrated, the Balinese culture remains dominant.

The performers of Grup Gedebong Goyang traverse the Balinese language, in various accents including American, Italian, Swiss, and Australian, while simultaneously visually embodying their own culture through movement, signs, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication. Their multi-linguistic

display, both spoken and physical, is the source of much the hilarity and demands the audience listen and receive jokes through a different lens.

Audience member Komang Sugi Muliani commented after one performance that “they did a clever thing with the story, yes, and now I remember that story more.” (Muliani 2012) Precisely why it was memorable needs further unpacking. She continued, “It was interesting to hear *bulés* talking about popular political issues that are up to date. It’s impressive; they are very worldly, very global and it’s interesting to think how our politics, are seen. The meaning of what is reflected is true: the corruption in Bali” (Muliani 2012).

Greater political currency and added value comes from the fact that it is *bulés* who are *berani* (brave) to publically comment, yet a Balinese audience is familiar with this sort of commentary in performance. After all, this is one of many performative functions of *topeng*; masked dance-drama. Ballinger is the first to admit that if there were a group of Balinese women doing this sort of performance, there would be no need for Grup Gedebong Goyang. This indicates that there is something intrinsically funny or poignant about watching foreigners imitate, reproduce, and re-create Balinese culture. When asked why is it funny watching *tamu* or "guests", a word that is intermittently exchanged with *bulé*, imitate being Balinese, Rucina responded “because we are taking the mickey out of ourselves.

We are able to take situations that could be tense and turn it into something funny” (Ballinger 2012).

As I have explained, most of the Gedebong jokes are designed to poke fun at themselves, for example, the tourist wife who can’t sweep in the sketch "McDadong". Figure three shows Desanti in this role with Kohlik as the Balinese mother-in-law. G3 are aware that white women are perceived as having a “lack” in the eyes of the Balinese, and negotiating this is important in terms of winning their audience. They all feel that the stage is not the place to air their cultural frustrations. Because they laugh at themselves, they are encouraging others to do so too. As audience member Komang Sugi Muliani continues, “It is funny because regardless of their material and what they’re saying, it’s five *bulé* women speaking Balinese! It’s unusual and very funny because of their accents, it’s very difficult to understand them, even the ones who speak it really well, but it’s rare and a really good show of effort” (Muliani 2012)

It is important especially to Rucina Ballinger who first went to Bali over forty years ago, that the performances are opportunities to show and “show off” how much they know about Bali and *what it is to be Balinese*. This is understandable, as regardless of her fluency in the Balinese language and highly competent cultural knowledge, she is still on first encounter a *bulé* or *tamu*. In the words of Ballinger, which accurately sums up how many Balinese people feel, “*Tamu* are people who have buckets of money who can afford to travel to Bali. They are perceived as ignorant of anything Indonesian: the language, the culture, the idiosyncrasies.” Bali receives millions of tourists every year, the majority stay for two weeks. She

continues, “what makes our work so rich as we talk about things that are deeply embedded within the local community” (Ballinger 2012).

On the one hand, it could be argued that Gedebong performances are bringing Balinese women’s issues to the fore. On the other, there is an obvious desire for the group to express frustrations at always being seen as *bulé*. As foreign wives, who adopt a Balinese persona they expand the Balinese idea of what a *bulé* can be by identifying with the Balinese culture through their closeness to and distance to Balinese women. Balinese people are inspired to take more interest in their culture when they see it celebrated by *orang turis* ‘tourists’ and actively displayed in front of them. Women particularly see that if foreigners, all of whom are over forty, can still attempt the dances, so can they. As Hatley observes many women would feel inspired to dance again, regardless of their age and failing body (Hatley 2008:272). In a Gedebong performance, there is commitment to showing women of all castes and showing an understanding of village or *kampong* identity. Suzan Kohlik, when she speaks Balinese, has the ability to speak with the inflection of a low caste field worker. She claims it is the voice of her mother-in-law. To a Balinese ear, this is very specific tonal quality which the audience find hilarious. Figure four shows Kohlik, once again in the role of the traditional old Balinese woman pounding her betel nut.

Being “Other”

Being made up of four foreign women adds a positive flexibility and diversity to how and what Grup Gedebong Goyang is able to show and tell. For example, in one performance they could be at the Bali Hotels Association pretending to be

Japanese tourists or a French fashion models and in the next, they could be in a village making jokes about *roti kembang* (the aforementioned vagina-shaped cupcakes). Perhaps what this diversity grants them is a certain form of courage to be different, or more themselves, warts and all. They are "brave" and not afraid to discuss age, class, nor any perceived "lack" of the culturally acceptable attributes of womanhood. While it is too general to suggest that there are not Balinese woman who endorse these views, perhaps this "braveness" is a Western trait that Balinese women do not feel they fully can embody on the public stage.

The words *tamu* and *bulé* while negative in connotation are not always intended to be offensive. The words are more frequently used ignorantly as a greeting rather than a racial attack: "O, ya ada tamu," "Oh, yes, there's a stranger." *Tamu* is a word with negative capacity used to describe people from Java who live in Bali or towards Balinese from a different *banjar* or applied to any people who are literally "guests" in the home.

However *bulé*, carries with it deep associations of "othering" which as cultural geographer Mike Crang suggests, involves setting up identities as unequal, where belonging to a group is linked to the good qualities that group shares and projecting fears and dislikes to other people (Crang 1998: 61). The G3 performers have become more Balinese in their thinking and day-to-day life, but they still wear the "label" They may speak Balinese, but they are not Balinese.

The Balinese are extremely impressed by the embodied understanding of Balinese culture that Grup Gedebong Goyang show: issues of nature/nurture come to the fore and being both inside and outside of culture is literally center-stage.

Cultures interconnect and change. The culture of Bali is a hybrid fusion of Hindu-Balinese with ancestors from Java, religion from India, and cultural traits from China. Interculturalism is taken for granted. Western views focus on imagined and/or real borders using categories to divide nations, cultures, and religions into strictly separate groups (Gottowik 2010). What Grup Gedebong Goyang achieves through their work is to blur and cut through boundaries, bridging gaps with laughter. The Gedebong women, "look" like *tamu* and *bule* but are very different. The Gedebong performances prove there is a resident foreigner is more than *tamu*. As yet, there is no Balinese word for this person but perhaps the Gedebong performances challenge the Balinese to consider a new role for these people. By attempting to be viewed as "same" they cleverly position themselves as "other" and encourage the audience to both laugh at and with them. They have successfully created a hybrid, intercultural form of performance, borrowing from both Balinese and Western traditions.

The Grup Gedebong Goyang's humor is accepted not only because it is funny, but more importantly because it is a clever, respectful, and highly knowledgeable engagement with both traditional and contemporary globalized Balinese culture.

The work of Grup Gedebong Goyang is a positive leap forward in view of intercultural discourse.

END NOTES

1. This is a position that Ballinger shared with her late husband Anak Gede Putra Rangki and what this meant for Ballinger is that she had to organize the community to help with the ritual ceremonial preparations and offerings on new and full moons (*kajeng kliwon*), other holy days, and for any births, deaths or marriages. This is a huge service to one's community, and an honor to be recognized in this way.

2. This is true with the exception of Antonella Desanti and Rucina Ballinger, who are equally often known through their marriage associations. Desanti is married to I Wayan Wija, a famous *dalang* (shadow puppet performer). Rucina Ballinger is *jero*, meaning that she married into a significantly higher caste, in her case royalty; this is extremely unusual and comment-worthy locally.

3. These are band leader Kadek Balon on electric piano, Wiwit Setiawan also on keyboards, Michael Indrawan on electric guitar, "Dadok" on bass guitar and Anak Agung Gede Tirta on the drums.

4. After the 2002 Bali bombings it was felt that Bali socially, culturally, and spiritually should return to traditional values, restore balance, and embrace its past. Bali Ajeg was created as a political vehicle. "Ajeg," means invariable, and stable (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004) and the word was popularized the newspaper *Bali Post*. In "Ajeg Bali; Multiple Meanings, Diverse Agendas," Allen and Pallermo highlight the meanings of this term for the Balinese people. For example many interpreted it as meaning fixed and "static, not dynamic" (Paramatha cited in Allen and Pallermo 2003: 4). Generally the term espouses "defending our traditions and customs and the Balinese values that are beginning to fade in Bali at the moment" (Suryana cited in Allen and Pallermo 2005: 2).

5. There are other performers, such a Cokordo Sawitri, who tackle feminist and/or women's issues but from a unique perspective; so much so that "a Balinese audience would probably not compare their [G3's] work" (Ballinger cited in Ryan 2013). As Ballinger says, "Cok loves to shock, whereas our only shock factor is that we speak Balinese" (Ballinger cited in Ryan 2013). Ultimately as Desanti states,

Cok is not trying to entertain in the same way as us. We're perhaps more conventional. She's trying to get a message across in her own

creative, intellectual, artistic way which differs from ours. We have more of an entertainment level, on a lighter note (Desanti, cited in Ryan 2013).

To summarize Grup Gedebong Goyang's delivery references, although it does not rely on, a Balinese sense of clowning. They use and capitalize on this cultural borrowing. Cok does not need to borrow anything as her work is rooted and originates from her own culture.

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