

# Body Movement on Screen for Navigating Grief and Expressions of Care in *The Seen & Unseen*

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## Abstract

This article examines how *The Seen & Unseen* (Sekala Niskala, 2017), directed by Kamila Andini, deploys cinematic craft to shape body movement as a language for navigating grief and expressing care, especially in the contexts where care—typically enacted through direct physical encounter—must be articulated through screen-mediated bodily movement. Departing from Western, dialogue-centred film conventions, the film foregrounds gesture, choreography, stillness, and rhythm to articulate affective experience. Drawing on care ethics and Balinese cosmology, the study argues that the film reframes care as a sensorial and relational practice rather than a verbal or narrative one. Through close analysis of key sequences—including Tantri's moon dance, the river immersion, and the rooster duel—the article explores how embodied movement functions as both a mourning ritual and an aesthetic offering of solidarity. It further situates the film within traditions of dance film, slow cinema, and indigenous performance, demonstrating how screen-mediated *taksu*, a culturally specific Balinese philosophy of embodied performance, enables affective transmission across distance through screen-based aesthetic mediation. By centering a child's perspective through deliberate cinematic framing and rhythm, alongside Balinese performance epistemologies, *The Seen & Unseen* counters Hollywood's dominance and reclaims cinematic authorship as a collaborative, intercultural, and embodied practice. Ultimately, the article proposes that movement-based cinema can create a shared field of sensorial attunement in which grief is collectively felt, and care is aesthetically enacted.

**Keywords:** *Embodied care, dance film, kinaesthetic empathy, intercultural cinema, taksu, indigenous performance*

## Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana *Sekala Niskala* (judul internasional: *The Seen & Unseen*, 2017) karya Kamila Andini menggunakan praktik sinematik untuk mengolah gerak tubuh sebagai sebuah bahasa untuk menavigasi duka dan mengekspresikan kepedulian, khususnya dalam konteks ketika praktik kepedulian—yang lazimnya diwujudkan melalui perjumpaan fisik secara langsung—diartikulasikan melalui gerak tubuh yang dimediasi layar. Berbeda dengan konvensi sinema Barat yang bertumpu

pada dialog, film ini memusatkan perhatian pada gestur, koreografi, keheningan, dan ritme sebagai sarana untuk mengartikulasikan pengalaman afektif. Dengan merujuk pada etika kepedulian serta kosmologi Bali, kajian ini berargumen bahwa film tersebut memaknai ulang kepedulian sebagai praktik yang bersifat sensorial dan relasional, alih-alih sebagai pesan verbal atau naratif. Melalui analisis mendalam terhadap sejumlah adegan kunci—seperti tarian Tantri di bawah bulan purnama, berendam di sungai, dan sabung ayam—artikel ini menunjukkan bagaimana gerak tubuh berfungsi sekaligus sebagai ritual duka dan sebagai tawaran estetis atas bentuk solidaritas. Kajian ini juga menempatkan film dalam konsep film tari, sinema lambat, dan pertunjukan yang berakar pada adat tradisi, untuk menunjukkan bagaimana taksu—sebuah filosofi performativitas ketubuhan Bali—yang dimediasi layar tetap mampu mentransmisikan pengalaman afektif melampaui jarak melalui mediasi estetika sinema. Dengan menghadirkan sudut pandang anak sebagai pilihan estetis yang dibangun melalui pendekatan visual dan ritme sinematik, serta berpijak pada epistemologi performatif Bali, *Sekala & Niskala* menantang dominasi sinema Hollywood dan memposisikan ulang penulisan film sebagai praktik kolaboratif, interkultural, dan berlandaskan ketubuhan. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa sinema berbasis gerak dapat menciptakan suatu ruang bersama bagi keterhubungan indrawi, di mana duka dapat dirasakan secara kolektif dan kepedulian diwujudkan melalui bentuk-bentuk estetis.

**Kata Kunci:** *Perawatan berwujud, film tari, empati tubuh-kinestetik, sinema lintas budaya, taksu, performativitas tradisi*

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## Introduction

Research consistently shows that Western, particularly Hollywood-driven, film styles dominate the global film market. US films are the most prevalent in top box office lists across many countries, often outpacing local productions. This dominance is attributed to Hollywood's global distribution power, high production values, and the adoption of "deculturized, transnational" content to appeal to international audiences (Crane 2014, 365-368). National film industries outside the United State often struggle to challenge this dominance, even with supportive cultural policies (Crane 2014, 378-79). While cinema is fundamentally a visual medium, dialogue plays a central role in Western (especially Hollywood) films. Research shows that, despite action sequences, the standard scene in popular movies is a conversation, with dialogue-heavy shots dominating dramas (72%), comedies (60%), and even action films (43%) (Cutting 2016, 1728). *The Seen & Unseen* (2017), directed by Kamila Andini<sup>1</sup>, intricately depicts the journey of a young girl grappling with her dreamscape to reconcile with the potential loss of her twin brother due to illness. The film has received widespread acclaim, earning prestigious international accolades, including the Grand Prix - Generation Kplus award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2018. Grounded in the vibrant tapestry of Balinese arts and culture, the film employs

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1 Throughout this paper, "Dini" will be used as a shortened reference to filmmaker Kamila Andini.

body movement as a profound narrative device. This cinematic work marks Dini's debut as she embarks on her filmmaking journey, utilizing it as a process of self-discovery. In contemplating the nature of her craft, Dini reflects on the stories she wishes to tell and the films she desires to create. Returning to her roots, she aims to authentically portray the essence of Asian, particularly Indonesian, humanity. Bali, in this context, serves as a symbolic space where holism permeates daily life. *The Seen & Unseen* encapsulates the philosophy embraced by the Balinese people—a harmonious existence with both the seen (*sekala*) and the unseen (*niskala*) elements of life. Shaped by beliefs, myths, and a holistic universe, this concept encapsulates Dini's perspective on the profound cultural identity of Indonesia (Kotzathanasis 2018). This essay centers its analysis on various scenes and the storyline, which effectively illustrate the nuanced process of navigating grief and the expression of care through bodily movements. The exploration further delves into an ensemble filmmaking methodology, aiming to elucidate the nuances of authorship and the evolution of creative elements within the film. Specifically, the discussion focuses on how the configuration of body movements or dance, as the central element in the film, is intricately formulated.

In his exploration of “The Ethics and Aesthetic of Care,” Steven P. Black emphasizes the centrality of embodied communication in care activities and the formation of moral and ethical care. Physical acts, such as touch, tone of voice, hugs, kisses, and shared eye gaze, constitute care by communicating affect, attention, empathy, and copresence. These acts form the foundational basis for intersubjectivity development, particularly in contexts like breastfeeding and infant-caregiver interactions. From a phenomenological perspective, communicative care activities simultaneously embody social action and experiential engagement. The aesthetic dimensions of talk-in-interaction play a pivotal role in socialization processes and the continual communicative construction of morality and ethics (Black 2018, 82). Joan Tronto's influential ethics of care framework positions the body as central to understanding care—not just as a set of tasks, but as a deeply political, embodied, and relational practice. Tronto's work highlights that the vulnerability and neediness of the human body are foundational to the political significance of care. Rather than viewing care solely as labor or moral disposition, Tronto's approach reframes care as a “corporeal relation.” The body's inherent need for care exposes the political dimensions of dependency and interdependence, challenging the marginalization of care in both public and private spheres. This perspective insists that the body's vulnerability is not just a private matter but a constant opening to the political, demanding recognition and ethical response (Vaittinen 2015, 110–12). Care, viewed as a performance, exists within specific temporal and spatial parameters, much like live and theatrical performances. James Thompson, in his chapter on “Performing the Aesthetic of Care,” cites the example of a dance workshop, *The Grandchildren of Hiroshima* (2015), to illustrate the embodiment of care. The workshop explores care through body gestures, shifting from traditional hand-on-shoulder-hand-in-hand interactions to more relaxed and gentle movements, resembling a dance of care. These fluid movements, akin to a choreographed dance, aim to ensure the collective safety and support of all participants (Thompson 2020, 222). Furthermore, socially engaged performance emerges as another illustration of the connection between care and performance. This form of art, created in collaboration with communities, addresses social issues and advocates for social change. Care is enacted through the establishment of a space

for dialogue, story-sharing, and relationship-building between performers and audience members. The performance itself becomes an act of care by fostering a space for individuals to come together, share experiences, and offer support (Thompson 2020, 217).

The aforementioned studies underscore that both the concept of care and its expression through bodily movement are typically linked to direct encounters, incorporating key elements such as touch and collaboration, to emphasize interactive processes between two or more entities. Consequently, this research aims to address a pivotal question: Can cinema effectively convey care when the film and audience are physically separated, lacking direct contact? Specifically, this study investigates how films that centre body movement as a primary expressive element articulate and perform the notion of care, even in the absence of direct physical interaction between the film and its audience. It further argues that such films employ embodied movement as a universal language through which they communicate affective experiences to global audiences, functioning as a medium for navigating grief and expressing care. The case study focuses on a film produced in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, where bodily movement is deeply rooted in indigenous performative traditions.

### **A Passage Through Grief's Surreal Landscape**

The film opens with a poignant scene featuring Tantri, a 10-year-old girl, observing her twin brother, Tantra, lying motionless in a hospital bed. In a composed manner by the door, she demonstrates a profound stillness while deftly cracking a raw chicken egg. As the eggshell fractures, both the egg white and yolk spill onto Tantri's hands, serving as a symbolic representation of the release of her long-suppressed anger. This act serves as a poignant metaphor, illustrating the nuanced manifestation of her emotions. The symbolic act of breaking the egg encapsulates the intricate nature of her emotions—a delicate yet forceful expression of the inner turmoil she grapples with. Tantri's facial expression and deliberate actions serve as a journey through her grief, intertwined with a quest for retribution against her circumstances. Following this impactful scene, a flashback unfolds to the day when Tantri and Tantra were preparing a meal—a sunny-side-up egg divided into two parts. Tantri selects the egg white, while Tantra opts for the yolk. Notably, this egg was pilfered from the offerings intended for the Gods. The narrative introduces the cultural context of twins of opposite sexes, known as *kembar buncing* in Balinese terminology. In Balinese tradition, mixed-sex twins (*kembar buncing*) have historically been associated with social anxiety and impurity for a set period, often leading to exclusion or ritual cleansing of the child and family (Rustiani et al. 2025, 178). The belief is tied to old manuscripts such as the "Indik Anak Manak salah lontar" which claim lower-caste families giving birth to *kembar buncing* are under a curse, equating their act to that of royalty, a serious social transgression (Ariyani et al. 2023, 62). This belief is connected to traditional social hierarchies: for commoner families, the birth is seen as problematic, requiring banishment or ritual isolation, while royal families historically viewed such births as auspicious (The Jakarta Post 2012). The curse is often attributed to the deity Brahma, believed to bring misfortune and impurity to communities unless appropriate rituals are quickly performed (Ariyani et al. 2023). Ritual offerings and ceremonies at both family and village levels are required to purify the supposed defilement and restore harmony, involving community

participation at shrines, temples, beaches, and important village sites (Lestawi 2022, 683-689). The ritual suggests removing the family of opposite-sex twins to the village periphery or even to temporary shelters near cemeteries for a period (commonly 42 days to 3 months) (Suraya et al. 2024, 126-128).

Tantri's journey through grief is characterized by her silence, avoidance of the hospital room, and the expression of her anger, notably manifested through the symbolic act of cracking the egg. Concurrently, her recollections of the stolen egg contribute to the complexity of her grieving process. Engaging with Paul C. Rosenblatt's perspective, grief is intricately woven into social relationships and cultural frameworks. While the psychological understanding of grief often emphasizes individual experiences, it is essential to acknowledge the profound impact of social and cultural contexts, as elucidated by symbolic interaction theory and family systems theory (Rosenblatt 1993, 102). In Tantri's case, her struggle with denial regarding Tantra's illness becomes a focal point, leading her to seek justification for the situation. Rosenblatt posits that grief, particularly the loss of a significant figure, imbues the experience with qualities such as a quest for meaning, uncertainty about one's identity, ambiguity in interpreting events, disorientation, confusion, and a lack of confidence (Rosenblatt 1993, 103). In navigating her grief, Tantri engages in introspection rooted in her beliefs within the context of Balinese Hinduism. In this cultural framework, religion, art, and daily life are seamlessly intertwined. This indigenous community place a strong emphasis on dance and music as vehicles for connecting with the divine (Sugiartha 2018, 4). These artistic expressions are integral to the rites of passage that guide individuals through the various stages of life, including birth, death, and reincarnation (Davies 2007, 28). Tantri's reflective process involves a deep consideration of these cultural tenets, providing a meaningful backdrop to her journey of grief within the Balinese Hindu beliefs.

The egg, with its unified yet contrasting elements of yolk and white, functions as a compelling metaphor for dualism—a philosophical principle deeply embedded in Balinese culture. Balinese dualism is most explicitly expressed through the doctrine of *Rwa Bhineda* ("two differences"), which holds that all aspects of existence are characterized by pairs of opposites—such as good and evil, joy and sorrow, sacred and profane—that are interdependent and mutually sustaining. This philosophy parallels, but is distinct from, frameworks like Chinese yin-yang: *Rwa Bhineda* stresses that neither pole can exist without the other, and that ultimate harmony comes from their dynamic balance (Kapela 2023, 28–30). Balinese architecture and spatial orientation reflect dualities, for example, by dividing homes into separate sacred (*utama/kaja*) and profane (*nista/kelod*) zones, or aligning key features according to opposing directions (mountain/sea, sunrise/sunset) (Wijaya 2021, 1111–18). Artistic traditions, like the black-and-white *poleng* cloth seen at sacred sites, visually symbolize this dual balance (Wibawa et al. 2023, 68–70). Rituals and ceremonies routinely invoke contrasting elements to affirm cosmic balance, such as celebrating both full and new moons (*Purnama* and *Tilem*) (Kapela 2023, 29–30). Furthermore, in the film, the moon itself also becomes a central motif, particularly in the scene where Tantri dances beneath the full moon. As her head tilts backwards and her face opens toward the sky, the movement evokes an image of surrender and spiritual receptivity. This gesture resonates with a movement vocabulary found in Balinese dance traditions, particularly in the Sanghyang dance, where the dancer's head and upper body appear to be drawn

upward by an unseen spiritual force. The elongated neck, expanded chest, and subtly lifted sternum create the impression that the body is being guided by a higher power rather than through conscious muscular control. The scene of Tantri dancing with the moon also demonstrates that nighttime is the channel for her to connect with Tantra. The moon becomes the connector of the real and surreal worlds. In the film, hence, despite the daytime illumination, Tantra remains at rest in his bed, while Tantri actively engages in various pursuits. As night descends, Tantri summons the courage to enter Tantra's room—an act she consistently avoided during daylight hours. During these nocturnal hours, Tantra seemingly awakens, allowing the siblings to communicate as they typically would. Notably, one specific night unfolds as Tantra indulges in the art of shadow puppetry. This nighttime interaction emerges as a poignant juncture of connection and storytelling, unraveling a profound layer within their sibling dynamic. While Tantra may be perceived as unconscious by others during the day, for Tantri, the nighttime hours bring him to life in a surreal realm.

**Picture 1.** Tantri dancing under the full moon



**Picture 2.** One of the nocturnal encounters between Tantra and Tantri. Here, Tantra performs with a shadow puppet while Tantri watches from the opposite side of the hospital curtain, which functions both as the puppet screen and as a symbolic threshold between two realms—boy and girl, real and surreal.



This Balinese dualist worldview is reflected in the film's structuring of day and night as distinct experiential spheres, each imbued with contrasting atmospheres that shape the characters' emotional and spiritual journeys. Although the narrative establishes a clear dichotomy, the film grants equal weight to realism and surrealism. Rather than framing the surreal as an "other" realm, the film resists visual strategies that would typically mark such a division—there is no use of altered lighting, special effects, or atmospheric cues to signal a metaphysical shift. The supernatural is presented not as a rupture from ordinary life but as an extension of it. This is evident, for example, in the night sequences where Tantra awakens and communicates with Tantri, despite remaining unconscious and bedridden during the day. The film avoids signalling a transition between worlds; instead, it allows the supernatural to emerge seamlessly within the same temporal and spatial frame as the everyday. This strategy is further illustrated through the depiction of *tonya*, one of the supernatural beings in Balinese cosmology, alongside *bhuta*, *kala*, and *dengen*. *Tonya* are believed to inhabit large, sacred trees and form part of Bali's spiritual ecology (Arimbawa 2011, 216). In the film, they are portrayed by children dressed in plain white clothing, appearing in several scenes: in Tantra's hospital room, where they curl their bodies like cocoons, and in the rice fields, where they walk in a single line, eventually accompanied by Tantra, as if escorting him into another realm. Their presence is shot entirely naturalistically—without prosthetics, theatrical makeup, or lighting effects. The supernatural is therefore not spectacularised but absorbed into the film's everyday visual register, embodying a Balinese worldview in which the visible (*sekala*) and invisible (*niskala*) coexist fluidly rather than hierarchically.

In a subsequent daytime scene set in Tantra's hospital room, the atmosphere is thick with worry and quiet sorrow. The mother anxiously asks the father for updates on her son's condition. The news delivered is devastating: a growing lump in Tantra's head has begun to disrupt his neural system, gradually stripping him of his senses. Tantra can no longer hear or feel—a revelation that instantly destabilizes Tantri, who is confronted not only with her brother's suffering but with the irreversibility of loss already in motion. Unable to accept this reality, Tantri enters a state of disorientation, suspended between despair and yearning for connection. Her grief takes an embodied form. Rather than expressing her sorrow through speech or tears, she turns toward kinaesthetic empathy—a bodily attempt to inhabit her brother's condition. She immerses herself in a river, staying underwater long enough for her skin to wrinkle, letting the cold diminish her tactile awareness. Later, she pricks her own hand with a needle, deliberately testing the threshold of pain and numbness. These acts are not self-harm, but an aesthetic gesture of care: Tantri is not trying to escape emotion, but to meet her brother in the realm of sensation he is losing. Here, care becomes performative, enacted through corporeal mimicry rather than verbal reassurance. Tantri's attempt to erase her senses becomes a form of embodied solidarity. This sequence illustrates how grief is not only emotional but sensorial. Tantri mourns the gradual disappearance of sensory life—sound, touch, connection. Through her actions, the film shows that care, in its deepest form, is not merely tending to the other, but transforming the self in response to the other's suffering. Tantri's attempt to inhabit her brother's sensory decline is both an act of mourning-in-advance and an offering of presence—one that acknowledges that love persists even when perception fades.

**Picture 3.** After immersing herself in the river until her skin wrinkles, Tantri is discovered by her mother, who attempts to comfort and reach out to her.



### **Dramatic Body Movement: A Form of Proper Care**

In contemporary global cinema, melodrama has emerged as a vital aesthetic mode for articulating the complexities of care, emotion, and moral responsibility. Through heightened affect, expressive gestures, and moral tension, melodrama enables filmmakers to explore how care is felt, performed, and negotiated across diverse cultural and social contexts. Within this framework, scholars such as Jeong Chang have examined how melodramatic conventions are reconfigured in transnational cinema to interrogate the ethical dimensions of caregiving in an interconnected world. Chang posits that films, hailing from diverse cultural origins and designed for international distribution and reception, employ melodrama as a narrative framework to scrutinize the ethical underpinnings that define "appropriate" care. In this context, melodrama is construed as a dramatic genre characterized by heightened emotions, archetypal characters, and a simplified moral universe (Chang 2013, 15–16). Melodramatic films frequently focus on caregiving roles such as nurses, mothers, and family members, using intense emotional expression and moral conflicts to underscore themes of care, self-sacrifice, and devotion. These stories highlight caregiving through portrayals of suffering, redemption, and complicated family dynamics, which reinforce the nursing profession's ideal of dedication and altruism. This strong emotional emphasis is consistent with melodrama's distinguishing feature as a genre closely associated with women, often described as a "feminine genre" because of its focus on female protagonists' internal struggles, their relationships, and sacrifices. Such portrayals embody the conflicts women face between personal desires and societal or professional duties, particularly in caregiving roles, making melodrama a key medium for exploring female experience and identity (Babini 2012, 27–28). The narrative is driven by powerful, often exaggerated emotions such as love, sacrifice, suffering, and redemption. These emotions are communicated through expressive dialogue, music, and *mise-en-scène* (visual style) (Holohan 2023, 831–32). Besides dialogue, some films even employ monologue. The narrative is often punctuated by extended monologues that function as acts of self-revelation or emotional release for the characters. These introspective passages

allow for intense emotional reflection and expression, serving as an expressive device typical of melodrama's heightened mode of emotional communication (Çelik 2024, 67–68). It emphasizes the prominence of verbal communication as a key medium for expressing emotion, including expressions of care. However, this raises questions about films that rely less on words: how do such works convey emotion and care through nonverbal means? While *The Seen & Unseen* does not conform to the conventional melodramatic formula, it artfully reimagines the dynamics of caregiving through an embodied and intercultural cinematic language. The film moves beyond melodrama's reliance on verbal and emotional excess, instead foregrounding body movement, rhythm, and gesture as affective vehicles for expressing care. Moreover, although the figure of care remains centered on a woman, the film subverts conventional portrayals by situating caregiving within the child's imaginative world, where the boundaries between the visible and the unseen, the human and the spiritual, are porous. Rooted in an indigenous cosmology that informs both the narrative and its visual language, *The Seen & Unseen* extends the discourse of care beyond the moral and emotional legibility of melodrama, proposing instead a cinematic form where care is felt, sensed, and lived through embodied connection and cultural imagination.

In a nocturnal setting, Tantri decorates herself with young coconut leaves shaped like a rooster's tail and paints her feet to resemble chicken claws. Through this playful and inventive act, she helps Tantra symbolically transform into another rooster. What follows is a silent, stylised duel that echoes the Balinese cultural practice of cockfighting. Cockfighting, or 'tajan', is a long-standing Balinese tradition embedded in both social life and Hindu ceremonial practice. Clifford Geertz famously conceptualised the Balinese cockfight as "deep play," a ritualised, symbolically charged arena where questions of honour, identity, status, and cosmological order are enacted through gesture, wagering, and embodied conflict (Geertz 2000, 190–95). Unlike other Balinese ritual performances—such as the consecration of a Brahmana priest, which emphasises breath control, stillness, and inward concentration—the cockfight is driven by kinetic emotionality: impulsive, visceral, and animated by the movements of animals rather than disciplined human bodies (Geertz 2000, 200). For Geertz, this stark kinaesthetic contrast reveals how different modes of physical expression articulate different layers of Balinese social and cultural life. The film's cockfight-inspired dance scene transposes this embodied metaphor into a hospital room, where Tantra and Tantri perform a non-contact duel through synchronised movement. Their bodies evoke the tension, rivalry, and mutual recognition of two roosters in combat, while the creaking of an iron bed heightens the intimacy of the space. Tantri challenges Tantra to prove his strength for her, transforming the choreography into an allegory of resilience, struggle, and the will to survive. As choreographer Dayu Ani<sup>2</sup> notes, the dance foregrounds life's battles—not through literal violence, but through embodied negotiation, mutual testing, and the shared labour of enduring (Yoga et al. 2022, 34).

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2 Throughout this paper, "Dayu" will be used as a shortened reference to filmmaker Dayu Ani.

**Picture 4.** Tantri and Tantra in the rooster dance sequence, a choreographed interaction inspired by Balinese cockfighting (tajen).



In a distinct scene, Tantri metamorphoses into a monkey using crafted coconut leaves as ears and tail. Monkeys, as primates, exhibit characteristics most closely aligned with humans among all animal species. Therefore, this monkey dance symbolizes the emotional facets of human desire and connection (Yoga et al. 2022, 34). Attempting to engage Tantra in a dance, the monkey dance concludes with Tantri, and Tantra figuratively presented behind her, creating a tableau that encapsulates themes of connection, spirituality, and Tantra's challenges. The recurring imagery of *tonya* played by children in white clothes during night scenes adds layers of symbolism, with repetitive movements suggesting a blend of spirituality and shared experiences, challenging a simplistic interpretation of them as ghosts. This intricate fusion of symbolism and emotion enriches the narrative, providing insight into the characters' inner worlds.

### Body Movement in Synchrony with Universal Nature

Since 2011, Dini harbored the aspiration to create a film centered around dance as a primary element. The ongoing discussions with the choreographer Dayu persisted, encountering challenges in securing funding for what was deemed an 'unusual' cinematic endeavor. Against the backdrop of these challenges, pivotal life events, such as Dini's experience of motherhood, ultimately led to the commencement of shooting in 2015 (NusaBali 2018). The filming process spanned 15 days, resulting in an 86-minute cinematic work. The body movement elements of the film, as elucidated by Dini, are intricately shaped by the cultural milieu where verbal communication assumes a secondary role. In an interview, she underscores that, similar to Balinese Hindus, Muslim communities in Indonesia also engage with Arabic prayers in a nuanced way—one not always rooted in full linguistic comprehension, but grounded instead in the affective and ritual force of the utterance itself. During *tahlil* and *dzikir*—rituals of remembering and invoking God through the repetitive recitation of divine names or phrases—the prayer is experienced less as semantic content and more as a mantra (K. Andini, interview, August 23, 2023). Here, mantra refers to a vibrational, rhythmic act that reshapes the body, the breath, and the participant's sensorial field. What matters is not the lexical meaning of the words, but how they are ritualised and

embodied. In this context, embodiment becomes a form of knowing. The sacred is accessed through doing, not decoding. Prayer becomes a sensory, sonic, and kinaesthetic event—one in which meaning is inhabited rather than interpreted.”

The film’s choreography, therefore, mirrors the expressive characteristics of Indonesian society, capturing the essence of their prayers and the distinctive mode of communication manifested through bodily movements. Influenced by nature, the choreography draws inspiration from various sources, including animal behaviours such as those of monkeys and roosters, along with natural phenomena like the process of cocooning. Dini highlights the organic relationship between classical Balinese dance vocabulary and the natural world, noting, for example, the eye movement *seledet*—a rapid, sideways glance often described as echoing the darting motion of a dragonfly’s eyes. In a similar vein, Dayu Ani’s choreography is grounded in traditional Balinese movement lexicons, drawing from the Tamulilingan dance and gestural motifs that evoke the sacred Sanghyang dance (Yoga et al. 2022; Shackleton 2017). At the same time, Dayu expands the repertoire by introducing newly created movements inspired directly by nature, referencing the behaviour of roosters, monkeys, and cocoons. By grounding the film’s movement language in the interdependence between ecology and ritual practice, Dini aims to produce a narrative that resonates beyond its local context. She expresses confidence that the film’s thematic and affective registers will be accessible to international audiences, arguing that the shared human condition of living on Earth—and within nature’s embrace—forms a common interpretive foundation. This strategy not only enriches the film’s cultural texture but also cultivates the possibility of cross-cultural understanding among viewers from diverse backgrounds.

Equally important, Dayu imagines contemporary dance as an evolving expression of Balinese culture—open to new choreographic ideas yet still attentive to principles of silence, breath, and slow tempo. She follows the rhythm of the lead actress, Thaly Kasih, who performs on set in ways that prioritise embodied stillness and contemplation (Nurvitasari 2018). Furthermore, I argue that Tantri, as performed by Thaly Kasih, embodies a form of *metaksu* that is transmitted through the medium of film, enabling the audience to sense and respond to an embodied expression of care. The concept of *taksu* plays a crucial role in influencing Balinese performers by embodying the spiritual inspiration and charismatic power that enables them to fully embody the characters or roles they perform. *Taksu* is described as the spiritual energy within masks, puppets, characters, or ceremonial weapons, and it signifies the condition of being at one with one’s musical instrument, costume, or performance medium (Davies 2007, 21). Unlike much Western thought that treats witnessing as a passive act, in Bali, witnessing—especially concerning the divine—is an active, constitutive process without which a performance is considered incomplete or “empty” (*gabeng*) (Hobart and Pujawati 2020, 7). Performers aspire to achieve *taksu* as it marks the highest level of artistic excellence and divine gift that cannot be easily taught or conveyed. It is regarded as a form of divine inspiration that empowers the artist with exceptional virtuosity and conviction, allowing them to captivate and move audiences profoundly (Davies 2007, 21). Furthermore, *taksu* is described as “half technique, half losing yourself so deeply in the part that you become whatever you are acting.” *Taksu* cannot be invoked with pre-recorded media; it requires live interaction and a dynamic dialogue between actors/singers and musicians. Performances without an audience are considered “dead” (*mati*) because the vital component of *taksu*—the active witnessing—is

missing. What, then, becomes of performance when it is no longer live? In the absence of a shared physical space—when performer and audience no longer encounter one another bodily—how does *taksu* operate and by what means can it be transferred to the audience? In *The Seen & Unseen*, *taksu* is not confined to the live ritual or stage context; rather, it is mediated through the screen, suggesting that cinematic space can serve as an extension of energy transmission. The audience, therefore, does not merely witness the performance but is invited to experience its affective and spiritual charge. I further argue that the medium of dance film enables this shared experience to be intensified through the screen. Dance film challenges conventional understandings of presence and temporality by translating the ephemerality of live movement into a cinematic form, where close-ups, editing, and framing reshape the viewer's sensory and affective engagement (Brannigan 2010, 39–46). Seen through the lens of *The Seen & Unseen*, the embodied gestures of Tantri, Tantra, and the tonya are re-mediated through filmic techniques, resulting in a transformed choreography of meaning—one that exceeds both the immediacy of live performance and the conventions of narrative cinema.

Significantly, the cultivation of stillness—both in the performer's body and the film's temporal rhythm—serves to amplify *taksu*, allowing its presence to be felt even across the distance between screen and viewer. The film's editing reinforces a sensorial atmosphere of silence and stillness by sustaining long takes, minimising cuts, and deliberately withholding musical accompaniment during key moments of pause. For instance, in the opening scene of cracking the egg. Rather than accelerating narrative tempo or dictating emotional cues through sound, the editing allows time to expand, inviting the viewer to dwell in the quiet presence of the characters. This restrained rhythm not only heightens the contemplative quality of the scene but also amplifies the affective force of *taksu*, as stillness becomes a medium through which energy, care, and spiritual resonance can be perceptibly felt. This approach echoes the aesthetics of “slow cinema,” in which extended duration, minimal montage, and temporal openness encourage the viewer to shift from narrative consumption to embodied attention. The film employs duration as a pathway to contemplation rather than spectacle, foregrounding presence over plot. Discussing how slow cinema plays with time and rhythm, focusing on how long shots and minimal editing create a deeply immersive temporal experience, Marta Stańczyk conceptualised ‘somatic resonance’ where rhythm pulsates between the screen and the viewer's body, enabling kinesthetic empathy—viewers become corporeally synchronized with the onscreen time and space. The perception of time in slow cinema becomes affective and visceral, inviting spectators to surrender their habitual temporal expectations and allowing time to flow through them (Stańczyk 2021, 251–52). In the context of this film, the long take becomes both an ethical and affective device: it respects the interiority of the characters while generating a space in which *taksu*—and the care embedded within it—can be transmitted to the viewer. In addition, in the context of animation there is a newly constructed terminology introduced called ‘virtual *taksu*’ to describe the representation and embodiment of the Balinese aesthetic and spiritual concept of *taksu* within virtual or digital contexts. When traditional performing arts such as dance are transformed into digital animation, there is a possibility to recreate an “aura” that provides an aesthetic experience to observers, provided that various sensory interactions and aspects are carefully considered. According to the research, recreating aura in virtual or digitally animated adaptations of traditional performing arts requires attention to several

key elements. First, the aesthetic impact depends on how effectively the work engages the viewer through sensory interaction, including visual, auditory, and other immersive cues. Second, the virtual *taksu* must reflect the balance of *sekala* (material reality) and *niskala* (spiritual or immaterial dimensions), meaning that technical precision needs to be paired with symbolic and cultural depth. Finally, the artist's own technical skill, dedication, and spiritual maturity remain essential, echoing traditional understandings of *taksu* even in digital form (Yusa 2020, 109–12). In this film, the presence of Balinese artists—particularly the choreographer, dancers, and actors—plays a crucial role in determining how *taksu* operates, allowing the work to speak from within Balinese epistemologies rather than merely reproducing external interpretations. The director, Dini, deepened this process through extensive research and collaboration with local practitioners, while the producer Gita Fara also engaged closely with symbolic meanings, the cinematographer Anggi Frisca embraced long takes, and the editors Dwi Agus Purwanto and Dinda Amanda preserved moments of slowness and silence—all of which contribute to the film's atmospheric and spiritual integrity. This is especially significant given the long history of Western representations of Balinese culture that rely on exoticism, fantasy, and stereotypical imaginaries, often overshadowing Balinese self-expression (Hobart and Pujawati 2020, 11). Such portrayals have repeatedly mediated Balinese bodies and traditions through European perspectives, reinforcing a subtle yet persistent representational hegemony. Accordingly, *The Seen & Unseen* functions simultaneously as a mode of cultural self-determination and an affective aesthetic of grieving and caregiving—distributing care, affection, and ethical regard across a transnational viewing public.

## Conclusion

By privileging body movement, rhythm, breath, and stillness over dialogue, *The Seen & Unseen* translates caregiving into an embodied aesthetics. Tantri's kinaesthetic responses to Tantra's sensory decline—immersion, self-testing of numbness, nocturnal dances—render grief as a sensorial condition and care as a transformation of the self in relation to the other. The film thus reframes care from a moral message into a corporeal practice, aligning with care ethics that emphasise attentiveness, vulnerability, and co-presence, while extending these ideas into mediated, transnational spectatorship.

Grounded in Balinese cosmology, the work shows how spiritual and sensorial life interpenetrate the everyday. The film scenes unfold a narrative that explores dualities, such as boy and girl, day and night, health and sickness, life and death, conscious and dream, and real and surreal. Rather than viewing these elements as opposing forces, the film portrays them as interconnected and complementary, forming a cohesive whole. The circular concept presented challenges to the conventional linear understanding, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between seemingly contrasting elements. As mentioned above, the expression of care through bodily movements often involves the direct interaction of two entities, engaging in a process of encounter. In the cinematic realm of *The Seen & Unseen*, this film adeptly serves as a mediator for such encountering dualism concepts presented in the film. Consequently, it assumes a prominent role within the narrative, functioning as a key character in conveying the aesthetic essence of care. Furthermore, through *taksu* (and its screen-mediated intensification), movement carries an energetic charge that

traverses the distance between performer and audience. Long takes, cultivated silence, and deliberate tempo invite somatic resonance: viewers breathe with the film, dwell in its temporal openness, and become attuned to its ethical pulse. Here, slow cinema's durational strategies are not austere formalism but an ethics of attention, a space where grief can be shared and care can be transmitted.

This cinematic language also unsettles the universalising dominance of dialogue-driven, Western melodramatic modes. Instead of verbal confession or moral excess, *The Seen & Unseen* offers an intercultural poetics in which choreography and atmosphere are primary engines of meaning. The child's imaginative world, the presence of *tonya*, and the day/night braid of realism and the surreal together perform a Balinese philosophy in which the visible and invisible co-inhabit the same moral and sensory field. In doing so, the film asserts cultural self-determination against exoticizing gazes while opening an accessible, affective channel to global publics.

Finally, the film invites a broader rethinking of authorship and medium. Emerging from ensemble practice—director, choreographer, dancers, cinematographer, editors—its authorship is relational and processual, mirroring care itself. It also raises generative questions for dance film and digital culture: if *taksu* can be mediated, what are the conditions under which aura and ethical relation travel across screens? *The Seen & Unseen* suggests that when movement is rooted in ecological attunement, ritual intelligibility, and committed craft, cinema can become a conduit for moving through grief and expressing care, uniting distant audiences within a common field of emotional and sensory connection.

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