

A Sense of Place:  
*Wayang kulit* in Bali and  
*wayang listrik* in America

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Various forms of shadow puppetry exist throughout South East Asia. More specifically, in Indonesia, this art has developed into a number of unique traditions; the most famous is found in the islands of Java and Bali and is called *wayang kulit*, or sometimes just *wayang*. This paper focuses on Balinese *wayang*, though at points the Javanese form will be used as an important reference. Shadow puppetry has also made its way to America. As jet travel became accessible to young artists in the 1970s, many Americans visited Bali to study *wayang kulit* and later to adapt it for their own performances. Larry Reed is one of these artists who remains at the forefront of American shadow puppetry. This essay examines the relationship between elements included in both Balinese and American performances and the role of each performance form in its respective society.

By mixing religious tales with elements of contemporary life, Balinese *wayang kulit* has proven remarkably capable of integrating the sacred and secular aspects of its society. The first section of this essay looks at the history and technical aspects of *wayang kulit* performances, while the second addresses *wayang kulit*'s place in Balinese society. The following two sections focus on Larry Reed's career, and how he builds upon traditional *wayang kulit* by incorporating film techniques and aesthetics from a variety of foreign cultures. Reed's aim is to translate ritual across cultural boundaries – to introduce Americans to and educate them about a foreign culture in way that is also sensitive to the source material and culture. The third section of this essay looks at the trajectory of Reed's career through the lens of transforming elements from foreign cultures through a unified aesthetic. The fourth

section examines Reed's method for remaining conscious and respectful of the culture whose tradition he adapts.

As the paper explains, both *wayang kulit* and Reed's performances employ guidelines shaped by their audiences' reactions and desires. Despite this similarity, the two performances hold very different places in their respective societies: *wayang kulit* is an integral part of Balinese culture, mixing religious and secular elements into an enjoyable spectacle, while Reed's entertainment *mélanges* traditional cultures with American values, creating performances which help to introduce a foreign culture to an American audience.

#### **WAYANG KULIT IN BALI**

Imagine yourself in the warm humid climate of Malaysia; let's say in a small town in the state of Kedah. It's night, and you're sitting at a roadside café table sipping your coffee, a thick layer of sweet and condensed milk coating the bottom of your cup. You're enjoying easy conversation with friends, when the not-so-distant music from a gamelan orchestra reaches your ears, alerting you to the fact that a shadow puppet show will soon be starting. Any children in your company will begin tugging at your sleeve, begging you to hurry to the performance so they can sit right up front beneath the shadow screen. Knowing there is no rush, you casually follow the music to the clearing in the town, where a delivery truck has its large side door replaced with a muslin shadow screen. Inside the vehicle, now a shadow puppet stage, the musicians are beating their drums, gongs and metal clappers, and the *seruni* player is blowing a hypnotic melody that seems to snake through the crowd, snaring its

audience. Seated behind the screen, the *dalang* is readying his shadow puppets for the evening's performance, the piles of flat, rawhide puppets snagging on each other as he hurriedly pulls them apart and stacks them into piles in the order he plans to use them. Flicking off his hand-rolled cigarette out the open back of the truck and taking one last swig of coffee, the puppet master settles himself behind the hanging light that will cast the shadows on the screen. He softly recites his requisite prayers, incantations and blessings, ending with a gesture of *baka*, touching his thumb to the roof of his mouth and then to his puppets. Finally he is ready to summon gods, heroes and demons alike from the supernatural world to bring their struggles and triumphs to life in this play of shadows. (Osnes 7)

Though Malaysian *wayang kulit* varies from the Balinese form, the excitement and intrigue that pulls in viewers – adults and children alike – are a hallmark of shadow puppetry throughout South East Asia. This form of shadow theater is typically performed during religious festivals over the course of a night and features myths of classic heroes, like Arjuna and Bima, who battle monstrous ogres. People of all ages enjoy watching the *dalang*, or puppeteer, manipulate his puppets, also called *wayang*; he gives them, and, more importantly, their shadows life to tell a riveting story. In fact, one of the unique features of *wayang kulit* is that, depending on the character, the *dalang* jumps among several different languages, few of which are familiar to a typical audience member. Because he cannot hold the audience's attention simply through the dialogue which is barely understood by the audience, *dalang* view their spectacular puppetry manipulation displays as integral to their

performances. In this section, I discuss the history of *wayang kulit* in Bali as well as the stories told, the design of the puppets, the role of the *dalang* and the makeup of the performance space.

Historically, shadow puppetry has been performed throughout Asia, from China in the East to Turkey in the West (Hobart 13). Though there is no definitive historical record, many scholars believe that shadow puppetry spread out of India by telling Hindu tales. Throughout most of the continent, the indigenous traditions of shadow puppetry fail to be practiced today, with China as a notable exception; however, in Java, the form matured into the sophisticated form of *wayang kulit* (22). The earliest inscription that references “*wayang kulit*” comes from 860 CE in Java, and by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the form was flourishing throughout the island (Van Ness 8-9).

*Wayang kulit*’s success is based on the actions of a *dalang*, who is the puppeteer and director of a performance; he gives voice and life to his characters, relating them to his audience. *Dalang* are responsible for almost every aspect of a performance: animating and the voicing puppets, reciting the narration, setting the pace of the story and conducting the *gamelan* orchestra. Depending on the character, *dalang* switch fluidly among Old Javanese, *Kawi* (Old Balinese) and contemporary Balinese; only the last of these languages is comprehensible to an average audience member. Though much of the story is recited from memory, the rest is entirely ad-libbed with as much wit and humor as possible.

Long before a performance, *dalang* craft their own stories, drawing most of their inspiration from the Javanese-Hindu classic epic the *Mahabharata* (Hobart 38).



This epic is made up of a huge number of shorter myths that are more appropriate in length for a *wayang* performance and called *lakon* (37). From the bare framework provided by *lakon*, a *dalang* “develops the entire plot himself and improvises extensively,” forming tales that “abound in romantic episodes, royal audience scenes, fearful battles, and philosophic and mystical observations” (Hobart 146, Brandon 13).

In writing these stories, *dalang* are pressured by their audiences to follow certain rules. First, a single thread called a *giing satua* must run through the entire performance: a conflict is introduced, developed, and then resolved by the end of the night (Hobart 147). Second, there must be several complicated sub-plots that explain the *giing satua* to the audience. These scenes, called *penyelah*, or beautifiers, usually feature the servant characters (discussed later), and function as a parallel or foil for the *giing satua* to reinforce themes, while adding in relevant cultural references (147). The *dalang* usually adlibs these scenes, gauging the audience’s reaction to ensure maximum enjoyment and understanding of the *giing satua*. Third, each individual scene must follow a fairly standardized form: it opens with a description of the location, followed by dialogue which results in action (147).

Within these structural constraints, the *dalang*’s *wayang* act out the part of each character. The term “*wayang*” derives from “*yang*,” which means “moving unsteadily or floating in the air” like “ghosts” or spirits (67). *Wayang* are leather puppets of the human figure in profile, ranging from 2’ tall ogres to 13” or so tall minor characters. The puppets are decorated with intricately carved openwork and manipulated with rods.<sup>1</sup> Depending on the character, he<sup>2</sup> will have one or two mobile

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<sup>1</sup> *Wayang* of supporting animals and props also exist but are not pertinent to the discussion.

arms; Figures 1 and 2 depict *wayang* with two articulated arms while Figure 3 has only one. Though the puppets are intricately painted, they exist only as shadows during a performance, moving with an eerie grace reminiscent of the supernatural, rendering the puppets themselves deserved of their name.

Each *wayang*'s design conveys to the audience two crucial pieces of information: the character's sense of refinement and social class. First, the characters are usually designed to be

either *alus* ("refined") or *kasar* ("coarse") (Brandon 41). Arjuna, perhaps the most refined *wayang* prince, has almost exclusively *alus* qualities: "his profile is straight and strong, his features delicate and the lines of his apparel flow rhythmically" (Hobart 120; see Figure 1). Further, his legs are set close together and his almond-shaped eyes gaze humbly toward the ground (120). In contrast, Dursasana, is a more *kasar* prince: he has a hairy, orange body and a wide stance, and his round eyes look haughtily forward while his pulled-back lips expose his gums (121; see Figure 2).



FIGURE 1: Balinese *wayang* of Arjuna (Australia Museum)

<sup>2</sup> Though puppets depict both male and female characters, the males tend to be the more important; for the sake of convenience, puppets generally will be referred to as male.

The characters are also designed according to their social caste: Gods;



FIGURE 2: Balinese *wayang* of Dursasana (Tropenmuseum)

*Brahmana*, the ruling class; *Satriya*, the aristocratic and warrior class; *Sudra*, the lower castes whose members hold various jobs; *Pandasar*, the male servants; and finally, the lowest, Ogres (113).

Generally, as the classes descend, the puppets' features

become more *kasar*, but within each caste, the design of any given puppet is fairly stereotyped. For example, all *Satriya* are “well clad, handsome and youthful by comparison with other [lower] castes” which exhibit more *kasar* features (115). As the *Satriyas* and *Sudras* take “active roles” in the performance – fighting, falling in love, making peace and so on – they need to be able to express themselves easily. For this reason, they are awarded two mobile arms, whereas the less refined ogres usually only receive one articulated arm (115). Despite these generalized similarities, each *wayang* represents a



FIGURE 3: Balinese *wayang* of Prajangga (Hobart Plate 12)

specific character from the canon, and so *dalang* can amass collections of hundreds of puppets.

A special note should be made about the caste of *pandasar*, or the “basic ones” (120). This term refers not only to the *pandasar*’s place at the bottom of the social ladder, but also to their role as the basis of Balinese society, without whom the kingdom could not function or perhaps even exist (120). In Bali, there are four *pandasar* characters who enliven the plays: father Tualèn and his son, Merdah, as well as the brothers

Dèlem and Sangut (56). Even though Tualèn, the “main servant,” acts in a “foolish and stupid manner,” he is viewed as the son of the supreme god, Tunggal



FIGURE 4: Daytime Balinese wayang kulit (Hobart Plate 23)

(56). In this unique position, Tualèn can serve as a perfect intermediary between gods and humans, and between the performance’s religious overtones and its secular audience (Foley 85). Interestingly, it is only the *pandasar* who speak contemporary Balinese, which they employ to translate and to comment on the other characters’ incomprehensible dialogue.

*Wayang kulit* is usually performed near a temple in a “raised booth” that accommodates the *dalang* and his musical accompaniment of four metallophones

called *gender wayang* (Hobart 127). As seen in Figure 3, the audience watches the performances from the ground in front of the booth (Geertz 267). However, note that this photograph depicts a more sacred, yet less popular, daytime performance, which lacks a screen, called a *kelir* (Hobart 24). Night performances require a coconut-oil lamp to cast shadows onto their white cotton *kelir* (Diamond 3, Figure 4).

The use of a live flame is important to Balinese *dalang*. Puppeteers elsewhere in South East Asia use almost exclusively electric light sources; according to the Balinese, the flickering light of the coconut-oil lamp “infuses the shadow figures with life” while the “steady brightness of the electric light [seems] ‘dead’” (262). Only when the *dalang* reaches his hands out in front, touching his puppets directly onto the *kelir*, do their intricate details become visible to the audience; otherwise, the outline is fuzzy, flickering along with the lamp behind it.

After the wave of Hindu influence that brought *wayang kulit* to Java in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a second wave of Middle Eastern influence entered Java containing the ideas of Islam. The members of the Javanese community who refused to accept Islam as their new religion moved to the isolated island of Bali, bringing *wayang kulit* with them (Hobart 23). This heralded the start of a uniquely Balinese tradition of *wayang kulit* independent of the Javanese form (Brandon 6). Unlike the Javanese court-sponsored tradition – which eventually became so sophisticated that a typical native could not understand the religious nuances and references without studying beforehand – Balinese *wayang kulit* developed in response to both the court and the local villagers’ patronage (Geertz 269-278). By having two separate sponsors, Balinese *wayang kulit* developed a balance between refinement and rusticity:

maintaining popular interest in *wayang kulit* while also upholding the traditional form imported from Java in the 16<sup>th</sup> with relatively few changes (Hobart 23). In fact, some scholars believe that Balinese *wayang kulit* may be the closest representation of the “pre-Islamic style of Javanese *wayang kulit*” in existence today (Osnes 24).

### **WAYANG KULIT AS A CHANGING RITUAL**

Wesleyan University’s Professor Sumarsam calls a *wayang* performance a “ritual celebration” (Sumarsam). *Wayang kulit* is the perfect mix of religious ritual and secularity: it is performed at religious events to provide entertainment; the story amuses but holds religious undertones. Both the role of the *dalang* and the way these puppeteers create stories reinforces the idea that *wayang kulit* is simultaneously a religious and secular event.

The idea of what is and what constitutes “ritual” has been studied at length. For the purposes of this paper, the term



FIGURE 5: *Wayang kulit* performance (Bali & Beyond)

“ritual” will refer to “a body of technologies, practices, acts... that people employ to distinguish and set apart a space, special and magical, [from] ordinary everyday life” (Dulic 39). As such, “ritual” is not limited to sacred ceremonies, as it can also apply to everyday events such as eating a meal or greeting friends (39). In the case of

*wayang kulit*, everyone involved enters a demarcated performance space and sets aside daily life and troubles to concentrate on the performance. In this context, ritual can be further defined as a “process that embodies ideas through encoded or ‘scripted’ performance” (41). More simply stated, ritual is a set of prescribed actions that follow a particular order, not necessarily including a literal or written script. As discussed earlier, *wayang kulit* performances incorporate specific elements, ranging from the setup of the performance space to the trajectory of the plot. Without these consistent factors, *wayang kulit* would lose its efficacy as ritual – each performance would be isolated instead of functioning as part of a longstanding tradition. This idea of maintaining *wayang kulit*’s “script” is particularly strong in Bali.

In addition to being a “ritual,” *wayang kulit* is performed at religious celebrations throughout Bali. According to the Hindu Balinese *wuku* calendar, each temple celebrates its anniversary every 210 days by hosting some sort of performance. As there are over 20,000 temples on Bali, performances occur frequently (Hobart 21). In addition, shadow puppetry is performed at marriages, upper-class births, “thanksgiving” ceremonies (during which an individual gives thanks to the gods for a boon), and to protect children born during inauspicious periods (25).

While the last chapter explained the elements of a *wayang kulit* stage, to understand why *wayang kulit* is considered a religious “ritual,” it is essential to see the way these physical components combine to form a unified cosmology. All the action of appears on the *kelir*, which symbolizes the universe and becomes visible with the help of a coconut-oil lamp, which represents the sun (Korsovitis 60). A

banana log (or stem), signifying the ground, lines the bottom of the *kelir*, while the space above represents the sky (Hobart 128). For part of each scene, all of the puppets' main rods are inserted into the banana log to support and to hold them in place while the *dalang* manipulates other characters. The act of inserting a puppet's rod into the banana log symbolizes the sustained relationship between humans and the Earth, "to which man is eternally connected" (Korsovitis 60). The *gender wayang* music, which underscores the entire performance, represents the "harmony and interrelationship of all things in the universe" (Hobart 129). While the audience sits on the ground, maintaining their connection to the Earth, the *dalang* and his *gamelan* sit on a raised platform. Though the platform is physically connected to the ground, the *dalang* himself is not. This reflects his liminal position, hovering between an ordinary citizen and a spokesman for the gods (60). In short, every part of *wayang kulit* – down to the number of holes in the top of the *kelir* – shares an essential part in this cosmology (129). *Wayang kulit* performances occupy a space, "special and magical" but also religious in nature, which is set apart from daily life, leading to its consideration as a ritual due to its religious aspects.

The *dalang*'s physical location between the ground and the sky parallels the secular and religious roles he plays within the community. When not performing, the *dalang* is simply another member of society, working a job or cultivating a rice field. However, to be qualified to perform, a *dalang* must undergo the "great consecration ritual" and become a sanctified religious figure (33). During a performance, the *dalang* "makes clear the sacred classical literature." The very term "*dalang*" derives from the word *galang*, meaning "bright or clear" (27).



The Enlightened Dalang incorporates the earth, ogres and the Gods.

His other name is ‘Leader’ for he is Siwa, Sada-Siwa, Parmama-Siwa (manifestations of the supreme god) and the Unfathomable God.

For ‘Tintya’ (‘he who cannot be imagined’ in Sanskrit) is the unification of all worlds; empowered he chooses his position.

Thus is the origin of Him who is called *dalang*; he is empowered to command speech. (34)

As this passage explains, though a poetic description, *dalang* use their words to bridge the worlds of gods and humans. Inspired by the divine, the *dalang* himself chooses how to relay messages to the laity. The puppeteers are uniquely suited to interpret *lakon* in a way that is both religiously accurate and also understandable and relevant to their secular audiences.

In addition to the *dalang*, the stories told at the performances also straddle the religious and secular spheres to convey a religious message through the guise of a contemporary, relevant tale. To conform to the ritual side of *wayang kulit*, the stories must include the required elements discussed above. However, the *dalang* must also be able to relate to his audience, expressing his *giing satua* in a way that is both approachable and entertaining. To this end, *dalang* are given the freedom to create new tales based on “odds and ends” of different *lakon*, traditional melodies and songs and standard dialogues (146). Balinese *dalang* cobble together the framework of *Mahabharata*-derived *lakon* with “extensive” improvisation to create unique plots which imbue traditional tales with relevant elements of contemporary life (146). If *dalang* were restricted to a standard canon of texts, over time, the stories would

become “detached from the belief system that gave them coherent significance” in the first place; modern audiences might find these stories outdated (Dulic 42). To keep *wayang kulit* fresh, *dalang* are allowed by their communities to find ways to update classic *lakon*.

Despite this necessary balance of religious and secular, some *dalang* have attempted to break away from the religious sphere. For example, during the Indonesian National Revolution in the 1940s, *dalang* created new forms of *wayang*; some of these plays depicted Indonesia’s struggle against its Dutch colonizers while others modernized their content in different ways (Brandon 9). Unsurprisingly, these forms did not survive past the Revolution and are performed rarely, “if at all” today (Hobart 37). While this might be due to the fact these issues are no longer relevant, the fact that these types of plays are no longer produced might be caused by the audience’s perception of them as containing unsuitable subject matter for *wayang kulit*.

Further, the Balinese consider shows which alter the ritualized form as separate from traditional *wayang kulit*, and instead consider these works as part of the *kreasi baru*, or “new creations” (Diamond 269, 274). For example, Larry Reed’s Americanized *wayang kulit* is considered *kreasi baru* and has been awarded the name “*wayang listrik*” (electric shadows) based on his extensive use of modern, electric light sources. In Bali, *wayang listrik* is seen not as a “ritual celebration,” but rather as a secular theater performance inspired by *wayang kulit*. In general, the ritual nature of *wayang kulit* has prevented *dalang* from making changes to its form, though there is opportunity for *dalang* to relate to their audiences through the stories that they tell.

By fostering a unique balance between tradition and innovation, *wayang kulit* has retained a place in Balinese folk culture. *Dalang* come from all classes, and they are responsible for attuning their performances to particular audiences, be they young, old, tired or rowdy. Only by keeping track of what is relevant both in the news and to a particular community can a *dalang* give a compelling performance. By doing so, the community works together with the *dalang* to keep the ritual of *wayang kulit* alive and vibrant in Bali.

### SHADOWLIGHT PRODUCTIONS

Throughout modern history, Asian shadow puppetry has reached outside of the continent and influenced Western theatrical and cinematic directors. 18<sup>th</sup> century France was enthralled with the Ombres Chinoises and this fascination with theatrical shadow puppetry culminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chat Noir cabaret. The cinematic zenith was the German film *The Story of Prince Achmed* (*Die Geschichte vom Prinzen Achmed*) from the 1920s (257). Soon thereafter, however, shadow performances fell out of favor until the 1970s in America.

At that time, jet travel became easy and affordable, allowing young American artists like San Francisco's Larry Reed to study traditional Balinese arts *in situ*. In 1972, after graduating with a degree in film from the San Francisco Art Institute, Reed visited Bali. As soon as he arrived, his camera was stolen and his life changed when he stumbled across a *wayang kulit* performance (Reed 1). Captivated by the beauty and possibilities of the form, Reed said, "Even though I couldn't understand the language I could tell what was going on and [the performance] excited me because it was so worked out, yet so wild...It was like watching primordial cartoons"

(Diamond 260). For the rest of his career, Reed changed his focus from producing films to creating both *wayang kulit* and cinematically inspired *wayang listrik*, a term meaning “electric shadows the Balinese gave to Reed for innovative work” (275).

Upon his return to the United States, Reed studied under acclaimed *dalang* I Nyoman Sumandhi at the Center for World Music in Berkeley, CA; in 1974, Reed returned to Bali to continue his studies with Sumandhi’s father, Pak Rajeg (260). With the help of his teachers, Reed learned the role of the *dalang* in *wayang kulit* – how they move the puppets, voice the characters, craft the stories, etc. Despite his formal training, Reed never felt either truly integrated into the Balinese culture or that he could contribute to it; instead, he wanted to build a cultural bridge between America and Bali by introducing *wayang kulit* to his compatriots (261).

Early in his career, Reed was content performing traditional *wayang kulit* for American audiences, drawing on American cultural events and politics to keep his shows current and relevant. In 1990, Reed made a transition – he conceptualized *wayang listrik* (Reed 2). Inspired by his roots in both film and *wayang kulit* (as well as other sources) Reed created a form of theater which translates foreign cultures in a fashion which is both comprehensible and informative for American audiences through its unified design aesthetic, and sensitive to the original material.

By combining elements that he learned both in film school and from *dalang*, Reed created *wayang listrik* with his company, ShadowLight Productions. Each successive production over the course of his career helped Reed to evolve his aesthetic style as he builds on his discoveries and successes. When first formulating

*wayang listrik*, Reed diverged greatly from his Balinese training. Soon thereafter, he began to incorporate additional traditional elements into his performances in the hopes of creating more aesthetically unified productions. After learning how to successfully integrate Balinese concepts into his design aesthetic, Reed applied the same techniques to other cultures, producing shows that draw their stories and aesthetics from alternative cultures like indigenous Californian. Over his career Reed developed a practical performance space conducive for his shows, his use of cinematic techniques with a focus on changes in scale, his use of a plot-driven storyline, an effective way to portray his characters to the audience and a method for including the humorous *pandasar* characters. Some of the major turning points in Reed's career for the development of these elements include his productions of *DreamShadows*, *In Xanadu*, the Balinese trilogy of *Sidha Karya*, *Mayadenawa* and *Ambrosia of Immortality*, and *Coyote's Journey*.

Before beginning the discussion of these pieces, it is important to note that I have been unable to view any of these pieces live, or even in their entirety as a recorded movie except for *Coyote's Journey*. Because of this, my analysis of Reed's work is based on the short clips available on video as well as a number of secondary sources. Moreover, performing at festivals and other similar events, few of Reed's shows have been professionally reviewed, at least in a medium accessible to me. Catherine Diamond's article, however, looks at the trajectory of Reed's career through a number of his performances and presents at least one audience member's opinion of Reed's performances in their entirety. Through her analysis, it seems that Diamond strongly prefers Reed's work when it exhibits a unified design aesthetic

opposed to a collage from a variety of cultures. To this end, what I may call a “successful” production or technique is one that upholds Diamond’s preference for aesthetic unity, while the “unsuccessful” ones fail to do so. This does not mean, however, that the rest of the audience’s reaction to these elements necessarily accords with Diamond’s perception, simply that this is the only analysis that I have to work with. In addition, Reed himself has posted on YouTube “Making of” videos for many of the performances which I discuss that have helped me to uncover Reed’s own intentions for his pieces. Because of this, though my analysis of the successes and downfalls of Reed’s performances are largely based a few, limited sources, I hope they can approximate the opinions of the rest of the audience and hold true in the general sense.

### ***DREAMSHADOWS***

Reed’s first major *wayang listrik* production, *DreamShadows*, premiered in 1990. Allowing dancers to move “in a forest of their own hands,” Reed tells the story of a fatal attraction between a man and a woman (Reed 2). Veering away from traditional *wayang kulit*, this piece established the hallmarks of *wayang listrik*: incorporating cinematic techniques such as multiple planes of action as well as cinematic cuts through the implementation of a unique physical space conducive to these performance conditions.

Though the basic elements of the piece remained true to *wayang kulit* – the story was told through shadows projected on a screen and underscored by music – *DreamShadows* radically veered away from the Balinese tradition in several other ways. First, Reed shortened his performance from one that lasts eight hours through

the night to a one of only about 25 minutes, a length much more typical of American dance piece (*DreamShadows*). Second, he increased the size of the screen past a traditional *kelir* to several meters tall and wide. Third, Reed abandoned *wayang kulit*'s use of puppets as the only characters by combining non-figural puppets with the shadows of live performers, called shadow casters – this is a technique



FIGURE 6: *DreamShadows* (Intro to Shadow Theater)

that Reed used for the rest of his career (*DreamShadows*). *DreamShadows*' puppets consisted of meter-large positive and negative cutouts of Balinese dancers' hands in various poses, as seen in the background of Figure 6 (Diamond 261). Fourth, Reed explored a non-traditional plot line; abandoning an epic story with battle scenes and complex subplots, *DreamShadows* instead tells a much smaller-scale story of a man and a woman (261).

Finally, to facilitate these changes, Reed employed several halogen lamps which are both larger and brighter than the traditional, singular coconut-oil lamp. Another benefit of this type of light is that regardless of the distance between a puppet, the screen and the light source, the shadows produced will be crisp. As seen in Figure 7, the shadow casters are several feet away from the screen, but they still

project crisp shadows onto it. Moreover, if an object is closer to the light source (and thus farther from the screen), its shadow will appear larger, and vice versa. In Figure 7, the shadows are slightly larger than the performers because of the distance between them and the screen. Because halogen lamps allow both the puppets' and shadow caster's shadows to remain crisp regardless of their distance from the screen, they are able to change size within a scene simply by moving. In contrast, for a coconut-oil lamp to produce crisp shadows, the puppet must be placed directly on the screen, leaving no room to play with the scale of the puppet while its shadow remains in focus.

The major aesthetic deviance from traditional *wayang kulit* in *DreamShadows* comes from its incorporation of cinematic techniques. Though shadow puppetry and film may seem very different, they share a common principle: both media reduce the three-dimensional world into two, asking the audience to consider what is "reality" and whether it can be condensed down a dimension, from the world that surrounds us to a two-dimensional one represented on a screen (Dulic 193). Perhaps this similarity is what drew Reed to the study of *wayang kulit* in the first place. In any event, as he began developing *wayang listrik*, Reed consciously decided to incorporate the cinematic techniques of multiple planes of and the use of cinematic cuts.

Explaining his intentions, Reed stated,

I was interested in three planes of action: a scenic element close to the lamp; a puppetry element in front of the scenery; and a human element in front of that. I also wanted to incorporate ideas from the world of film: to be



able to make cinematic cuts from one scene to another, or within a scene, from one perspective to another (Reed 2).

Here, Reed brings to light some of the radical differences between his aesthetic and that of traditional *wayang kulit*. First, new to Reed's work is the inclusion of both scenic backgrounds, seen in Figure 6 as the cutouts of hands, and a human element, the shadow casters. Second, within this new framework and aided by his larger screen and multiple halogen light sources, Reed is able to explore scale by providing, for example, both close-up and medium sized hands in the same visual image (3). Third, instead of asking the audience to watch all of the characters exit the stage as in *wayang kulit*, Reed can make smoother transitions through his use of cinematic cuts. Simply by introducing a new light source, Reed can change the projected image rapidly; this can help heighten drama and also shorten a performance (*DreamShadows*). By introducing cinematic elements and a uniquely designed performance space, Reed expanded the viewing experience to focus on the aesthetics and film techniques.

Drawing on his training both in America and in Bali, Reed created "a kind of theater that combines the power of cinema with the immediacy of live theater" (Reed 3). Though the design of this show was strong, Diamond believes Reed failed to focus on his plotline, leaving it as an discordant afterthought. (Diamond 261). In fact, after remounting the show for a second time, Reed made sure to include a stronger plot for his piece (261). Instead of focusing on the plot, as *dalang* do necessarily, Reed let the storyline become secondary to his exploration of new aesthetic techniques and creation of an effective performance space for *DreamShadows*.

### *IN XANADU*

After *DreamShadows*, Reed founded ShadowLight Productions, the company through which he continued to develop *wayang listrik*. Their first production, *In Xanadu*, returned many traditional elements eschewed in *DreamShadows*, without losing Reed's new signature cinematic effects. He reintroduced an epic storyline, figural puppets for the portrayal of



FIGURE 7: Two shadow casters backstage at *In Xanadu* (*In Xanadu*)

his characters and a *pandasar*-type figure, creating a performance more closely linked to the traditional *wayang kulit* ritual. At the same time, Reed exploited the cinematic techniques discovered producing *DreamShadows* – the use of shadow casters and the exploration of different planes of action. Through this integration of traditional elements and successful cinematic techniques, *In Xanadu* helped Reed to understand more about the successes and hardships of translating *wayang kulit* into a unified aesthetic comprehensible to Diamond.

First, Reed reevaluated the importance of focusing on and developing a storyline. Instead of leaving the plot as an afterthought to the aesthetics, Reed deferred to the Balinese expertise, choosing traditional epic for his plot. Perhaps because he wanted to ensure that his production did not resemble *wayang kulit* too closely or maybe because he wanted to a reason to explore the tradition of Chinese

shadow puppetry, he chose the Chinese epic of the general Kublai Khan, who searches through hell for his wife in order to revitalize her, relinquishing this desire only after seeing her decomposing face (262). With a strong plotline, Reed believed his production could be unified appeal beyond simply the visuals. By borrowing this traditional element, Reed improved the cohesion and focus of his production.

Second, to compliment his plot-driven storyline, Reed also altered the way the action was revealed to the audience. While *DreamShadows* focused on the interaction of shadow casters with backgrounds, *In Xanadu* tells its story through casting characters as a mixture of both figural puppets and shadow casters. Though the puppet design is are based in the Chinese tradition rather than the Balinese in order to correspond to the text, Reed reincorporated the single most basic elements of *wayang kulit* which was excluded in *DreamShadows*: the figural puppet (Reed 4). Reed is able display his characters at drastically different distances and scales by adding in a puppet – a physically smaller representation of each character than a human being. Moreover, Reed can switch between using puppets and shadow casters to portray the onstage action by creating masks that transform a shadow caster's head to look like a puppet, an innovation lauded by many puppet artists (See Figure 7, Weinberg written). In many instances, distance shots of the action would feature physically smaller puppets while close-ups would instead use shadow casters with masks who could portray more detailed action (*In Xanadu*). This allows Reed to explore different scales while imbuing his shadows with his life in a way only real humans can, an element that was so compelling in *DreamShadows*.

The last *wayang kulit* element Reed incorporated into *In Xanadu* is the *pandasar*. In traditional *wayang kulit*, the *pandasar* expand upon the story at hand, making the audience laugh at their comical antics as clown-servants while translating and explaining the relevance of the performance to their audience. As there are some parallels between Tualèn and Marco Polo, Polo takes over this role in *In Xanadu*: both are revered outsiders who occupy a liminal space in the social hierarchy, simultaneously at the top and the bottom (Diamond 264). Though Polo's scenes are not included in the DVD, Diamond explains that he mixes slapstick humor with a discussion of the "far-reaching nature of [Kublai Khan's] reign" (264). By using *pandasar*, Reed hoped to incorporate one of the audience's favorite parts of *wayang kulit*.

For the physical staging of *In Xanadu*, Reed made only two major practical changes from *DreamShadows*: the use of backdrops and the type of light source. In *wayang kulit* there are no backgrounds at all, while in *DreamShadows*, cutouts of hands occupy the background plane of action, creating an undefined sense of place and time. However, *In Xanadu* takes place in numerous locations which need to be specified for the audience. The quick, cinematic cuts between scenes would be rendered useless if the location of each scene needed to be explained by a character instead of through easily interpreted visuals. By using temple or cloud backdrops, Reed quickly conveys to his audience the location and scale of his figures (*In Xanadu*). Second, to further his exploration of scale, Reed changed his light source from halogen lamps which to Xenon-arc lamps (Diamond 262). While both lights are capable of casting crisp shadows, Xenon-arc lamps are capable of lighting Reed's

larger screen more effectively than halogens (262). This allowed Reed's performers to explore scale with greater finesse and flexibility.

Overall, *In Xanadu* created “lush visual images,” though some of the individual elements used could have been improved, at least according to Diamond (265). One major issue was the dynamic between the shadow casters and their puppets. By having puppet and performer play the same characters, Diamond believes Reed limited his shadow casters' range of motion to parallel the puppets movements; unfortunately, the result of this unified physical score was that the “bodies were so dormant that the puppets seemed more animated” (265). The other issue with this production, which Reed would struggle with for yet some time, was the use of the *pandasar* (265). Puns such as “on the Khan-trary, the people are Khanstantly in Khan-versation about the Khan” were seen as “humorously excessive” (264). Diamond saw Polo's section as a “gratuitous history lecture rather than possessing any dramatic raison d'être” (Diamond 264). Though some many have seen these scenes simply as “not so funny” and it, in fact, won the UNIMA-USA citation for excellence, puppetry's highest award, Diamond believes that they broke the dramatic unity of the performance by veering away from the character- and plot-driven storyline for a section of unimpressive comic relief (Weinberg conversation). Despite Diamond's qualms with the production, it won the highest award in puppetry, UNIMA-USA's citation for excellence (*In Xanadu* website)

#### ***SIDHA KARYA***

After producing *In Xanadu*, which incorporated a number of Balinese elements, Reed decided to focus even more pointedly back on his educational roots

by creating a trilogy of Balinese-inspired productions: *Sidha Karya*, *Mayadenawa* and *Ambrosia of Immortality* (259). Through these productions, Reed incorporated knowledge drawn from each production into the following one in the hopes of making each more successful than the last. ShadowLight's 1994 production of *Sidha Karya* built on the lessons Reed learned creating *In Xanadu*, attempting to improve through additional Balinese influence.

*Sidha Karya* tells the story of “an arrogant king brought down by a beggar” (266). In this piece, Reed attempted to fuse *wayang topeng*, traditional Balinese solo



FIGURE 8: A scene from *Sidha Karya* showing live dancers and a setting made from shadow puppets (*Sidha Karya*)

masked dance performance, into *Sidha Karya* by adding a fourth plane of action: masked dancers in front of the screen (266). By allowing the audience to see the performers

in front of the screen and not simply as shadow casters, Reed expanded the actors' range of motion way past the ones that puppets are capable of – the problem seen in *In Xanadu*. Moreover, Reed redesigned the *pandasar* scene to use live actors instead of puppets, hoping that this would help bridge the gap between the *pandasar*'s and Americans' humor which was lacking in his prior show. With the incorporation of

these two Balinese elements, Reed hoped to produce a more lively performance with an engaging story and visuals.

Unfortunately, Diamond believes the inclusion of *wayang topeng* did not help to solve these issues. In fact, it seems that Reed vastly overcompensated for what Diamond saw as the puppet-emulating bodies of the shadow casters by substituting live dancers in front of the shadow screen (*Sidha Karya*). This extra plane of action created a “discrepancy between the forestage actors and the shadow puppets” which was so great they “did not occupy the same performing universe and created a too heterogeneous environment” (268). In doing this, Reed both literally and figuratively upstaged his puppets with live performers, leaving at least Diamond questioning the necessity of the shadows at all (269).

Like *wayang kulit*, *wayang topeng* has its own unique set of *pandasar*-type “grotesque, eccentric and deformed clowns” which Reed included in *Sidha Karya* (268). However, their section of the performance, too, failed to impress Diamond. She proposes that it was “due to the lack of the ritual element that supports both *topeng* and *wayang kulit* in Bali” (268). Alternatively, as with *In Xanadu*, Reed may have just done a poor job of writing jokes and translating Balinese humor for his American audience. For whatever reason, Reed’s use of live *pandasar*-type characters did not translate well.

In *Sidha Karya*, Reed also tried to sort out some of the problems with the shadow casters and *pandasar* characters faced earlier through the inclusion of *wayang topeng* dance form. Trying at once to work *wayang kulit* and *wayang topeng* into a

unified production, Reed neither solved his problems nor successfully integrated the two forms in Diamond's opinion.

### ***MAYADENAWA***

The 1996 ShadowLight production of *Mayadenawa* solved the problem of integrating shadow casters in the performance seen both in *In Xanadu* and *Sidha Karya*. Because it was created for the Walter Spies festival in Bali, the need to addressing the question of translating the *pandasar* scenes for an American audience becomes moot (*Mayadenawa*). By eliminating the influence of *wayang topeng* from this piece, Reed focused on making sure his shadow casters were a dynamic part of his performance who integrated well with his shadow puppets.

If we agree with Diamond's analysis that using puppets in conjunction with shadow casters results in a necessity of having the shadow casters imitate the puppets' movements, Reed adeptly avoided the comparison between them in two ways. First, Reed chose to tell his story with significantly more shadow casters than puppets (Diamond 270). Because of this, the audience perceives the realistic, lifelike movements of the shadow casters as the norm. In essence, the actions of the puppets should align with the movement of the humans, instead of the other way around – what Diamond perceived as a shortcoming in previous productions.



FIGURE 9: A shadow caster without a mask and two puppets from *Mayadenawa* (*Mayadenawa*)



Though this transformed Reed's *wayang listrik* from a primarily "shadow puppet drama" into more of a "shadow drama," Reed was better able to use the expressive nature of his shadow casters' physical bodies and dance poses, as seen in Figure 9. More specifically, Reed capitalized on the expressive nature of the performers' hands, explored extensively in *DreamShadows* (270).

Second, Reed nearly eliminated the use of his specially designed mask from *Mayadenawa* which transformed a shadow caster's head into the profile of a puppet. It was employed only in two cases: for the eponymous Mayadenawa and the god Indra. No longer attempting to convince the audience that they were a human-sized versions of a puppet, Diamond saw the shadow casters as free to move like the humans they are. Reed eliminated the competition between puppets and the shadow casters by reducing the number of puppets and by not having the humans strive to perform like puppets; in this way, Reed successfully and dynamically integrated shadow casters into a unified aesthetic.

#### ***ELECTRIC SHADOWS OF BALI: AMBROSIA OF IMMORTALITY***

Premiering in 1998, *Electric Shadows of Bali: Ambrosia of Immortality* was the final piece in ShadowLight's Balinese trilogy. Telling the story of the Balinese creation myth, Reed held back from introducing new aesthetic production techniques; instead, he showed "greater [confidence and] complexity" in the ones established in his previous pieces according to Diamond (271). Working closely with acclaimed traditional Balinese *dalang* I Wayan Wija, Reed helped to pick a traditional story line and puppets for their performance (*Ambrosia of Immortality*). Moreover, true to their heritages, many of the puppets spoke in their various traditional languages, which

were indecipherable to typical members of both American and Balinese audiences. This not only created a sense of Balinese authenticity for the performance, but it also inspired Reed with the answer of how to incorporate the *pandasar* into his performance effectively.

As mentioned earlier, in Bali, the *pandasar* play two roles during a performance: they feature in comic scenes of slapstick humor, as Reed tried to replicate in *In Xanadu* and *Sidha Karya*, and they also follow around their masters during the rest of the performance, translating from *Kawi* and Old Javanese into modern Balinese with a definite sense of humor. Drawn from a modernized traditional tale, the four *pandasar* characters are able to fulfill their own roles in this piece. Because *Mayadenawa* incorporated traditional languages, the *pandasar*'s role as English translator was essential to the audience's understanding of the performance, as it is in Bali (Diamond 271). However, the *pandasar* did not lose their clownish nature, and they made wisecracks at the expense of their superiors and engaged in general buffoonery throughout the piece (*Ambrosia of Immortality*). Over the course of the show,

Delem and Sangut ineptly try to communicate with the other two [pandasar] in various languages, but they are run over by the impatient pair, leaving poor Delem one-dimensional. Sangut has to 'blow him up' in order to render him two-dimensional again (Diamond 272).

The comedic *pandasar* engage in physical comedy, delighting the audience while also attempting to convey their superior's important religious message to the audience

without seeming didactic. By integrating the *pandasar* into the performance, Reed fixed what Diamond's perceived as the problem with these scenes in *In Xanadu*: by becoming essential to the audience's understanding of the plotline, they also found a place within the dramatic unity of the performance.

Overcoming the final hurdle he struggled with in *In Xanadu*, Reed concluded the Balinese trilogy with a production Diamond appreciated. It was not only true to its Balinese roots, featuring many traditional elements and even a Balinese *dalang*, but it was also understood and appreciated in America by at least one audience member as a modernization of the traditional form into *wayang listrik*. By this point, Reed had become comfortable in his cinematic aesthetic, the relationship between shadow casters and puppets, and, finally, a way to include the traditional feature of the *pandasar* as a comedic translators.

#### **COYOTE'S JOURNEY AND AFTERWARD**

After concluding the Balinese trilogy, Reed realized that he had "always done projects based in far away places" (Reed 6). For his next production, Reed decided to focus instead on the possibilities offered by indigenous Californian culture. After working with California's Klamath River tribes for seven years, Reed



FIGURE 10: Coyote with a reflected pattern from *Coyote's Journey* (*Coyote's Journey*)

created *Coyote's Journey*, first produced in 2000 (6). Another creation epic like *Ambrosia of Immortality*, this production capitalized on the artwork and aesthetics of the Klamath tribesmen, while also drawing on the technical aspects Reed learned producing his Balinese trilogy.

As there is no local shadow puppetry tradition in California, Reed was free to construct an aesthetic style fitting for his production. Abandoning the intricately carved, stylized puppets and the backdrops of exquisite Balinese buildings and temples which capture the aesthetic of Balinese culture and *wayang kulit*, Reed drew from the Klamath people's love of simplicity and nature (*Coyote's Journey*). Though it is reproduced in black-and-white, Figure 10's landscape is brightly colored to contrast Reed's silhouetted shadow puppets and ground lines. Moreover, he included colored mirrors to reflect light onto the shadows of his puppets, adding to the complexity of the scene; for example, the design on Coyote's chest is produced this way with an orange mirror. After studying with the Klamath people, Reed adeptly converted the visual elements, which were inspired by Balinese aesthetics in his past productions to ones based on Klamath artwork.

However, Reed did not make these changes without asking for the help of Klamath natives. Two members, in specific, proved to be such great resources for Reed that they actually joined the production team: Charlie "Red Hawk" Thom and Clarence Hostler (Gonzalez). Thom is a respected elder from the Karuk tribe, dedicated to preserving the ancient culture and rituals of his people. Not only did he serve as Reed's link to understanding and to translating the traditional stories, but he also narrated the performances, blending *Karuk* and English with his traditional

storytelling techniques (Gonzalez). Hostler is also of Native American descent and has a background in telling traditional stories at California Indian storytelling festivals (Gonzalez). Moreover, Hostler was Reed's production manager, and he also sang and drummed during the performance. In addition to these two collaborators, Reed tapped many other California natives for their inspiration and help, including Karuk singer, artist and poet Brian Tripp, and Nomtipom Wintu regalia-maker and storyteller Vince La Pena (Gonzalez).

Although the visual aesthetic of this performance is different from Reed's earlier ones, the techniques used to produce the images are strikingly similar to those found in *Ambrosia of Immortality*. First, Reed used a mixture of shadow casters and puppets to portray his characters: shadow casters perform the human characters while puppets portray the animals. The one exception is the eponymous Coyote. As the main character, Reed found it more compelling to give him the flexibility of movement and the visual likeness of a human in a coyote costume than a puppet (*Coyote's Journey*). Not only did this allow Reed to reinstate the masks that many puppeteers found so compelling in *In Xanadu*, he was able to do so in a way that did not invoke Diamond's issue with the shadow casters needing to behave like puppets through creating a strict differential of media (Weinberg written).

Second, by having Thom narrate the piece in a blend of both *Karuk* and English, Reed allowed the narrator to take on the humorous qualities of the *pandasar* while remaining essential to the audience's understanding of the performance (Gonzalez). Paralleling the inclusion of Old Javanese and *Kawi* in his previous productions, the use of *Karuk* both creates a sense of authenticity and gives Thom a

possibility for humor in the performance (Gonzalez). Even though the *pandasar* characters do not exist in a traditional telling of the *Coyote's Journey*, they are represented in this production, though transformed.

By substituting the visual aesthetic particulars of the Klamath, and subsequently other, cultures into the format used in *Ambrosia of Immortality*, Reed was able to apply the same process of adapting foreign aesthetics into a show which uses translation, a balance of shadow casters and puppets, and cinematic techniques to other cultures.

*7 Visions* applies the same guidelines to traditional Mexican culture in the days of the “Spanish missions” (Reed 6). *Ghosts of the River* looks at “vignettes of those who have encountered the Rio Grande throughout time” (*Ghosts of the River*). A bilingual piece in both Spanish and English, each vignette features its own aesthetic style which helps the audience to understand each piece individually and as part of the whole (*Ghosts of the River*). After spending two years working in Taiwan, Reed produced *Monkey King at Spider Cave* following the same process. Through discovering elements which successfully (at least according to Diamond) translate a foreign culture into a unified design aesthetic, Reed has become an internationally acclaimed puppeteer.

#### **TRANSLATING RITUAL ACROSS CULTURAL BOUNDARIES**

With the exception of *DreamShadows*, each of Reed's pieces was inspired by a culture alien both to him and to his American audience (Diamond 261). Through his work, Reed hopes to introduce to his audience to elements of a foreign culture though an educational yet evocative method. Further, Reed is sensitive to the way

that root cultures display their own theatrical and aesthetic traditions. The pieces that best exhibit these ideals are *Ambrosia of Immortality* and *Coyote's Journey*, while his earlier production of *In Xanadu* fails to live up to Diamond's standards for cultural sensitivity. To determine whether a production achieves a sense of cultural sensitivity and avoids resorting exotic spectacle, Diamond judges based on the following three guidelines: exhaustive research about the root culture, the inclusion of members from that culture in his production team and producing his pieces where members of the root culture were able to see it performed.

As a project that attempted to cover such a broad scope, *In Xanadu* failed to meet Diamond's guidelines. Produced a mere three years after *DreamShadows*, Reed attempted to collage a great number of different cultures and historical traditions into a single production without sufficient time to study each of them individually. From its conception, *In Xanadu* had a large number of different directions it hoped to explore, including elements from seven distinct cultures: Italy, Mongolia, Han China, South India, Tibet and America and Bali (*Making of In Xanadu*). Reed gained his first inspiration for the project through reading the Italian book Invisible Cities, which told of Marco Polo's visit to China through his dialogue with the Mongol Kublai Khan, the founding emperor of the Chinese Yuan dynasty (*Making of In Xanadu*). Though the Khan was Mongolian, the Yuan dynasty spread across present-day Mongolia, China, Korea and some of the surrounding areas. After more research, Reed shifted the story away from the Italian's journey and towards a traditional Chinese tale which recalls the relationship between Kublai Khan and his wife Chabui, though Polo featured in the script (*Making of In Xanadu*). Unlike Reed's subsequent

productions, which focused on introducing a single foreign culture to the audience, the very heart of *In Xanadu* is spread across Mongolian, Chinese and even some Italian roots.

Moreover, Reed chose to design the visual and audible aesthetics of *In Xanadu* with cultural elements from elsewhere. First, the designs of the puppets were based on the longstanding tradition of Chinese shadow theater, which has its own separate history unrelated to *wayang kulit*. Further, he based movement of his puppets and shadow casters on a collaboration with both a South Indian bharatnatyan dancer and the founding members of San Francisco's Chaksam-Pa Tibetan Opera (Diamond 262). After the debut of *In Xanadu*, Reed asked Miguel Frasoni to create a "complex score of Western and Asian instruments played both live and on synthesizer, and augmented with Mongolian and Tibetan chanting" to underscore the piece (262). With so many disparate elements and only three years to study, a project of this scope seems entirely unreasonable by Diamond's standards of cultural sensitivity, especially in order to produce a unified aesthetic.

Because its plethora of cultural elements was not well integrated, Diamond saw Reed's intended intercultural phenomenon as merely "a product of Western Orientalism" (272). Instead of highlighting and educating the audience about unique aesthetics and traditions from other cultures, the various elements in *In Xanadu* come across as simply foreign and strange. Instead of becoming a diverse yet sensitive piece of theater, Diamond believes *In Xanadu* neither represented a culture in a positive and educational manner nor amused its audience.



After producing the wide-ranging *In Xanadu*, Reed decided to limit the scope of his productions, focusing on creating a more unified aesthetic concept through his own study of the root culture and including native experts on the culture into his production team. Though Reed himself deferred to the expertise of others while producing *In Xanadu*, Diamond believes that Reed could not have the background in each element included into that production to be able to unify them aesthetically and to avoid her accusation of exoticism. However, Reed's subsequent performances that focused on Bali were substantially more culturally sensitive in her eyes because they focused on melding the two cultures which Reed knows well – Balinese and American. Spending almost twenty years as a *dalang* afforded Reed insight into the place of *wayang kulit* in Balinese society and also into the crucial elements of the form itself (About Us). Only at this point did he attempt to modify the particulars of the traditional form into *wayang listrik*, developing his own usage for the *pandasar* characters and cinematic techniques for displaying his images. In his later production of *Coyote's Journey*, Reed spent years studying with the Klamath people in the hopes of understanding the importance of the storytelling tradition and their particular design aesthetics (*Coyote's Journey*). Only after this substantial research was Reed prepared by Diamond's standards to embark on the creation of a performance derived from a foreign culture.

In addition to Reed's study of the root culture, Diamond also believes that it is essential to include native experts in a performance for it to qualify as culturally sensitive. While trained professionals assisted Reed in creating *In Xanadu*, no one who upholds Yuan Dynasty traditions is present in today's society, making the

fulfillment of this requirement fairly difficult. Despite this, there is also no mention of Reed incorporating any Chinese puppeteers or artists into his production team either as designers or actors. If this is the case, Reed's oversight of including any Chinese on his production is a grave mistake according to Diamond's guidelines for cultural sensitivity

However, in the productions of *Ambrosia of Immortality* and *Coyote's Journey*, Reed's reliance upon natives proved invaluable to his production. In creating *Ambrosia of Immortality*, Reed worked with two of Bali's premier *dalang*, I Wayan Wija and I Dewa Putu Berata (*Ambrosia of Immortality*). With their help, Reed not only solved the issue of the *pandasar*, but also added content to the piece of which only a learned *dalang* would have knowledge – from a little-known traditional storyline to hand-crafted puppets from Bali designed especially for this piece (*Ambrosia of Immortality*). The same holds true for *Coyote's Journey* with its mix of Klamath and Balinese influences. For this production, Reed made sure to include individuals from both traditions to aid in maintaining the authenticity of the production. Working with Thom and Hostler as well as others, natives not only verified every aesthetic decision Reed made but also featured in his performance. *Coyote's Journey* also drew influence from the Balinese tradition, and so Reed made sure to feature Balinese performers – experts in their craft – in his company (*ShadowLight*). In fact, the shadow caster of the eponymous Coyote was performed by Balinese artist I Made Moja (Stewart). Only by deferring to experts on the tradition who have grown up with its influence was Reed able to create a unique mix of authentic *wayang kulit* tradition, with its mix of modern and classic, and Reed's

own American cinematic aesthetics in *Ambrosia of Immortality*, *Coyote's Journey* and other subsequent pieces.

The final test of whether a production is culturally sensitive by Diamond's standards is through whether Reed allowed the locals of the root culture an opportunity to see his performance and their reception of the piece. As people from the local culture of *In Xanadu* no longer exist, the point is moot for this production, but there is also no evidence that this piece was performed anywhere in China. However, Reed was careful to ensure that both the Balinese and the Klamath people had the opportunity to see the performances based on their cultures.

*Ambrosia of Immortality* was restaged in Bali to be "appreciated and judged by local people" (Diamond 274). Making what is considered an "important contribution" to the realm of intercultural performance, *Ambrosia of Immortality* was accepted by the Balinese as part of the *kreasi baru*, or "new creations" which are variations upon traditional performance forms (274). "The Balinese see this new form as an adjunct and expansion of their ancient tradition into modern times...they found that traditional and new puppets and techniques can be seamlessly combined" (274). The Balinese praise of *Ambrosia of Immortality* by itself lends the performance not only an air of authenticity but also significant cultural weight by Diamond's standards.

Reed attempted to garner the same sort of respect from the Klamath people by producing *Coyote's Journey* in locations accessible to them. Performed in San Francisco and then throughout California, Klamath River people had plenty of opportunities to see and to review the spectacle. Though there is little available

discourse about the piece by the Karuk people themselves, an unnamed source hailed *Coyote's Journey* as “helping to bring about a renaissance of Native California Culture” (*Coyote's Journey* website). Moreover, Karen Gonzalez’s glowing review of the performance detailing the involvement of Native Americans during the production process, was re-published in Canku Ota, an online newsletter “celebrating Native America” (Canku Ota). Though not a definitive analysis of the Native American response to the performance, these factors suggest a positive, if quiet, reaction to *Coyote's Journey*, satisfying this Diamond that *Coyote's Journey* was a culturally sensitive performance.

As his first intercultural production, *In Xanadu* attempted to cobble together a large number of disparate cultural phenomena and failed to live up the Diamond’s expectations for cultural sensitivity. However, later in his career Reed learned the value of extensive research, including native experts in his performance and allowing natives to see and to respond to his performances. This allowed him to unify the productions of *Ambrosia of Immortality* and *Coyote's Journey* aesthetically, and thus help to introduce Americans to an authentic representation of a foreign culture.

## CONCLUSION

Both *wayang kulit* and Reed’s *wayang listrik* have developed over time, culminating in a series of guidelines which go into a successful performance. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, *wayang kulit* performances have created and followed specified rules about the duration of the performance, how to craft the stories being told, and many other features discussed earlier which combine together to create a ritual form of theater with both religious efficacy and appeal to the Balinese people. In contrast,

Reed's *wayang listrik* first debuted in 1990. Despite this, in a short time, Reed has created formula of necessary elements to include to create a performance which is understandable and edifying to his American audience through its unified design aesthetic but also reverent of the culture from which the performance takes its inspiration by Diamond's standards. After studying and working with natives, Reed crafts performances which meld cinematic techniques familiar to his American audiences with the aesthetics of a foreign culture. By following this pattern, Reed has continued to create well-received performances to this day.

On the other hand, though they share the necessity of formulaic guidelines, traditional *wayang kulit* and Reed's *wayang listrik* hold wildly divergent places in society. In Bali, *wayang kulit* has a long, vibrant history as part of a ritual celebration. Performed regularly, the Balinese audience and *dalang* both understand that there are certain elements which need to be included during the performance for it to be considered true *wayang kulit*. One of the most important of these is the inclusion of novelty, whether through the storyline or through the antics of the *pandasar*. Reed's American audience, however, does not have this same cultural basis in the *wayang kulit* aesthetics. Because of the "primitive attractions of shadow puppets," shadow performances are instinctively seen as foreign and different (Diamond 274). Capitalizing on this idea, Reed's *wayang listrik* lends itself to being used as a medium for enlightening American audiences about other cultures and aesthetics.

The audiences of both *wayang kulit* and *wayang listrik* attend performances to learn something novel, but what this is based on the role of each piece within its

society. *Wayang kulit* is related to religious activities in Bali, and so the audience should come away with a moral about how to live their lives. *Wayang listrik* does not hold such an honored place in America, but is seen by the audience as foreign and exciting. Instead using this medium and aesthetic style simply for his profit, Reed has worked hard to avoid Orientalism and, instead, to use the form as a teaching tool for his American audiences about various foreign cultures. The role of each type of *wayang* in its society is intrinsically related to what the audience hopes to take away from it, and in each case, it is something new.

## APPENDIX I: DEFINITIONS

- Alus*: “refined” qualities highly admired by the Javanese and Balinese (Brandon 41).
- Brahmanas*: the ruling class; “they should follow the six moral rules: good speech, good thoughts, good actions, good use of objects and persons, good work, have only one wife and be sexually faithful. They would be learned in literary and religious matters, and maintain a state of ritual purity” (Hobart 113)
- Dalang*: puppeteer; narrates the story, voices the puppets and conducts the *gamelan* orchestra
- Gender Wayang*: Four piece metallophone orchestra which accompanies *wayang kulit* performances
- Giing satua*: the plot thread that runs through the story and is concluded by the end of the night (147)
- Karuk*: the native language of the Klamath River tribespeople
- Kawi*: the language of Old Javanese
- Kesar*: “coarse” qualities, usually attached to characters such as ogres and servants (120)
- Kris*: a type of dagger.
- Kreasi Baru* “new creations” (Diamond 274)
- Lakon*: Javanese-Hindu myth
- Mahabharata*: A classical Hindu text in Javanese and Balinese Hinduism. “The central theme ... is the tragic conflict between two families of the Kuru clan, the Pandawas and the Korawas. The quarrel culminates in the great war, the Bratayuda (Bharatayuddha), in which the five Pandawa brothers confront their first cousins, the one hundred Korawa brothers. After eighteen days of terrible fighting, in which thousands of men are killed, the Pandawas emerge as victors and the eldest Pandawa brother, Yudistira, succeeds as heir to the throne of Nastina. The heroes of most of the myths are one of more of the Pandawa brothers – the gentle Yudistira, the strong and brave Bima, the noble and comely Arguna, and their younger twins, Nakula and Sahadéwa” (Brandon 38).
- Manis*: delicate (Hobart 120)
- Ogres*: Demon, *kesar* characters. “They should be uncontrolled, greedy, powerful, ready to devour humans or harass virtuous men” (113)
- Penyelah*: “beautifiers,” scenes in a *wayang* performance, usually involving the servants, which embellish upon and relate to the main plot
- Ramayana*: A classical text in Javanese and Balinese Hinduism. “The myths tell of the abduction of the beautiful Sita by the demon-king, Rawana. Her husband, Rama, finally retrieves her with the help of monkey armies led by the monkey god, Hanuman” (Brandon 39).
- Pandasar*: male servant characters, generally clown characters
- Satriyas*: “they should be good administrators and warriors. They should protect and set a good example to their subjects. They should be virile lovers” (Hobart 113)

*Sudras*: lower classes; “They should subordinate their individuality to that of the community and follow the rules and be respectful to the high castes. They should working the in the rice-fields, on repairing roads and public buildings” (113)

*Wayang Topeng*: a traditional Balinese masked monodrama form in which a solo performer enacts several roles and changes masks in full view of the audience (Diamond 266)

*Wuku* calendar: Hindu Balinese calendar which contains 210 days per year (Hobart 21)



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