

# Wayang Kontemporer: Innovations in Javanese Wayang

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis. This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.



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Miguel Escobar Varela

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Ki Slamet Gundono (1966-2014).

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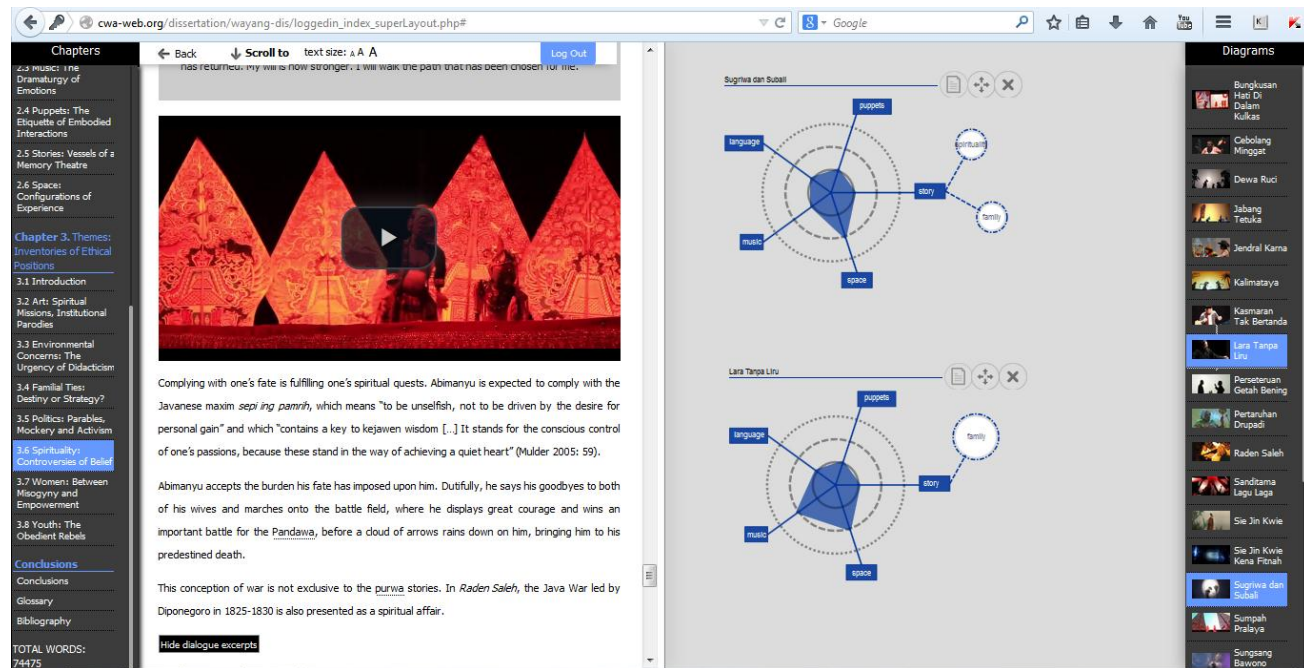
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## A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

This dissertation was originally conceived and submitted as an online portal with embedded video and interactive diagrams. The online version can be accessed at <http://cwa-web.org/wayang-dis/dissertation>. In this written version, video excerpts are indicated with the icon .



The screenshot displays the CWA-Web.org Wayang-Dis dissertation portal. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Chapters:** A sidebar on the left lists chapters from 2.3 to 3.8, with '3.6 Spirituality: Controversies of Belief' highlighted. Below the list are links for 'Conclusions', 'Glossary', and 'Bibliography'. At the bottom, it states 'TOTAL WORDS: 74475'.
- Main Content Area:**
  - At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Back', 'Scroll to', 'text size: A A A', and a 'Log Out' button.
  - Below the navigation bar is a video player showing a scene with three large, ornate puppets (wayang) on a stage. A play button icon is overlaid on the video.
  - Below the video player, there is a text excerpt discussing the Javanese maxim *sepi ing pamrih* and the character Abimanyu. The text is followed by a 'Hide dialogue excerpts' button.
- Diagrams:** On the right side, there are two interactive diagrams. Each diagram is a circular flowchart with a central node and several surrounding nodes connected by lines. The top diagram is titled 'Bugina dan Subali' and the bottom one is 'Lara Tanpa Liru'. Both diagrams have nodes for 'puppets', 'language', 'music', 'space', 'story', and 'family'.
- Right Sidebar:** A vertical list of 'Diagrams' with small thumbnail images and titles, including 'Bugina dan Subali', 'Cibolang Minggat', 'Dewa Ruci', 'Jabang Tetuka', 'Jendral Karna', 'Kalimataya', 'Kasmaran Tak Bertanda', 'Lara Tanpa Liru', 'Pondoran Gajah Bening', 'Pertanahan Drupadi', 'Raden Saleh', 'Sanditama Lagu Laga', 'Sie Jin Kwie', 'Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah', 'Sugina dan Subali', 'Sungah Pralaya', and 'Sungang Bawono'.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: Floods, Biscuits and Banana Leaves .....	11
Important questions about life and art .....	25
Why the biscuit is not the banana leaf .....	27
How not to be a character from Borges .....	32
Chapter 1: Methods and Contexts.....	41
1.1 Literature Review: What Other People Have Said About Wayang Kontemporer.....	41
1.2 Positionality: Researching Wayang as a Digital Archivist.....	54
The Impossibility of Archiving Performance .....	57
1.3 Approach: An Essayistic Ontology.....	75
Classification and its Discontents.....	80
The essay as an approach .....	95
Chapter 2 Aesthetics: Variables of Adaptation.....	101
2.1 Aesthetics: Variables of Adaptation.....	101
Performance frameworks .....	106
Variables of Adaptation .....	108
Intermedial Journeys .....	109
2.2 Language: The Question of Belonging .....	118
Conventional Language Use.....	122
Intermedial Language Use .....	126
Non-conventional Language Use .....	131

2.3 Music: The Dramaturgy of Emotions .....	137
Conventional music.....	141
Intermedial Music .....	145
Non-conventional music .....	158
2.4 Puppets: The Etiquette of Material Interactions .....	163
Conventional Puppets.....	167
Intermedial Puppets.....	172
Non-conventional Puppets .....	185
2.5 Stories: Vessels of a Memory Theatre .....	193
Conventional Stories .....	195
Intermedial Stories.....	199
Non-conventional stories.....	202
2.6 Space: Configurations of Experience .....	205
Conventional Space Usage.....	208
Intermedial Space Usage .....	217
Non-conventional Space Usage .....	239
Chapter 3 Themes: Inventories of Ethical Positions .....	247
3.1 Introduction .....	247
3.2 ART: Spiritual Missions, Institutional Parodies .....	251
3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: The Urgency of Didacticism.....	274
3.4 FAMILIAL TIES: Destiny or Strategy? .....	288
3.5 POLITICS: Parables, Mockery and Activism.....	306



3.6 SPIRITUALITY: Controversies of Belief .....	328
3.7 WOMEN: Between Misogyny and Empowerment .....	352
3.8 YOUTH: The Obedient Rebels .....	367
CONCLUSION.....	376
APPENDIX 1 Foreign Terms Used in The Dissertation.....	382
REFERENCES.....	389

## SUMMARY

This dissertation analyzes new developments in Javanese *wayang kontemporer* – contemporary *wayang kulit*. This dissertation has three objectives: to analyze new formal and thematic developments in *wayang*, to interpret what these developments say about sociocultural life in Java and to reflexively develop a digital interface to communicate the outputs of the research process. This interface is a combination of interactive diagrams, texts and audiovisual materials. The method used is described as an *essayistic ontology*, a combination of formal and interpretive methods. As such, this dissertation aims to combine theatre studies and digital humanities methodologies. The dissertation concentrates on 24 performances and argues that their most distinctive feature is their variety: the performances represent a compendium of creative possibilities and of positions towards sociocultural change in Java.

## INTRODUCTION: Floods, Biscuits and Banana Leaves

The late Slamet Gundono was the most famous and the fattest *dalang* in Java. Both superlatives are empirically verifiable. If you ask around, both among foreign researchers and local *wayang kontemporer* aficionados, they will certainly agree with the fact that he was, if not the best, at least the most famous. He was “perhaps Java's best known post-traditional puppeteer” (Cohen 2014: 4) and “his experimental art earned him travel to faraway countries like Britain, Germany, The Netherlands and Japan for performances” (Panji 2000).

If you ever saw him – live or through videos – you will agree that his prominent physical presence was hard to miss, especially since he referred to it often. In almost every performance, he mentioned jokingly his enormous weight. “In Java lives the fattest *dalang* who has ever lived, called Slamet Gundono,” he said, speaking of himself in the third person in the opening lines of a *wayang* show that was recorded for a German television broadcast, “but he is also the most handsome” (Pertaruhan Drupadi, 2006). These bits of self-deprecating and self-aggrandizing humor elicited roaring laughter from the musicians, and the *dalang* continued with the show.

In certain parts of the world, it would be very rude to call someone fat, especially an artist one admires and whose work one is going to talk about.

However calling oneself or others fat in Java seems perfectly acceptable. I have witnessed the shock of many foreigners when they themselves or other people are called fat directly. Likewise, I have seen many Javanese people shocked when foreigners say things that would not necessarily be offensive in other places (for instance, when they show visible signs of anger and yell at others).

Trivial as these reflections may appear, these differences matter. They are relevant to *wayang* and to the academic discourse on *wayang*. This is a piece of writing about *wayang* performances but it is also about the ways people talk about these performances in Java. And the way people talk about performances is never too different from the way people talk about people. Discussions about art and the most mundane assertions found in everyday conversation are part of the same discursive sphere. The aesthetic, the philosophical and the worldly realms are intertwined in the way *wayang* is created, enjoyed and talked about. *Wayang* is interesting to me because it can potentially address every aspect of life in Java. If we accept this proposition, we must also concede that many observations about everyday life in Java are relevant to *wayang* scholarship. By stating this, I don't aim to suggest that the ontology of *wayang* can be encapsulated or reduced to a collection of notes about curious cultural differences, I merely wish to suggest that the flimsiest assertions about culturally-contingent language usage are not fully out of the scope of an academic inquiry into *wayang*. In this dissertation I aim to develop a digital platform to compare a wide range of *wayang* performances and to interpret what they say about contemporary Java. In order to accomplish these

objectives, I try to develop a culturally sensitive approach and recognize that talking about *wayang* implies talking about the way people talk about other things as well. A central tenet of this dissertation is that *wayang kontemporer* is a way of "making sense" of and speaking about the contemporary world. I do not mean to say that all the Javanese people talk about it in the same way, but I will recognize my intellectual debt to the specific ways some people have talked with me about it. My thoughts and experiences of *wayang* have been deeply influenced by conversations with friends, teachers and artists, one of whom was Ki Slamet himself.

Born in Tegal in June 9 1966, Slamet Gundono came from a family of traditional puppeteers but he also received *dalang* training at the Indonesian School of the Arts in Surakarta (ISI-Solo). In the late 1990s he achieved national fame with his *wayang suket*. *Suket* means grass in Javanese and in *wayang suket* shows he used puppets made from grass. This was not his invention; *wayang* made of grass has probably existed for a long time. Nonetheless, as a commentator writing in *The Jakarta Post* said, "Slamet is the one who has elevated the straw puppet status to a performing art" (Ganug 2000) and he has brought a new sensitivity to the usage of grass:

*Wayang suket* allows full freedom for the audience to build on their unlimited imagination. The philosophy of grass as an ever-growing plant needing only water and sunlight represents the spirit of an art that generates pride and strength of imagination (Ganug 2010).

Although Slamet Gundono used stories from the *Mahabharata*, he did not rely on the *wayang* performance conventions. He often spoke directly to the audience, alternating between singing and narration, using the puppets only now and then. He was also a famous singer, and his songs did not completely follow *wayang* conventions. In his performances, he incorporated new music by singing and playing the ukulele. His storytelling technique was not traditional either; he impersonated characters and looked spectators in the eye when speaking, generating a unique sense of theatrical intimacy. His puppets were not limited to *suket* creations; sometimes he would use sticks, cell phones and other common objects:

Unlike most *dalang*, clad in a traditional suit with a headcloth and a kris, Gundono sometimes appears without a shirt, or dressed like a cowboy. His other performance media, apart from the main characters and *gunungan* (mountains symbolizing human and spiritual worlds), are made from vegetables such as chili, cucumbers, tomatoes and onions stuck to a banana tree stem (Ganug 2010).

To this day, his *suket* shows remain his best known works. But he also engaged in a variety of projects, collaborating with other artists from both Java and

abroad. In *Wayang Tanah*, his production team dug up a 25 square meter cavity in the ground in which he performed a *wayang* show where the "puppets" were made of mud. The performance combined storytelling with a ritual to celebrate the beginning of the rainy season. Cebolang Minggat was a collaboration with the French writer Elizabeth Inandiak that explored the sexual and spiritual adventures of Cebolang, a character of the 18th century Javanese literary work *Serat Centhini* whose controversial content has occluded this work from public consciousness, although some people consider it the greatest Javanese work of literature. Besides being a creative *dalang* and a famous singer, he was also a good and patient teacher. Some of the most pleasant memories I have of my "fieldwork" are the long conversations I had with him in his house near Surakarta. On one such occasion, in April 20 2012, I asked him if he liked the term *wayang kontemporer*, which is often used to describe his work. I wanted to know if he felt it was an accurate term to describe what he does with *wayang*. He just smiled enigmatically and said nothing. I thought I might have asked something silly or annoying and did not say anything either, I just kept drinking my tea in the hot afternoon. We were sitting in a *pendopo* in front of his house, the place where he usually rehearsed, while his assistant was examining a pile of external hard drives trying to find a performance video I was interested in watching. "*Wayang kontemporer* is alright," he said after several minutes, "but you could also talk about it in other ways. Maybe flood *wayang* is better [*wayang banjir*]."

I think I might have looked quite puzzled, for he just laughed again and went on to explain that:

In the past there were seasons. Life was organized according to them and so was *wayang*. You would make a performance for a wedding and for the start of the rainy season. But now nature is not predictable anymore. We have long dry periods and these awful floods. So now we have to create a *wayang* that suits these crazy times. A *wayang* for a world where there is no natural order and no social order anymore. If the times are crazy, the *dalang* must do the same! [*nek jamane edan, dalange kudu melu edian ha!*]

This dissertation is about the crazy *wayang* performances of the crazy *dalang* for these crazy times. Since the term *wayang banjir* has not yet caught on, I will keep referring to them as *wayang kontemporer* and I will define these performances as those re-elaborations of *wayang* which are a combination of *wayang* and something else, but where the *dalang* and at least some of the conventions of Javanese *wayang kulit* are still central.



## Wayang Kontemporer and the Contemporary Wayang Archive

Most of the performances I will refer to are among the 24 *wayang kontemporer* performances which, in a recorded version, form the current collection of the Contemporary Wayang Archive (CWA). Collecting, recording and subtitling the videos were essential activities during my PhD research. In Positionality: Researching *Wayang* as a Digital Archivist, I talk more about the methodological implications, the joy and the headaches of this process. I also argue the importance of using digital tools for the recording, analysis and presentation of my research, framing this dissertation as a digital humanities project (See Approach: An Essayistic Ontology). At this point, I will just define the kinds of shows which were considered for the archive and for this writing. The scope of this research was limited to *wayang* shows with the following three characteristics: the *dalang* is the central figure, Javanese *wayang kulit* conventions are used, the shows were created in the post-Reformasi era.

*Wayang kulit* has sometimes been translated and talked about as a form of “shadow theatre”, and seen in comparison with other shadow theatre forms from elsewhere in the world such as the Taiwanese *ping* or the Turkish *karagöz*. Personally, I find the term shadow theatre misleading and I would suggest that *wayang kulit* is largely the art of the *dalang*. Few people watch the shows from the side of the shadows (see Space) and the *dalang* is a central element of the shows. He (rarely she) is a philosopher, a comedian, an orchestra director, and a storyteller. Part of the joy of watching *wayang* is

seeing how the *dalang* brings the story to life, animates the puppets and interacts with audience members and musicians. Kathy Foley suggests that the notion of a controller is very important to certain traditional theatres and links this to the way rituals are organized. In rituals, as in traditional theatres, there are always two figures: "the dancer and the danced," or the controller and the medium, which, she suggests, is similar to what happens in trance dances: "Clearly the two-role division of the trance form (medium and spirit controller) has its parallel in the dancer-dalang dichotomy in theatre" (Foley 1985: 42). Although she formulated this role duality within the Sundanese context, it applies to Javanese performances as well. This criterion of the centrality of the *dalang* figure in the contemporary *wayang* performances covered in this dissertation leaves out performances such as those by Teater Koma which are inspired by *wayang* stories but where there is no art of the *dalang*, such as *Semar Gugat* (1995). However, it does include Teater Koma's *Sie Jin Kwie* and *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*, where a *dalang* is one of the performers.

In the shows considered in this dissertation, Javanese *wayang kulit* conventions are used, even if they are completely reinterpreted. Therefore, this excludes contemporary shows that only use *wayang wong* or *wayang golek* conventions, like the shows by Asep Sunandar Sunarya, described by Andrew Weintraub (2010). The selection does include shows that integrate *wayang wong* and *wayang golek* elements within *wayang kulit*, such as Aneng Kiswantoro's *Sumpah Pralaya* and Mirwan Suwarso's *Jabang Tetuka*. However, the contemporary work of Ria Papermoon and her company falls outside of

the scope of the present dissertation. Traditional *wayang kulit* as a form has a distinct integrity as a medium, a set of stories, aesthetics and spectatorship conventions. These have all been very well documented and therefore this project has chosen to focus on the reinterpretations of the form which can still be thought of as wayang performances. This is the reason why the centrality of the *dalang* figure has been considered a key criterion.

Although *wayang kontemporer* shows have a long history (which will be considered when pertinent), the scope of this research is limited to works created after 1998, when Suharto's New Order came to an end. After this date, incipient democratization, increased digitization and accelerated globalization have allowed the creation of a great variety of shows about which there is very little scholarship.

With these criteria in mind, I selected 24 performances, and traveled around Java making and collecting recordings, watching performances and talking to people. I saw most of the performances live, and many of them on several occasions. In some cases, I was personally responsible for recording and editing the videos. Upon returning from Java, I have seen those videos repeatedly with different purposes in mind. First, to add English subtitles to them. Second, to complement my analysis of them. Third, as supporting materials for the classes I teach. I began my analysis of the performances when watching them live. Watching them on video prompted memories of those experiences but also opened up new analytical possibilities: by allowing me to concentrate on things

that I missed on the first watching and by facilitating a comparative approach with other performances.

Consequently, I have seen them on video many more times than I saw them live, and this has necessarily affected my perspective on them. The multiple viewings have allowed a comparative analysis of their salient features but they have also flattened the performances to the same format, abstracting them from their original context. In this dissertation, I address this bias by providing explanations of the contextual conditions of performance where pertinent, which are taken from my fieldwork diaries. However, one of the reasons this dissertation is presented in an online form is so that it can include video excerpts within the text. In order to complement their reading experience, the users of this website can also view radar diagrams that display the main characteristics of the performances being analyzed.

The analysis in this dissertation cuts across the different performances and one disadvantage of this is that the individual performances fade to the background. This analysis might also be confusing to follow for people not familiar with these 24 performances. Therefore, the diagrams present a reading aid, displaying the main characteristics of each performance and allowing for an alternative way to navigate through the chapters that make up this dissertation. The chapters of this dissertation form part of a sequence. However, each of the chapters can also be read on its own by clicking on the

diagrams (left-hand panel) rather than on the table of contents (the right-hand panel).

Although the analysis uses videos and interactive displays, I must emphasize that this is a study of performances and it does not analyze films, interactive video-games and novels that also deal with re-elaborations of *wayang*. I am also aware that there are similar forms among Java's neighbors, such as Kelantan in Malaysia, and Bali. In Singapore, the term *wayang* has also been used to refer to Chinese street opera performances – a fact which, according to Paul Rae, attests to the “intercultural mobility of the *idea* of wayang” (Rae 2011: 74, original emphasis). I agree with his contention that following this idea could be used to “trace the associative network in which such performances are embedded” (75), an analysis that would take us far beyond the borders of Java.

However, I have chosen to take a different route and concentrate on the specific ways in which *wayang* functions within Java. There, it is the most respected form and its constant use by numerous institutional actors gives it an official status that it does not have elsewhere. What I mean by official is that *wayang* iconography and stories are used by prestigious government institutions and sponsored during official events. If we were to look at this official visibility and respect only, *wayang kulit* in Java is perhaps more similar to *khon* dance in Thailand than to *wayang kulit* in Bali. Although it is also very

alive there, *wayang* is hardly the most respected tradition in Bali, a position that is perhaps occupied by dance. Another difference is its function.

According to I Nyoman Sedana, even the most innovative forms of *wayang* in Bali have a decidedly ritual function, which is not true for *wayang kontemporer* shows in Java, which usually do not have a ritual function. Note the way in which he talks about a show by I Made Sidia that was aimed at restoring the natural balance after the 2002 Bali bombings:

Though Sidia and the other artists are mere humans, in the time that they played the *wayang* they stepped into a place of power where the disorder can be mediated by the active power of performance. There humans mediate the divine and nature as in the *tri hita karana* [three elements of harmony: environment, man and divinity]. There they can reveal the dangers of the *sad ripu* [the six internal enemies: lust, greed, anger, confusion, drunkenness, and jealousy] and help promote the proper relation of the *dasanama kerta* [the ten elements: earth, water, fire, air, fish, animals, birds, plants, humans, and gods]. Even in the newest permutation—*wayang kontemporer*—we see one of the old impulses of Balinese puppet performance: art actively reorders the universe and humans become like gods when they enter the realm of art (I Nyoman Sedana 2005:85, emphasis added)

I haven't found any instance of people in Java speaking about *wayang kontemporer* performances in a similar way. This confluence of aesthetic

innovation and religious efficacy is perhaps specific to Bali. In the case of Malaysia, *wayang kulit siam* has notably been subject to bans, but even before that it never enjoyed the same visibility or importance as Javanese *wayang* within its own sociocultural context or in international scholarship. As Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof notes:

It is clear that the shadow play in Malaysia was never an important or even a popular medium that is comparable to that in Java or Bali. Nor was there any kind of official support for it, including from the courts (Yousof 1997: 9).

Although *wayang kulit* in Kelantan and Bali offer interesting contrasts to *wayang kontemporer* in Java, a comparison with contemporary forms in these places would make this an entirely different project, and would require a linguistic expertise beyond my current abilities. Therefore, I have chosen to concentrate on specific *wayang* practices in Java, which I describe as hybrid performances, located in between *wayang* and something else (See Aesthetics).

These performances are combinations of “tradition” and “other media,” as these ideas are imagined today. The way tradition is imagined, talked about and performed is subject to change and that which is considered as traditional

today was not necessarily so in the recent past. The work of Natosabdho (1925-1985), for example, is generally accepted today as a model of tradition. However, in his times, his usage of *lakon karangan* [composed stories] was controversial and he was considered a “destroyer of tradition” (Petersen 2001: 106). After Indonesian independence certain shows have been talked about as instances of *wayang modern*, *wayang kreasi* and, more recently, *wayang kontemporer*. The objective of this dissertation, however, is not to trace the transformation of the notion of tradition nor of attitudes to that tradition within Javanese performances. It takes as its starting point tradition as a contemporary discourse. It accepts the fact that tradition is often an artificial, dynamic and contested term.

However, as far as this research is concerned, tradition is what it is said to be today. This will not erase inherent disagreements in this notion; the concept of tradition also means *tradition as it is disagreed about today*. In any case, these hybrid performances represent, mock and repurpose tradition as it is imagined in the current world of *wayang* practice. I subscribe to the approach outlined by Jan Mrázek in the following words:

When I talk about ‘new’ trends, I am not suggesting that one could not find precedents for these trends in a more distant past (I point out historical precedents in some but not all cases). I merely imply that today they are (still) felt as new (Mrázek 2005: 362).



## Important questions about life and art

In my interpretation, these hybrid performances are creative responses to two sets of questions. The first one is formal – that is, it is concerned with the form of *wayang*. What can *wayang* be? How can it sound, feel, and look like? How long should it last, where and to whom shall it be presented? Which language should be used to perform it? The second set of questions is philosophical. At its core, all *wayang* is concerned with how to live. These *kontemporer* shows ask: How should one lead life in these crazy times? How should one relate to others, to tradition, to outsiders, to the state? To what extent are the old Javanese ethics still relevant and to what extent are they in need of revision or dismissal?

These questions are important because they strike a chord with contemporary audiences. They matter, specifically, to young people living in post-Suharto, digitally connected and cosmopolitan cities in Java. Whether they are specifically concerned with *wayang* or not, all the young people I have met in Indonesia are dealing with some version of these questions, day in and day out. They are constantly making aesthetic and ethical decisions, choosing to what extent they should follow what their parents and teachers tell them and to what extent they should find hybrid modes of thought and expression that adapt influences from other places. They are experiencing in the flesh the 'post-traditional' anxieties that come with the "reflexive modernity" described by Anthony Giddens:

The reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self. Put in another way, in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a reflexive project [...] In the settings of modernity, by contrast, the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change (Giddens 1993: 304).

How to dress? How to represent yourself to your friends and family, online and offline? How to deal with emotional relations? How to build a future? How to act? What language to use? How to speak? What to say? Basic tenets are up for debate in a way that is perhaps unprecedented in Indonesia. It can be rightly said that some citizens of the country were engaged in intensive soul-searching after Independence, but the options open to ordinary people were severely curtailed shortly after, by the policies of the New Order. It is only recently that a progressive democratic restructuring of institutions, a growing middle-class and the digital revolution have enabled millions of young people to ask themselves these questions on a daily basis.

*Wayang kontemporer* offers creative responses to these issues within the most contested, venerated (and hated) art practice of Java. The present dissertation addresses how people answer these questions through *wayang kontemporer*. It is about the words used, the stories told, the music played and the puppets made, as much as it is about the messages being conveyed.

## Why the biscuit is not the banana leaf

So far, I have emphasized a distinction between the form and content of *wayang kontemporer*. This deliberate strategy is a result of specific ways in which people have talked to me about *wayang*. I once asked my teacher Pak Parjaya, who is a traditional *dalang*, about his thoughts on the work of the *kontemporer* practitioners.

There is no problem if you want to do  
*kontemporer* things, as long as they contain  
something! [*Nggak apa-apa kalau mau  
kontemporer, selama ada isinya!*]

I was sitting in his office in Ngaglik, a village north of Yogyakarta where an ambitious, world-bank funded arts education initiative was set up in the 1990s. We were eating tiny *kue* (biscuits) that were wrapped in banana leaves. He said:

The *kue* is not the same as the leaves. You could  
present the *kue* in other forms, wrap it with  
other materials. It is the same with *wayang*. The  
important thing is not the wrapping, but the  
philosophical values it conveys. If some people

are creative and can create new wrappings, that is very good, because it will get young people interested in the tradition. It will allow people to continue eating *kue*.

Other people have spoken to me about *kontemporer* shows in comparable ways. In my experience, people tend to emphasize this form/content distinction when talking about their work and the work of others and, therefore, I will use this way of talking about *wayang* in my writing as well.

Most western performance scholarship is weary of form/content distinctions. For historical reasons that I will examine, some writers have become suspicious of these distinctions. In Indonesia, however, for another set of historical reasons, this distinction is a relatively new and very current way of talking about the creation and experience of art.

For a long time, making distinctions of form and content was part of the western academic tradition of philosophizing about art. As Arthur C. Danto notes:

It had always been taken for granted that one could distinguish works of art from other things by mere inspection, or by the sorts of

straightforward criteria by which one distinguishes, say, eagles from palm trees. It was as though artworks constituted a natural kind but not a philosophically natural kind, and that one mastered the concept of art by learning to pick out the examples (Danto 1992: 7).

This distinction was brought to a crisis by modernist artworks and more powerfully, according to Danto, by the works of Andy Warhol, such as the Brillo Box: “the Brillo Box really does look so like boxes of Brillo that the differences surely cannot constitute the difference between art and reality” (Danto 1992: 7). Talking about a distinction of form and content at this point would be useless and misleading. In the Brillo Box, as in many conceptual pieces, there is clearly no ‘content’ that can be separated from the form of the artworks. Of course, this is just the culmination of a process that started almost a century earlier. As Lehmann writes, “ever since Cézanne in painting and modern French poetry in literature the autonomization of the signifier has been observable, its play becomes the predominant aspect of aesthetic practice (Lehmann 2001: 64).” The autonomization of the signifier is just another way of saying that the form does not ‘have’ content: it is what it is. The form and/or signifier do not stand for things other than themselves. Lehman links this to developments in theatre as well, in what he terms postdramatic theatre:

In the face of our everyday bombardment with signs, postdramatic theatre works with a strategy of refusal. It practices an economy in its use of signs that can be seen as asceticism; it emphasizes a formalism that reduces the plethora of signs through repetition and duration (Lehmann 2001: 89-90).

He would later suggest that this formalist, postdramatic theatre, “can be seen as an attempt to conceptualize art in the sense that it offers not a representation but an intentionally unmediated experience of the real (time, space, body): Concept Theatre” (Lehmann 2001: 134). This unmediated experience is also the goal of performance art. Content/form distinctions would certainly be useless to describe Marina Abramovic inflicting wounds on her skin. The vocabularies of performance art and of postdramatic theatre have certainly affected the ways in which theatre is talked about in contemporary scholarship and many performances will be ill-served by a terminology that would simplify their complexity to the binary of a form/content analysis.

However, this terminology and dyad would not be simplistic in Java. Modern art and modern performance operate in a very different way in Indonesia. *Wayang kulit* was a preeminently ritual form until the early 20th century. According to Clara van Groenendael, *wayang* emerged as a contemporary art form in the 1920s when it was taught in schools (Groenendael 1972). Emphasis was placed on learning the technique, which then became freed from its ritual significance. This paved the way for the innovations that led to the *wayang*

*kontemporer* of the 21st century. Catherine Diamond, in her comparative study of contemporary Southeast Asian theatre, offers a similar explanation. She identifies “the establishment of state institutions” as one of the factors that have preserved the traditional arts but “also altered their function in society” (Diamond 2012: 4). However, she also considers “colonialism's imposition of foreign aesthetic criteria” as a cause of the same condition. In a point that seems to echo Groenendael, she describes that which happens in “western influenced” (Diamond 2012: 4) institutions:

While students learn technique, they have lost  
the meaning of the dance movements, the  
symbolism in song lyrics, the connotations of a  
melody, or the religious/philosophical  
significance of a narrative (Diamond 2010: 4).

I agree with her analysis but disagree with her nostalgia. With the advent of these teaching methods, meanings have not only been lost. The possibility for new meanings has also been gained. Form and content are now offered as separate realms for artistic exploration, questioning and innovation. In Java, after the preeminence of ritual, a local understanding of modernism and postmodernism allows artists to explore new ways of representing old ideas, and using old forms as vehicles for new ideas. This dissertation explores how these new meaning and ideas are constructed. It examines the ways contemporary *dalang* have modified *wayang* to talk about environmental

concerns, spirituality, politics, the functions of art, and the role of women and young people in a changing society.

I do not wish to suggest that form and content are always dissociated. But I believe that separating them for the purpose of this analysis is a productive way to discuss the performances. Not all radical aesthetic explorations are coupled with radical thematic explorations. By maintaining a double focus, it is possible to recognize continuities and differences in both the formal and the thematic explorations of the new work developed by the *dalang*.

#### How not to be a character from Borges

My proposed approach could still be accused of being a simplification of what is, in reality, a more complicated thing. I would answer to this argument that certain simplifications are useful and more desirable than their opposites: excessive complications that lead nowhere. I would like to illustrate this point by referring to two short stories by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges.

*Funes, el memorioso* [Funes the Memorious] is a man who had the capacity to remember everything. But he was not capable of making abstractions. “To think,” concludes the narrator, “is to forget” (Borges 1997: 76). This dissertation is an attempt to think about *wayang*; that is, to forget some aspects of its complexity in order to highlight its complexity. For the sake of drawing attention to important things, this dissertation will necessarily overlook other important things. The metaphors used by Slamet and Parjaya



will provide the basic interpretive framework for this endeavor, which I will now outline by describing how the dissertation is organized into chapters.

Chapter 1: Methods and Context. This dissertation has three objectives: to compare the features of *wayang kontemporer* performances in order to analyze their heterogeneous creativity, to interpret what they say about life in contemporary Java, and to reflexively develop a digital platform in order to convey my analysis of these performances. In this chapter, I set the theoretical background to sustain these objectives by presenting an overview of previous scholarship on *wayang*, highlighting my positionality as a digital archivist, and describing a methodological approach informed by performance studies and digital humanities.

In the following chapters, I propose a set of concepts that will guide my analysis: variables of adaptation and ethical explorations. The variables of adaptation are the formal building blocks of a *kontemporer* performance: puppets, music, space, story and language. Based on my conversations with *dalang*, I suggest that these are the building blocks with which *dalang* work and think when developing new works based on the tradition. The ethical explorations outlined in the next chapter constitute the themes addressed by these performances. Based on my conversations with the artists, I suggest that the ethical interpretation of the stories is very important to the *dalang*, who think about this carefully and constantly when devising their work.

In Chapter 2: Variables of Adaptation I describe the variables of adaptation, the aesthetic adventures that start in *wayang* but end in hybrid performances. The main building blocks of *kontemporer* performances (stories, music, language, space and puppets) can be used in three ways: reproducing conventions, reinterpreting them or substituting them for conventions from outside of *wayang*. In each of the sections in this chapter, I follow the trails of each of these explorations. I begin each section with anecdotes that illustrate the importance of each of these building blocks and then move on to offer detailed descriptions of all the variations in the *kontemporer* performances considered in this dissertation. Then, I venture into a philosophical interpretation of the implications of such classification. For example, when looking at the substitution of communal, improvised *gamelan* music for pre-recorded hip-hop soundtracks with star performers, I suggest that this could be interpreted as a sign of a historical change in how creativity is conceived in Java. Although this analysis is predicated on similarities, I attempt to remain attentive to differences among individual performances. Therefore, I describe the aspects of each performance in detail, trying to account for nuanced distinctions within a given category.

The texts can also be read as a result of the interaction with the diagrams of each performance.

In these radar diagrams, the five variables are represented by arrows. Three circles of progressive diameter represent the possible values: conventional (marked by a solid line), non-conventional (dashed line) and mixed (dotted

line). A skewed pentagon indicates the value of each variable within a given performance. The degree of conventionality is defined by the five vertices (the intersection of the line and the circle). In other words, the farther away a vertex is from the center, the least conventional the variable it represents. The following radar diagram, for example, represents *Dewa Ruci*, which uses a non-conventional language, mixed puppets, a conventional story, and mixed space and conventional music (Figure 1.1). When placing the mouse over any of the labels, small pop-up windows appear with further explanations on why a particular value was assigned to a given variable.

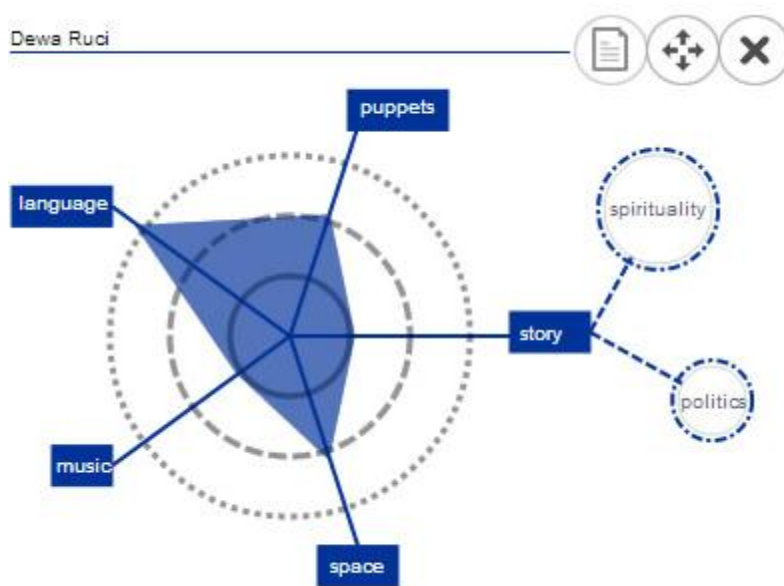


FIGURE 1. Radar diagram for *Dewa Ruci*.

These radar charts were chosen since they fit the classificatory model developed in this dissertation (a multivariate model). However, it is clear that the diagrams are not neutral. They have rhetoric strength and enact particular understandings of the play. In this case, they emphasize that which is far from

the tradition (as the shapes become bigger the more a performance departs from conventions).

I will describe the spheres that spread from the "story" label later in this introduction. When users click on any of the categories, the corresponding dissertation chapter will appear in the text window (which is currently occupied by *this* introduction). The usage of this diagrams has advantages and disadvantages. The most obvious shortcoming is that they flatten all the performances, subsuming internal differences and suggesting they are all the same kind of entities. I try to counter this shortcoming by offering a more nuanced description in the texts. The main advantage of the diagrams is that they allow for a visual comparison of the elements across performances. They also work as reading aides. Users not familiar with all 24 performances analyzed in this dissertation can summon up the diagrams in order to facilitate reading by easily conjuring up the main characteristics of each performance.

To some readers, the diagrams might suggest an attempt at scientific objectivity. However, my objective is not to offer truth claims about these performances. Rather, I intend to render my personal experiences of these performances in a way which is visual, interactive and comparative. The variables for the variables of adaptation and ethical themes were not created *a priori*, but as a result of the multiple viewing of the twenty-four performances in the collection analyzed in this dissertation. Furthermore, the texts for each category are animated by an essayistic imagination (see

Approach: An Essayistic Ontology) rather than by objective explanations. Therefore, readers might certainly identify discrepancies with their own views. These texts are meant to be playful, partial and interpretive explorations of ideas, informed by conversations, experiences and readings.

Chapter 3: Ethical explorations is concerned with the biscuits. It is conceived as a series of guided tours of the maze of the performances taken together. It cuts across chapters, following thematic associations through the different performances. This chapter is mainly concerned with the ethical explorations suggested by these shows: that is, what *wayang* says about life. The emphasis on ethics is underpinned by an approach to the exegesis of the stories which is common in Java. In my experience, people often discuss performances in terms of their ethical relevance. Discussions tend to focus on what *wayang* performances say about ethical behavior under particular circumstances. This is also important to the *dalang* who create these shows.

The ethical discussions are the main hermeneutic strategy I was offered when I discussed the stories with the *dalang*. This is represented visually in the diagrams by the small circles branching out from the “Story” variable. While Chapter Two deals with the origin of the stories (whether they come from traditional sources or not, and what this says about *wayang*), this chapter focuses solely on the ethical implications of the stories, regardless of their origin. These discussions are organized around seven themes: familial ties, women, youth, spirituality, environmental concerns, politics and art. The texts

distinguish between two ways in which the themes can be addressed in a performance: they can be the central concern of the narrative, or they can be tangentially addressed. Although I distinguish between these two modes of thematic engagement, I suggest that tangential references to a theme are important in *wayang kulit*. *Dalang* always weave references to the contemporary world into the fabric of the performance through asides, off-the-cuff remarks and interactions with the singers and musicians. The meaning a *wayang* takes in the minds of spectators is often more connected to these remarks than to the theme explored through a particular story.

In the diagrams, as mentioned above, the themes are represented by circles, linked to the "story" variable. The size of the circle indicates whether the particular theme was presented through plot development (big circle) or through tangential references (small circle). To continue a previous example, we can look again at the full diagram for *Dewa Ruci* (Figure 1.2). Here two themes are identified: spirituality (which is discussed through plot development) and politics (explored through a tangential reference in the comic interlude).

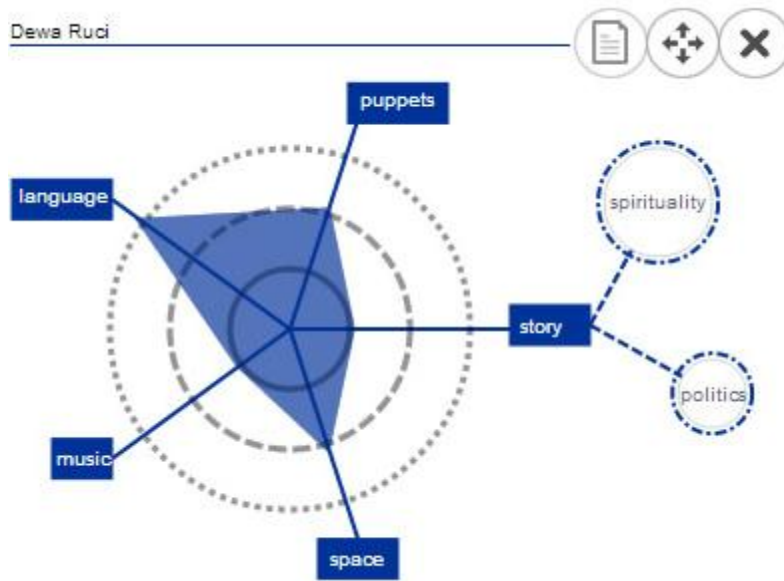


FIGURE 1.2 Full Diagram for *Dewa Ruci*.

By clicking on the circles, users can read the full texts that trace the themes across multiple performances. The subsections can be read on their own, or together as a whole chapter. In the same way as the texts that discuss the aesthetic variables of adaptation, the texts are selective readings of the performances and the readers will certainly identify omissions or excessive emphasis on certain ideas.

In my view, the texts and the diagrams complement each other, balancing out different objectives and possibilities, a point I expand in *Approach: An Essayistic Ontology*. When engaging with the ideas and assessing their limitations, I would like the reader to think of these texts as guide books. Like many guide books, they are selective and limited. But they can also be thought of as productive starting points for multiple journeys. In other words, they are

suggestions, and not absolute dictums. I hope that users will explore this digital dissertation with joyful *flânerie*. As Bruno Latour writes:

The advantage of a travel book approach over a 'discourse on method' is that it cannot be confused with the territory on which it simply overlays. A guide can be put to use as well as forgotten, placed in a backpack, stained with grease and coffee, scribbled all over, its pages torn apart to light a fire under a barbecue. In brief, it offers suggestion rather than imposing itself on the reader. (Latour 2007: 17)

I hope this invitation for *flânerie* will be facilitated by the digital platform I built for this dissertation, so that users can navigate from the performance diagrams to the texts and videos that constitute their analyses. *Selamat jalan!*



## Chapter 1: Methods and Contexts

### 1.1 Literature Review: What Other People Have Said About Wayang

#### Kontemporer

All interpretation places the interpreter in medias res and never at the beginning or the end. We suddenly arrive, as it were, in the middle of a conversation which has already begun and in which we try to orientate ourselves in order to be able to contribute to it.

Paul Ricoeur

Many of the works on wayang repeat clichés removed from reality, but at times, often in the midst of the clichés, there may be 'fresh' words that open up an aspect of the wayang performance, and some people are able to utter truthfully even the clichés, to rediscover how they connect to reality, how they can open it up. My own work is part of this diverse discourse.

Jan Mrázek

The study of the dalang has barely begun.

Clara van Groenendael

Finding a way to orient oneself within the vast literature on *wayang kulit*, within its ongoing conversation, might prove a daunting task. All the more so when one's aim is to contribute to it, to say something – however short and partial – that might add something to what has been said before. And yet, this possibility is sanctioned by some of the most renowned participants of the conversation, who readily acknowledge, it has "barely begun." These words, with which Groenendael concludes her sociological study on the figure of the *dalang*, are still able, 26 years later, to encourage further research by more recent observers like myself. In my attempt to contribute to this conversation, my goal is to compare the features of several *kontemporer* performances of the 21st century and to interpret what they say about life in contemporary Java. In order to link my research to previous scholarship, I present a literature review in this section.

There are very few scholarly works that deal with the kind of *kontemporer* performances I am researching, so I will presently consider a slightly larger scope, looking at that which has been said about *wayang* in recent times and about innovations within *wayang*. Since I am interested in developing a formal vocabulary to compare *kontemporer* performances, in this overview I identify the classification structures other researchers have used for describing

*wayang*. Another important objective of my research is to develop a framework to interpret what these performances say about contemporary Java; therefore, in this review I also identify how other researchers have addressed the connections between *wayang* and the contemporary world.

According to Clara van Groenendael, contemporary *wayang* has existed for at least 90 years; that is, since the creation of the first formal schools for the education of *dalang* in the 1920s (Groenendael 1985: 6-12). In these schools, the transmission of secret knowledge that defined *nyantrek* training, was replaced by a systematic, progressive, and formalistic approach that was influenced by western notions of art and of university level training.

These schools eventually paved the way for the modern day Institute Seni Indonesia (Indonesian School of the Arts, ISI) where students can obtain a University degree as a *sarjana muda pedalangan* (bachelor of *dalang* arts). As Clara van Groenendael notes, these schools played a key role in the development of the *dalang* as an artist (in a Western, contemporary sense). We can identify, as many observers have indeed done, artistry in the work of older *dalang*. However, probably neither he nor his cultural environment considered him primarily an artist; he was more closely aligned to a scholar and a religious officer. Groenendael links the emergence of *dalang* schools and the decline of the popularity of *wayang kulit* as a ritual form in the beginning of the 20th century.

Her analysis seems to suggest that his main competitors were not other artists, but other experts in secret knowledge (agricultural experts, for instance, whose products and advice would constitute a safer bet for successful crops than the *dalang's* incantations). For traditional *dalang*, the main challenge posed by modernization were the modern medicines and agricultural products and not mass media as one could readily infer.

Paradoxically, this situation gave great momentum to contemporary *dalang* to be considered artists. Groenendael's contemporary *dalang* was trained in institutions where he learned about the history of the form and about other types of puppet theatre. And he was encouraged to experiment, to display his art in competitions, galleries and theaters; as well as to travel and collaborate with other artists. In this way, the conceptualization of the performance changed. It was no longer (only) a ritual and the *dalang* was no longer (only) a mediator. The relationship between the *dalang* and the tradition had also changed. He was no longer the gatekeeper of the forms and traditions, a part of the long genealogy of performers who kept the old wisdom alive, but rather someone who used the tradition in non-ritual settings.

Other accounts of contemporary *dalang* focus more specifically on the aesthetic intentions of particular *dalang* or *wayang* forms. Laurie Jo Sears, writing in 1989, identified three types of contemporary “aesthetic displacements” in *wayang*. Unlike Groenendael, for Sears, contemporary *wayang* does not need to exist outside of ritual settings. In fact, her first

example of contemporary practice is *wayang ruwatan*, where *ruwatan* exorcism practices were integrated into *wayang* performances in Solo. Although both *ruwatan* and *wayang* were conventionally regarded as traditional, Sears interpreted their combination as an important and unprecedented innovation. The second type of performance she dealt with was *wayang rebo legi*, private performances organized by the famous Solonese performer Ki Anom Surata that included “changes in the oral tradition, changes in what is appropriate for certain scenes, changes in the characters who are allowed to fight together, or changes in the puppeteer's behavior during the performance” (Sears 1989: 123).

Nevertheless, these performances still required the conventional nine hours, as opposed to the third displacement she identified: *wayang padat*. This type of condensed performances never took more than two hours. According to her, this was developed by the Academy of Fine Arts in Solo (ASKI, the antecedent of the present-day Indonesian School of the Arts, ISI), for pedagogic and touring reasons; students were required to make their own *padat* version of a famous *lakon* (story) in their final year of study, and these versions were often used for productions touring Europe in the 1980s (Sears 1989: 133-4). However, according to Hardja Susilo, *padat* performances were not necessarily triggered for such reasons. He traced their development back to the 1940's and explained their origin primarily in relation to “cost-saving strategies” (Susilo 2002: 180), although he acknowledged that puppeteers have been using them for other reasons ever since, such as to let *wayang* keep

up with modern conceptions of the value of time, to intensify the dramatic content or to accommodate the short attention span of tourists.

Tim Byard-Jones, writing little over a decade after Sears had a different perspective. He felt confident dividing the *wayang* universe into “innovators” and “upholders of the great tradition” (Byard-Jones 2001: 43). Interestingly, although he was also retelling the story of the last fifty years of *wayang*, he classified Anom Suroto as an upholder of tradition (who was, as we have seen, Sears' prime example of a displacement). In any case, Byard-Jones had his own triadic classification for innovations or “new genres”: *wahyu*, *kancil* and *perjuangan*. The first one is a Christian *wayang* that uses *gamelan* music, and puppets inspired by the visual tradition of *wayang* to tell stories from the Bible. Polish ethnomusicologist Marzana Poplawska (2004) believes this is “an example of the vitality of traditional arts in Java, which unceasingly find new forms to manifest themselves” (Poplawska 2004: 200). The second type, *kancil*, narrates the stories of the Javanese mouse deer *kancil*. Byard-Jones says that this form was invented by Chinese-Indonesian Bah Bo Liem in the 1920s and developed by Ki Ledjar Subroto in the 1980s, who intended to “perform for audiences of young children in order to try to get them interested in *wayang* as an art form and to promote environmental awareness” (Byard-Jones 2001: 49). However, Ledjar himself claims to be the inventor of this form and says that Bah Bo Liem is a made-up character.

Ledjar is still active in Yogyakarta and, in Chapter 3, I will dedicate substantial attention to his performances (see Environment and Art). The third of Byard-Jones' genres is *perjuangan* (struggle), which tells about historical Indonesian figures in the fight for independence against the Dutch. Conversely, this *wayang* genre can also be used to retell Dutch history. An article in *The Jakarta Post* in March 2011 offered a chronicle of a *perjuangan* performance, which was commissioned by the Dutch Museum Nusantara to tell the story of William, the Prince of Oranje. The person in charge of making the puppets was none other than Ledjar Subroto, who lamented in the interview that the Dutch seem more keen on supporting *wayang* innovations than the Indonesians: "You know, there is no interest here in Indonesia. I am concerned about how to encourage our children and young generation to love *wayang* (Indah Setiawati 2011)."

Writing in the same year as Byard-Jones, Robert Petersen celebrated the innovations of Ki Nartosabdho, a *dalang* from Banyumas (Central Java), who is credited with the invention of particular Lakon Karangan (composed stories). In most of the other perspectives I will reference here, Nartosabdho is presented as an example of an old-fashioned *dalang*, and most of the young *dalang* I know would speak of him in the same way. However, as I mentioned in the Introduction, Petersen convincingly demonstrates that Nartosabdho's inclusion of unconventional, devised narratives into the traditional stories was considered highly innovative by many people (Petersen 2001: 106).

The following year Jan Mrázek edited a collection of essays about puppetry in contemporary Indonesia. Although the performances are not necessarily contemporary in nature, they take place in recent times. Some of them deal with performers that consider themselves (or are considered by others) traditional, but the essays pay significant attention to puppeteers that clearly refer to their own work as *kontemporer*. Rather than trying to identify clear-cut genres, in the fashion of the previous approaches, most of the essays in the book focus on the work and ideas of specific *dalang*, such as Slamet Gundono (who readers might remember from my Introduction), or visual artist Heri Dono, whose *Wayang Legenda* (1988) and *PhARTy Semar* (1994) are polemical “deconstructions” of *wayang*. Another *dalang* analyzed is Enthus Susmono, the “*dalang* superstar,” famous for combining Islamic proselytism and images from popular culture (such as Batman, Superman and Japanese Manga characters).

Susmono is a very controversial figure in Java and, since he is still very active, he will be a prominent character in this dissertation. Mrázek relates how Susmono enthusiastically spoke to him in an interview “about attracting high and powerful sponsors, speaking for the little people, and making his *wayang* explicitly Islamic.” Enthus is, according to him, “more than most *dalang*, interested in politics and in making both politics and Islam part of his performances. More than most *dalang*, he openly talks about *wayang* as a commercial enterprise” (Mrázek 2002: 20). Another *dalang* whose work is described is Sukasman, the creator of *Wayang Ukur*, which literally means



"measured *wayang*," and consists of "a fine art presentation by an individual artist" (Susilo 2002: 179).

Sukasman, who passed away in 2009, was an expert puppet maker who traveled to the US and Europe and was inspired to incorporate modern art ideas into *wayang*. In a *Wayang Ukur* show, the audience was expected to sit quietly, as they would do in a Western-style theatre. Three *dalang* simultaneously manipulated the puppets, and their combined efforts allowed for a wide variety of visual effects. Sukasman didn't control the puppets directly, but rather instructed the three *dalang* – in this sense he was the "*dalang* behind the *dalang*" – and his role was probably comparable to that of a contemporary theatre director (Susilo 2002: 179-188). I will argue in Aesthetics that contemporary *wayang* has a huge artistic debt to him that has not been fully recognized.

Jan Mrázek's *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre* focuses on many aspects that had not been contemplated in previous scholarship. These include an extensive study of the performance itself, the music, the words used, the puppets' movements and the night atmosphere of a performance. He is concerned with performance in the present: "The focus of this study is the present. In most cases, when I refer to the past, I mean the immediate past (which is chronologically as vague as 'the present') to which the present directly relates and reacts. (Mrázek 2005: 362). However, it is still concerned with notions of 'traditional' performances in the contemporary world. In order

to explain what he means by this he refers to a performance where the electricity went out and yet, no one even considered using a traditional oil lamp:

Thus, when I speak of a traditional performance [...] I mean something that is thoroughly in the present, is dependent on various developments in the present world (such as electricity) and indeed is built up in such a way that it would not hold together without (for instance) electricity. What I mean by traditional, and that the traditional is embedded in the present, must be kept in mind to understand this discussion correctly (Mrázek 2005: 504).

The last chapter in his book deals specifically with the clown scenes and he pays sufficient attention to the specific performances of innovative puppeteers such as Ki Joko Edan, Ki Enthus Susmono and other, less innovative ones, such as Manteb Soedarsono and Anom Suroto, looking at polemic innovations but remaining neutral to them:

But I, unlike most Javanese observers, do not say  
and do not question whether the developments  
are good or bad. I am saying that the coherent  
structure of a *wayang* performance is of a  
somewhat different nature than a potpurri of

attractions, and it is in the world differently  
(Mrázek 2005: 505).

Mathew Isaac Cohen has written about contemporary *wayang* in global contexts, providing an excellent overview of 20th century experiments carried out by foreigners and Indonesians using *wayang kulit* from Java and Bali. Since my present dissertation only deals with Javanese *wayang*, many of his examples fall outside the scope of my research. For him, the Javanese innovators worth mentioning include of Suprpto Suryodarmo, whose *Wayang Buddha* integrated Buddhist stories at the Indonesian School of the Arts (Surakarta) in the 1970s, and Nanag HaPe, who collaborated with the Netherlands-based jazz ensemble Nunuck Purwanto and the Helsdingen Trio and Indonesian *gamelan* musicians to create *Mahabharata Jazz and Wayang*, which was presented in the 2004 Athens Olympics (Cohen 2007: 358-359).

Cohen also refers to Suwijo Tejo, who combines traditional *wayang* with “guitar-driven folk fusion music and contemporary theatrical dramaturgy,” as he “integrates metaphysical speculation and political commentary with the surreal” (Cohen 2007: 360). Students and educated elite love him although people don't always appreciate his interpretations of the tradition, such as “casting Rahwana as the hero of the Ramayana” (Cohen 2007: 360). Cohen's study also refers to Slamet Gundono, Sukasman, and Enthus Susmono. His concluding remark is that:

radical innovators have probably always existed within Javanese and Balinese *wayang* traditions [...] The difference is that today's innovators operate in a globalized marketplace of ideas, techniques and technologies [...] Contemporary *wayang* artists such as Sujiwo Tejo, Heri Dono, and Slamet Gundono create new work with national and international audiences in mind, cultivate networks of international patronage, benefit from professional development outside Indonesia, and readily collaborate with artists from around the world (Cohen 2007: 362).

Indeed, innovation has probably always been part of the tradition; it is the context for such innovations that has changed.

In a more recent piece of writing (2014), Cohen distinguishes between traditional and post-traditional puppetry in Indonesia, describing the work of Seno Nugroho (an example of the former category) and his own collaborations with Catur “Benyek” Kuncoro and Eko Nugroho (an example of the latter).

In this overview I have highlighted how different categorizations are used within *wayang* scholarship and the way researchers interpret these performances in relation to cultural developments in Java. What other people have contributed to the study of *wayang* will continue to inform my investigation of *wayang kontemporer*. However since my objective is to talk about the new ethical and aesthetic values of specific *wayang* performances, my approach differs from most of the scholarship I have reviewed in three ways. First, I am interested in an in-depth analysis of specific *wayang*

*kontemporer* performances. In previous scholarship, *wayang kontemporer* performances are often described in general terms (i.e., in relation to their entire *oeuvre* or their general philosophy of *wayang*), but longer, more detailed performance analyses are lacking. Second, I am interested in finding a structured vocabulary to identify formal and thematic patterns across a wide range of performances, not just classifying new genres. Third, I am especially interested in the role of new media in *wayang kontemporer* performances and in what digital research methods can bring to the study of *wayang*. In Positionality: Researching Wayang as a Digital Archivist, I describe my vantage point in more detail and in Approach: An Essayistic Ontology I translate this into the methodological approach that guided this dissertation.

## 1.2 Positionality: Researching Wayang as a Digital Archivist

In my first trip to Java, I wanted to become a *dalang*. My most recent trips have been defined by the pursuit of a PhD degree. There are some similarities in my two desires to become something else, or rather something more. In the felicitous accomplishment of either of these endeavors, I would undergo a change in status and gain social recognition. In both cases, my name would grow: two letters would be prepended to it. If a certain community of people would recognize my work (i.e. my performances), I would become *ki* Miguel, if another community would validate my work (i.e. my dissertation), I would become Dr. Escobar. Although I have shifted my focus and objectives, my daily activities in Java have not changed much over the past six years.

In other words, although the objectives and outcome are different, in pursuing my desires to become something more, I have carried out the same set of activities for the past six years: taking pictures, buying puppets, taking lessons, talking to people, drinking industrial amounts of sweet tea, recording performances, translating texts and writing down notes on my laptop. In one case, I was performing and learning to perform, while in the other, I was building an archive and writing a dissertation. So, this leads me to pose the following, seemingly inconsequential question: is performing different from archiving?

Although many people would protest at the question and would say *it depends!*, I would like to consider two interesting answers to this question. The short answer is yes. The long answer is no. I will use these possible answers as a starting point for reflecting on the methodological implications of researching a performance tradition. But first, let's consider what the word archiving means.

According to Derrida, the word comes from the Greek word *arkheion*, which referred to the residence of the superior magistrates or *archons*. This was a place where the official documents were filed and the *archons* possessed the archives and the right to interpret them (Derrida 1996: 91). Diana Taylor suggests a different etymology, stating it comes from the Greek word *arkhe*, which “means a beginning, the first place, the government” (Taylor 2003: 19). This leads her to conclude that “the archival, from the beginning, sustains power” (Taylor 2003: 19), which is not dissimilar to Derrida's contention. The possible meanings of this word 3000 years before the invention of YouTube should not necessarily matter to us today. Words are notoriously plastic in their meanings and their Greek origins are not always illuminating. However, sometimes the origins of words do provide interesting historical background.

The idea of the archive as an expression of power seemed to be integral to thinking about archives for a long time. A similar argument seems to be present in the reflections of Foucault, who describes the archive as “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 1972: 130).

However, his notion of the archive encompasses many different practices. As Mike Featherstone points out, the Foucauldian notion of the archive “has a virtual existence and amounts to the system which governs the emergence of enunciations” (Featherstone 2000: 169).

It is worth interrogating the validity of these claims in a time when people in many parts of the world are constantly engaging in self-archiving projects. This has been facilitated by the availability of cameras, smartphones and web platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. In our times, the distinction between those with power to archive and those without it requires a nuanced understanding. Of course, we could still identify the mechanisms of power at work, arguing that YouTube is owned by the biggest company in the history of the planet or by pointing to the gross inequalities of the “digital divide” that allow some people to archive themselves 24/7, whereas others have to walk several kilometers to the nearest computer. True as this may be, there is a more complicated distribution of power than the ones implied by the theorists quoted above. In this writing, I aim to show that the availability of technology and the naturalization of everyday archiving practices complicate the relationship between archiving and performance. As Derrida himself would concede: “that which is archived differently is lived differently” (Derrida 1996: 18). But let us start with an exploration of how an archive differs from a performance.



## The Impossibility of Archiving Performance

A succinct distinction between archives and performances can be found in Diana Taylor's classical distinction of the archive and the repertoire. "Insofar as it constitutes materials that seem to endure, the archive exceeds the live" (Taylor 2003: 19). In contrast, the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (Taylor 2003: 20). Although this opposition seems absolute at first glance, she does allow for two complicating factors.

The first one is that power permeates both: there are state-sanctioned repertoires and official archives that are expressions of power. Likewise, there are subversive repertoires and unofficial archives that aim at destabilizing or at least offering alternatives to the ones sanctioned by official power. The other complicating factor is that differences between the two are not always absolute, and they are connected to one another in a dynamic relationship. Despite considering this complexity, Taylor still maintains a division:

The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire) (Taylor 2003: 20).

A starker, but similar, distinction was poetically, and famously, elaborated by Peggy Phelan:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance (Phelan 1993: 146).

In a controversy that has been well documented and which is often revisited, this argument was notably contested by Phillip Auslander who aimed to “destabilize these theoretical oppositions of the live and the mediatized” (Auslander 1999: 48). He suggests that “it is not at all clear that live performance has a distinctive ontology” (Auslander 1999: 57).

Mediatized forms like film and video can be shown to have the same ontological characteristic as live performance, and live performance can be used in ways indistinguishable from the uses generally associated with mediatized forms. Therefore, ontological analysis does not provide a basis for privileging live performance as an oppositional discourse (Auslander 1999: 184)

In her 2010 book on Cyborg Performance, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck historicizes this controversy and labels it a “dated” disagreement, suggesting that history has sided with Auslander and confessing to a “tacit acceptance of Auslander's argument” that the live is already mediatized “in the contemporary moment of globalized technology” (Parker-Starbuck 2010: 9). Although she is admittedly

seduced by Phelan's concepts, she ascribes to them little more than a nostalgic and historical interest, when she identifies her own “desires to use the term ‘live’ as Peggy Phelan does, to mean a bodily presence” (Parker-Starbuck 2010: 9). Contrary to Parker-Starbuck's approach, I would suggest that Phelan's critique can be used to do more than just recuperate the notion of bodily presence. Despite the fact that the debate has been documented extensively (Dixon 2007, Gieseckam 2007 and Reinelt and Roach 2007), the important questions raised by Phelan have not been settled once and for all and any archiving practice needs to take her provocations seriously. If we are to build an archive of performance recordings we need to ask ourselves: what will be lost and what will be misrepresented in the archive?

In order to answer this, let us consider the specific kind of archive that I am talking about. As I mentioned in the introduction, a substantial part of my PhD fieldwork involved traveling around Java to find existing recordings of *wayang kontemporer* performances. In some cases, I was given the raw video materials and I had to edit them myself. For five of the performances, I was in charge of the recording and the editing from the very beginning. I then added English subtitles to all twenty-four performances and designed a website in order to display the videos, subtitles and my translation notes. Against the backdrop of Peggy Phelan's arguments, what are we to make of these edited, digitized and subtitled traces of a live performance? Moving away from the terrain of purely ideological critique, we might take a moment to consider the practical considerations of putting an archive together, which can help us further

identify the differences between a live performance and a recording. The following remarks are inspired by my own archival practice.

There are at least four specific differences worth discussing between watching a performance live and the watching it on video. First, video fails to take into account the “atmosphere” of the performance. As Catherine Diamond notes:

Only by watching performances in situ, among the spectators for whom they are intended, do we get a feel for the theatre's cultural import as a creative response to the social changes being experienced by both spectators and performers (Diamond 2012: 22).

Jan Mrázek says something similar in his examination of the differences between watching *wayang* live or on television (or on a computer screen for that matter). In the latter case(s) we are not physically present at the place of the performance and this means we only experience audio-visually what is in reality a multi-sensorial event. The haptic and olfactory qualities of the performance, such as the temperature and scents (or smells) of the venue, the food we eat and the drinks we consume, are absent from these recordings. The same is true for the conversations that are part of watching *wayang* in situ, which do not get transferred to the televised experience. According to Mrázek and his Javanese informants, these aspects are not superfluous elements, but integral precursors to the joy of watching *wayang* live:

Part of the pleasure of watching *wayang* directly, it is emphasized, is talking to people, meeting new friends, and eating or drinking together in the stalls that surround the performance area, and this experience is lost, or altered, when *wayang* is seen on television (Mrázek 2002: 340)

Another difference between live and mediatized performances is that performances can be changed for the sake of the recording, when they are staged specifically for the cameras. Felicia Hughes-Freeland talks about an *arja* performance in Bali that was recorded for State Television. She interviews two people who describe how the live and the recorded performances differed from one another: the technical precision was higher in the recorded one, but this one did not allow for improvisation and interaction with the spectators. The live performance was also “livelier” (Hughes-Freeland 2009: 56). To her surprise, however, her informants considered the mediatized performance as having more *taksuh*, a term she translates as “the power of the performance endorsed by supernatural forces” (Hughes-Freeland 2009: 56). The mediatized version had greater ritual potency and was superior to the other in some technical aspects. Sometimes, as these commentaries suggest, recordings are not necessarily worse or less complete. As I will explore later, recordings can sometimes be considered better than the live performances.

Another thing to take into account is the fact that a video represents what is just a snapshot of an ongoing process of constant change. Sarah Jones, Daisy Abbott and Seamus Ross explain that:

Archives tend to focus on a single end product, yet performances are constantly in a state of becoming and have no definable end. The archive consequently enforces a false sense of completeness on a performance event that is part of a much wider work. It is impractical to separate individual instantiations of a performance from the process of their creation and unrepresentative to force them to fit this model of archives (Jones et al 2009: 160).

In other words, open-ended and ongoing processes become fixed. However, it can be argued that most spectators only watch an instance of a performance and do not witness the entire process of transformation in which that particular event partakes.

Hughes-Freeland identifies a point similar to that of Jones et al when she suggests these performances, by virtue of being recorded, acquire an “exemplary nature” (Hughes-Freeland 2009: 57). Subsequent viewers of the recording could be misled to believe the recording represents the most common characteristics of the specific show, since “it will be seen repeatedly.” This is perhaps more applicable to traditional performances than to contemporary ones. People will not necessarily think that a *wayang kontemporer* recording has exemplary value for the whole of *wayang*, but they

might believe that is what a particular *dalang's* work is always like. In the early days of Wayang Hip Hop, I remember inviting a friend to watch one of their performances. She had only seen poorly made YouTube clips and was reluctant to join me. However, when I showed her a better recording, which was not available online at the time, her attitude changed and she decided to join me in the end. This just stresses the same point; namely, that recorded performances give a limited view of long and dynamic processes.

Watching through a screen also differs from the embodied way of looking at a live performance. Jan Mrázek addresses this by describing the way in which both his informants and Maurice Merleau-Ponty talk about perception. Perception, according to the French philosopher, cannot be cut apart from movement and from our bodies. Perception is situated and embodied. Of course, when we watch a performance on a computer or television screen, we are not having a “disembodied” experience. Not being physically present at the performance just means we are physically present somewhere else – that other place will still be a venue full of multi-sensorial stimuli, and even if we do not use our bodies to move around, we will still interact with a computer mouse, touchscreen or remote control. However, the way in which we look at the performance is different because “perception is no longer what Merleau-Ponty claims it to be [...] [b]etween my body and the world there is television” (Mrázek 2002: 338). That which is to be looked at has been pre-selected by the cameraman and the editors.

The problem is that television represents my eyes, but it sees differently than me; it “edits” differently than I “edit” what I see. One reason why television, compared to myself, is a bad “editor” is because it is not me: I choose myself what I look at, on the basis of what I see, while television chooses that for me, as my deputy, and its choices are not always the choices I would make, and, more importantly, the whole process of seeing is different, as is my involvement in the process (Mrázek 2002: 350).

As Mrázek shows, sometimes editing is done in a way which is different from our personal preferences. Some of his interlocutors, notably angered by this situation, described the editors and cameramen as “tyrants” or “idiots” who didn't understand *wayang*. Sometimes his interlocutors said that watching *wayang* on television was like following a jumping squirrel (*bajing loncat*), since the close ups carelessly pieced together resemble the travels of this jumpy creature from branch to branch. He concedes that watching *wayang* is not exactly like this, but that this metaphor does provide insight into the differences between experiencing a performance live and through television.

Besides the obvious downside, his interlocutors also identify a variety of advantages to watching *wayang* on a screen. On the upside, it affords the



spectators the convenience of not having to travel to the performance and of being physically present somewhere else. Although this is not applicable to television, we could add to the list the fact that, in the case of the archive, recorded videos allow us to study *wayang* better, since we can rewind and replay different fragments.

If we are aware of all these differences and treat them with creativity, awareness and humbleness, making and archiving videos of performances has extraordinary possibilities for the academic discourse on the performing arts. They can enable us to convey more complete renderings of the performances that we would be able to achieve through writing alone. This is already impacting the ways in which knowledge about the performing arts is being produced. However, a more profound revolution of the ways in which performance studies research is conceived and practised is perhaps in store.

This does not mean that writing will be displaced. Writing (and other modes of description) can help to partially direct the attention of the viewers to the things that are lost in the recordings, which were considered above: the fact that they are snapshots of longer processes, the impact of editing, and the differences in multi-sensorial perception they entail. Writing also highlights the discursive aspect of performance, putting the performance into interaction with discourses not necessarily part of the performance. This dissertation combines texts, diagrams and audiovisual excerpts. In the texts, I try to account for all the things that the videos alone cannot. For this reason, I place a heavy

emphasis on anecdotal narratives in my introductions to each of the sections of Chapter 2. Through writing, we can point to, if not fully recuperate, those elements of the experience that might be lost and humbly accept that our editing and selection process might not be the best one – in the minds of the users of the archive. We can be reminded of the words of Jones et al:

The temporal nature of performance causes tension: the fear of loss leads to an urgent desire to counter this through documenting, while the loss inherent in this process leaves many dissatisfied with the outcome (Jones et al 2009: 167).

This, of course, applies to video as much as it applies to writing or other modes of documentation. However, I will insist that video offers important advantages to just writing about performance in general and about *wayang* specifically. Henrik Kleinsmiede's review of the Dutch scholarship on *wayang* diagnoses it with a severe case of “mentalism,” that is, an emphasis on reason and language. He then links this to contemporary scholarship, which also shares with previous colonial commentary four characteristics he lists disapprovingly:

(1) a continuing dominance of mentalism (to the detriment of the body), (2) a belief that only the

linguistic and symbolic can articulate [the performance's] meaning, (3) the development of a very specific genre of writing (academic literacy), and (4) a subsequent (over)reliance on printed media (Kleinsmiede 2002: 65).

His prescription against these evils of academic writing is a dose of affective writing which he describes as “novelistic,” as opposed to the heavily nominalized and impersonal voices that dominate *wayang* discourse.

By novelistic I mean writing intended to impact upon the body as well as the mind (that speaks to emotions as well as to the intellect) and in which the personal voice/perspective is not lost but actively celebrated (Kleinsmiede 2002: 61).

I agree both with his invitation to write in a more affective mode and with his remark that probably the only book in the entire academic corpus on *wayang* to have achieved this is Jan Mrázek's *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre* (Kleinsmiede 2002: 60). Kleinsmiede also identifies another strategy to move away from mentalism: relying on audiovisual media to recreate “a multitextured semiotic that includes sound, vision, taste, and even the olfactory” (Kleinsmiede 2002: 60). The material in this interactive dissertation stops at the second sense he mentions, but I agree with his hopeful remark that:

Perhaps this essay shouldn't even be here... it might be better placed elsewhere, in another mode, and possibly one not yet invented. In the interim, it might be better placed on the internet (Kleinsmiede 2002: 39).

This dissertation tries to take on Kleinsmiede's suggestion and provide for the kind of affective and sensorial experiences that writing alone might fail to do. The reader will be the judge of the extent to which this goal is achieved.

Thus far, I have illustrated the key problems and advantages of using video. I will contend, however, that the advantages greatly outnumber the pitfalls, especially when used wisely and humbly; that is, when explanations accompany the visual material, directing attention to things not captured by the recordings. However, even if we are able to account for all the problems and advantages of using video from a technical perspective, there is another set of issues that we need to be careful about and these relate to the ethics of representation.

Those engaged in researching other cultures have to deal with these questions, one way or another. How is it possible to represent the *others*, without committing the easy mistakes of either excessive reductionism or 'otherizing practices' and without the cultural insensitivity of glossing over important

differences? How can we be respectful and yet acknowledge that we want to say something about 'other' modes of making sense of the world and that we find these interesting, partially, because of their difference?

Dwight Conquergood identified four capital sins into which we can easily fall when we are studying and representing those from whom we have an "aesthetic distance." These sins are the custodian's rip-off, the enthusiast's infatuation, the skeptic's cop-out and the curator's exhibitionism (Conquergood 1985: 1). He suggests a diagram where these are plotted against two axes: identity versus difference and detachment versus commitment. In the center, lies the happy dream of a dialogical performance: a true conversation (Figure 1.3).

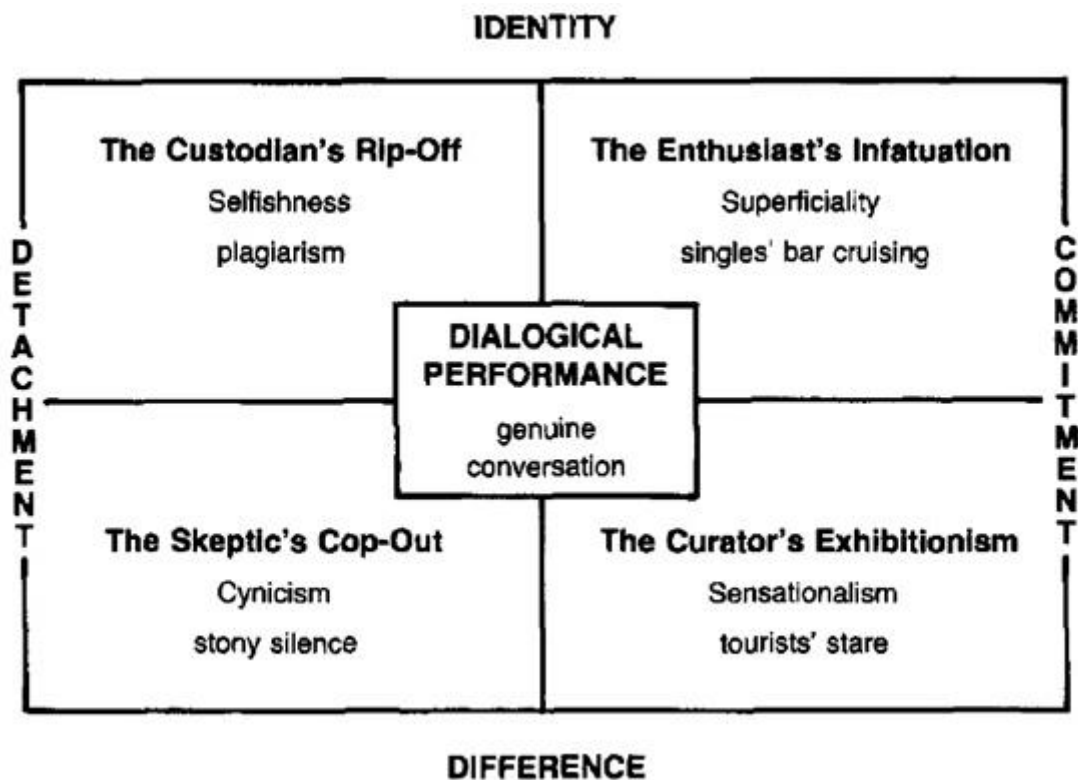


FIGURE 1.3 Dwight Conquertood's diagram for dialogic performance.

I must confess I have incurred all four at different stages of my research (and perhaps continue to do so). But the curator is the one that applies the most to the problems inherent in archiving: isolating and codifying the experiences of others and presenting them to people who are in faraway places. The results of this attitude:

[R]esemble curio postcards, souvenirs, trophies  
brought back from the tour for display cases.  
Instead of bringing us into genuine contact (and  
risk) with the lives of strangers, performances in  
this mode bring back museum exhibits, mute  
and staring (Conquergood 1985: 7).

There are many important ways in which it is different to write a digital dissertation about *wayang* than it is to talk about the Hmong refugees in the US (which is what Conquergood had in mind at the time of his writing): one such difference is that the creators of the *kontemporer* performances fully understand the ways in which their work will be represented; the other is that they are extremely familiar with archiving practices. Even in cases where the *dalang* have not recorded their own work directly, their performances are often seen by at least one camera eye: cameras and smartphones are ubiquitous in Indonesia (the country with the highest number of BlackBerry users in the world) and people often upload those pictures to YouTube and

Facebook (Indonesia also boasts the third largest population on Facebook). In many ways, cities in Java are a lot more mediatized than certain places in Europe. Internet access is ubiquitous and it is not impolite to look at your smartphone when you are having a conversation. Therefore, it is also sensible not to exaggerate the application of Conquergood's claims to this case, where there is no excessive 'aesthetic distance' between the researcher and the artists.

At least consciously, I believe none of my words could be interpreted in a way that would deny the *dalang* "membership in the same moral community as ourselves" (Conquergood 2007: 7), which is the basic flaw of exhibitionist curators. And yet, as I mentioned earlier, I am constantly expressing and celebrating their difference. Granting others both difference and equality is a fine line to tread, and it can only be achieved through the dialogical performance that Conquergood suggests. These are not merely theoretical concerns since they are reflected in the specific framing and presentation practices carried out by scholars and archivists. We should certainly be accountable for our presentation and research practices. In which ways, then, can I guarantee that the dissertation is consistent with dialogic performance?

I have tried to address this by returning continuously to Java after my initial fieldwork, discussing my approach, and showing this website to the *dalang*. I have also organized discussions with Indonesian academics and artists at the Indonesian Visual Arts Archive (IVAA), which is a partner institution for the

hosting of the Contemporary Wayang Archive. Conquergood suggests that doing research and presenting its findings are never passive activities. The performative turn in anthropology (to which Conquergood's writing contributed) stresses that research and research-presentation are necessarily performative. In a similar vein, we should recognize that archiving is also performative in a similar sense: it is never passive, nor transparent. Jones et al sum this up in the following way:

Arguably, all archiving is performance: records are surrogates that provide a window onto past moments that can never be recreated, and users interact with these records in a performance to reinterpret this past (Jones et al 2009: 166).

We have thus reached the long answer, *performing is not completely different from archiving*. Collecting and organizing records are also performative activities in the way some anthropologists and other social scientists have suggested; that is, the creation of knowledge is constructed and brought into existence through interactions between research participants and researchers. This constructed, active aspect of knowledge formation is highlighted in the engagement with a digital archive. Users are never passively consuming the archive; by reading subtitles and videos, fast forwarding and rewinding and re-watching the fragments, they are also constructing their own meaning. Jones



et al go as far as to suggest that a digital archive is a set of codes that exists only virtually and is only 'performatively' brought into visibility every time the code is executed: "digital records are inherently performative, only coming into existence when the correct code executes the data to render a meaningful output (Jones et al 2009: 170)."

To be performative, in this interpretation, means recognizing the constructedness of knowledge generation and presentation. Though this claim is haunted by a sense of limitation, in its acceptance, we can also find a path towards creative inclusivity and dialogue. In other words, we can and must continuously find new ways of incorporating other points of view that pay due justice to the specificity of that which is being presented. The archive should be in a state of constant change and self-reflexivity, as Jones et al suggest: "To maintain its significance, the archive, like a language, must be open to change and remain in active use" (Jones et al 2009: 169).

I agree fully with this last remark and this website has benefited from the active use by different people who have provided me with feedback, both in relation to its appearance and its conceptual underpinnings. However, the questions I examine in this section are not fully settled, once and for all. I don't think that a performance archive can ever fully resolve the tension with its others (the live performance and the cultural context from where the material comes from). At best, those tensions can be highlighted and critically explored, which is what I do, both here and throughout the dissertation. In the next section, I

describe the specific practices of archiving that I carried out and the ways in which they helped me refine my methodological approach.

### 1.3 Approach: An Essayistic Ontology

The objective of this dissertation is to explain *wayang kontemporer*. This requires analyzing the issues raised by the performances and describing the ways in which the *wayang* tradition is re-interpreted in them. In order to accomplish this, I traveled through Java, talking to people, trying to learn different skills and making audiovisual records of these performances.

My personal answer to the question "what is *wayang kontemporer*?" is somewhere in those records and those experiences. But how can I communicate it? Several approaches are possible. A very straightforward solution would have been to analyze each performance individually. However, I chose a comparative approach since I believe that highlighting the internal differences and similarities between a set of performances reveals more about the ways they are made and the meanings they can take in their context. Often, things don't reveal themselves in isolation as clearly as they do when they are juxtaposed. The variety of *wayang* characters attests to this very fact; Pak Parjaya often said that you can only appreciate the nuanced moral behavior of the Pandawa (who are all "good" characters) when contrasted against each other. *Wayang kontemporer* performances are similar to one another yet profoundly diverse. The tension between that similarity and difference is part of what makes these performances compelling to watch and to analyze. Therefore, this is what this analysis will focus on.

As preparation for developing a framework for this comparative endeavor, I made extensive notes as I talked to people and watched performances (both live and on video). As I reviewed those notes, patterns of connection and divergence slowly started to arise. Gradually, a series of analytical categories emerged from those comparative notes. Some of them are thematic and some of them are formal. In the introduction, I have already specified the usefulness of this distinction, arguing that for historical and cultural reasons, it is a valid and productive way to approach these performances in Indonesia.

In order to represent the analytical categories, I drew diagrams and wrote long texts about each of the categories. These two activities are complementary but they also entail very different intellectual operations. The diagrams isolate, the texts bring together. The diagrams are visual, spatial representations of isomorphic qualities (each diagram is constructed according to the same parameters and rules). The texts are associative and sequential. They explore a "quality" or an idea as it changes across the different performances, following minute transformations of emphasis, and adjusting definitions and theories in order to trace these slight metamorphoses and accents of meaning. In my mind there is no contradiction between these methods. But I have learned that not everyone is sympathetic to this approach, perhaps because many people don't readily see the connection between both things. Some people won't like the diagrams, no matter how hard I try to justify their usage. Others won't see the need for this excessively apologetic exegesis. Perhaps, the diagrams and the texts are indicative of two different academic

approaches to the study of culture. One is formalist, the other interpretive. This difference is reminiscent of that which Dwight Conquergood identified, following Michel de Certeau, between the map and the story.

[Michel] de Certeau's aphorism, 'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across' points to transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract – 'the map'; the other practical, embodied, and popular – 'the story.' This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies research. Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized in the academy (Conquergood 2007: 369-70).

This would suggest that performance scholars would be sensitive to the combination of both approaches, of an attempt to bridge the apparent objectivity of the diagram (or map) and the interpretive freedom of the essay (or the story). But this is not always the case, and my approach has often been criticized on epistemological grounds. The criticism I receive is akin to the points of contention raised by other projects that use digital technologies. The opposition between different ways of conceptualizing the aim of studying culture is at the heart of debates stirred up by digital humanities (DH) projects such as this dissertation. In order to provide a response to these points of contention, I will briefly consider some of the key aspects of the digital humanities debate.

There is no unitary understanding of what constitutes the digital humanities. However, most genealogies trace it back to the work of Roberto Busa, a Jesuit priest who used early computers in the 1940s in order to identify concordances in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Today, the DH are generally understood to denote the usage of digital technologies to carry out research in the humanities, regardless of the specific methods or aims of that research. Many projects depend on the usage of statistical or other computational methods in order to analyze cultural production. This side of the DH has received wide media coverage due to high-profile projects such as the Google ngram viewer (Michel et al 2011). For other scholars, the DH imply analyzing the ways digital technologies have influenced cultural production. As Dave Parry notes: "There are at least two digital humanisms: one that sees the digital as a set of tools to be applied to humanistic inquiry (design, project, tools, data) and another that sees the digital as an object of study (social media, digital games, mobile computing)" (Parry 2012: 436). As Johanna Drucker notes:

[M]uch of the intellectual charge against digital humanities has come from the confrontation between the seemingly ambiguous nature of imaginative artifacts and the requirements for formal dis-ambiguation essential for data structures and schema (Drucker 2004: 433).

Johanna Drucker herself has suggested a middle road, a combination of digital technologies and interpretive ludism she terms "speculative computing" and playfully describes as a combination of "generative aesthetics, pataphysics, speculative thought and quantum poetics" (Drucker 2004: 433). As she suggests:

Current methods don't allow much flexibility - a little like learning to dance by fitting your feet to footsteps molded into concrete. Speculative computing suggests that the concrete be replaced by plasticine that remains malleable, receptive to the traces of interpretative moves (Drucker 2004: 433).

I also struggle with these opposing needs. Classifying a performance as traditional or not requires cutting through a terrain fraught with certain ambiguity and subject to different opinions. I acknowledge this disambiguation as an interpretive act and, like Drucker, I try to balance playfulness and computing muscle. My own solution was to develop an essayistic ontology. By this I mean that I combine a structured systematic information schema (called an ontology in computer science) and an essayistic approach. I think of the essay as a literary genre that is a playful attempt at explaining an idea based on subjective experience and associative thinking.

In the rest of this section I describe what is an ontology and spotlight some epistemological issues that can be raised against them from traditional humanistic approaches (see Drucker 2004). Then I present an overview of the literary essay as I will apply it here. Lastly, I describe the way in which these two different approaches come together in my approach.

### Classification and its Discontents

According to Sperberg-McQueen all works of scholarship imply some level of classification. At the most general level, all inquiries in the humanities are the result of a classification process that distinguishes that which is relevant to the research from that which is not. Therefore, classification is "hardly distinguishable from coherent discourse in general" (Sperberg-McQueen 2004: 161).

My goal is to explain aspects of the performances in a way that is systematic, comparative, and at the same time subjective and flexible. I will call this a subjective data scheme. My approach won't be without its critics and I suspect many readers will remain unconvinced by my choices. However, I have tried to consider objections to this approach seriously. The following paragraphs are a result of these considerations. I address several issues that for historical and epistemological reasons should force any budding taxonomer of Indonesian theatre to pause and consider such an approach carefully and skeptically. I have identified three arguments against classification that I wish to address: 1) it limits any humanistic investigation, 2) it is a limited lens to appreciate the



experience of a theatre performance, and 3) it bears the imprint of colonial endeavors.

Philosophers have rightly observed that all humanistic inquiries (and perhaps any inquiry of any kind) suffer from the simplification imposed on them by classifications. Edgar Morin decries this as a "blind intelligence" that results from segmenting complexity:

What is complexity? At first glance, complexity is a fabric (complexus: that which is woven together), of heterogeneous constituents that are inseparably associated: complexity poses the paradox of the one and the many. Next, complexity is in fact the fabric of events, actions, interactions, retroactions, determinations, and chance that constitute our phenomenal world. But complexity presents itself with the disturbing traits of a mess, of the inextricable, of disorder, of ambiguity, of uncertainty. Hence the necessity to put phenomena in order by repressing disorder, by pushing aside the uncertain. In other words, to select the elements of order and certainty, and to eliminate ambiguity, to clarify, distinguish, and hierarchize. But such operations, necessary for

intelligibility, risk leading us to blindness if they  
eliminate other characteristics of the complexus.  
And in fact, as I have argued, they have made us  
blind (Morin 2008: 5).

The paragraph above perfectly captures the complexity of *wayang* and the way I am approaching it, forsaking the richness of the complexus for the benefit of intelligibility. But is there a way to follow this approach without being oblivious to this blindness? Morin himself offers an answer, a possibility for a self-reflexive epistemology. By weaving "a principle of uncertainty and self-reference" into the fabric of the complexus, the researcher's analysis would retain "a self-critical and self-reflective principle" (Morin 2008: 27).

In my own project, the principles of uncertainty and self-reference guide the writing of the different sections. I continuously describe my own position, experiences and doubts as I analyze the performances. In doing so, I believe my writing participates in the self-critical and self-reflexive principle identified by Morin.

Thus far, I have argued that it is possible to say something about a complex reality through a simplifying approach. But does this general consideration prove useful when analyzing theatre performances? Isn't theatre itself an experience that is best approached by means that don't cut reality up? Theatre scholars have been divided on that matter for a long time. Theatre studies as

a specific discipline is of modern invention, which can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century (Jackson 2004: 40) but writing about theatre has a long history. In the western tradition, Aristotle was the first person to write a systematic description of theatre. His analysis is meant as descriptive and impartial, not unlike much of Aristotle's other works. As theatre scholars well know, when this text was rediscovered in the European Renaissance by figures such as Julius Caesar Scaliger and Ludovico Castelvetro, narrow interpretations of the text led to heated disputes about the form theatre should take. The passionate exchanges between prescriptive academics and innovation-infatuated artists often led to public and legal confrontations. Most notable amongst these is perhaps the curious episode where Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* was declared by the L'Académie Française to violate the Aristotelian principle of verisimilitude and unworthy of public performance (McConachie 2006: 184).

This story sets a good precedent for the reasons anyone attempting to study theatre should be careful of not making too prescriptive an argument. In many ways, performance studies is a reaction against classification, favoring instead a "broad spectrum" approach. This is expressed most clearly by the fluid notion of *performance*, an "essentially contested subject" to use the often quoted formulation from Strine *et al* (1990: 183). The lack of clarity in the classification of culture, of what exactly constitutes a performance and what doesn't, is what is productive about performance studies. As much as I can appreciate the possibilities of such an approach, I would contend that this also presents a perennial problem for any performance studies approach. Any research within

this discipline needs to explain, at least tacitly, what accent of meaning of the word performance is used. In that sense, classification shows up again as a necessary ordering principle, a denial of classifications can only go so far before a shortcircuit of meaning ends up summoning it again. Instead, I propose grabbing the epistemological bull by the horns and trying to seek clarity about the ways in which classification, and other intellectual operations, will come to inform the analysis being developed. According to Stephen Ramsay, it is this drive towards making methods explicit that sets DH projects apart from other projects in the humanities. He suggests thinking of the work of the digital humanist as algorithmic criticism:

The sense of which selections, isolations, and noticing will yield suggestive patterns can only be expressed in terms of heuristics. It is an intuitive, experiential, social, contextual endeavor. We might also say, with Wittgenstein, that the operations those heuristics produce (operations that we can very often represent on a computer) are like the steps of a ladder that we can throw away once we 'climb up beyond them' (Wittgenstein, 1994). Throwing away the ladder in this way has, in fact, been the consistent method of literary criticism, which, as a rhetorical practice, is indeed often concerned

with finding ways to conceal these steps by making it seem as if the author went from the open possibilities of signification in *Lear* to the hidden significance of the Fool in a single bound. The computational substrate upon which algorithmic criticism rests, however, demands that one pay attention to the hidden details of pattern formation. Algorithmic criticism might indeed be conceived as an activity that seeks to scrutinize the discarded ladder.

What Ramsay says about literary criticism applies equally to theatre and performance studies. My interest in this section is to subscribe to his appeal and to scrutinize the discarded ladder that led to the writing of my dissertation. Scrutinizing the discarded ladder is important since it also highlights the troubled histories that often haunt the usage of specific ladders. It is with this idea in mind that I now turn to the last objection towards classification to be discussed here and consider the implications of a classificatory project that focuses on Indonesia.

The deployment of classification as an analytical strategy for the case of Indonesia is haunted by the history of the colonial enterprise. It has widely been noted that the 19th century, the height of colonialism in what is today Indonesia (and elsewhere in Asia) coincided with the formalization of anthropology as the study of other cultures (see for example Cooper and Stoler

1997). Colonizers were certainly motivated by personal economic gain. But some participants of the colonizing impetus also believed they were carrying out a "civilizing" function as much as a scientific one. A chief example of this is the figure of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. In Singapore, from where I write these lines, he is mainly remembered for the founding of modern Singapore (which he accomplished in 1819). But before establishing this colony he had previously been based in Penang (in what is now Malaysia), in Bengkulu (formerly Bencoolen, in Sumatra) and Java. He arrived in Java in 1811, when the Dutch were fighting the French at the height of the Napoleonic wars.

Later, the English considered it necessary to give Java back to the Dutch, in order to foster cooperation with a series of states (which included present-day Belgium) that they thought could act as a buffer against their arch-enemies of the time: the French. Much to his dismay, Raffles would be forced a couple of years later to cede Java back to Dutch control. However, during his short tenure there he ferociously roamed the island, collecting plant specimens and information about its culture. Amongst other things, he "discovered" Borobudur, which is to say, he coordinated an effort to dig it up, following a story he heard of a temple under a

hill. In 1816 he sailed back to England with a large collection of cultural artifacts (which included *wayang* puppets) and plant and animal specimens. This biological collection would later come to be owned by the Zoological Society of London, an institution he co-founded shortly before his death in 1826.

But that would be much later. While in England for eight months in 1816-1817 he kept himself surprisingly busy, managing to find a new wife (his previous one had died in Java in 1813), as well as to write and publish the two-volume edition of the *History of Java* in 1817. The list of chapters alone gives an indication of the expansive nature of this scholarly project: Geography, Origin of the Natives, Agriculture, Manufactures, Commerce, Character of the People, Ceremonies, and Language. Despite the conspicuous presence of the word 'history' in the title of the volumes, only one of the chapters (Chapter 2, "Origin of the Natives") deals with a historical account. Most of the other chapters are arranged as a catalog of descriptions. The layout itself, where the sections are written on the margins (a common 19th century editorial practice) serves to emphasize the sense that one is reading a catalog rather than a history. Chapter VII, the most interesting to a theatre scholar, deals with "Ceremonies of the Court" and includes descriptions of the "national drama", under which he bundles together "buffoonery", "wajang" (*wayang* in the Dutch spelling)

and dance. His descriptions of *wayang kulit* and other forms of *wayang* are succinct but perfectly accurate.

A posteriori accounts often dismiss Raffles as an amateur scholar, but one must remember that his book was considered groundbreaking at the time of its original publication. He took his work seriously and, more importantly, he was taken seriously by the incipient academic establishment of 19th century London. Nancy Florida asserts that many of his descriptions were not original but that he was nonetheless influential:

What was novel about Raffles' work was its scientific form and specially its publicity. With Raffles' History, 'Java' became a proper subject for Anglo-European Orientalism (Florida 1995: 23).

Raffles saw himself as both a colonial administrator and a scholar. He spoke Malay fluently, which made him an oddity amongst colonial administrators of his day. He died in 1826, in the midst of disputes with his former employers (who failed to see the profitability of Singapore until much later). He was in fact demanded to pay a retribution to the East India company and his creditors were surprised to see his almost complete lack of money and possessions. He had spent the best part of his wealth in the independent sponsorship of scientific expeditions for cultural and biological discovery (sadly for him, most



of his impressive collection of manuscripts and animals was lost in 1824 when the *Fame*, the vessel carrying him to England, caught fire just off the coast of Sumatra).

When confronted with the naiveté of Raffles' account, the contemporary reader is tempted to link his expansive archival impetus and his reductionist taxonomy to the colonial enterprise that he was a part of. The Javanese world, Raffles seems to imply, can be contained in eight, neatly arranged chapters. The most sketchy discourse analysis would have a field day with his book, easily unpacking a conception of Java as a thoroughly knowable entity, which is readily classifiable and usable. Java is not more than a repository of raw material for the production of sophisticated products - scholarship being one of them. Was it not the same organizing principle visible in Raffles' account and in the colonizing of Java? Several scholars believe so. Nancy Florida writes:

Dutch administrators, upon their return to power in Java were not blind to the usefulness of this new knowledge and in the coming decades strove to emulate British scholarship, citing in particular the proven political utility of British cultural policies in India. Dutch authority now saw how "understanding the natives" could facilitate both the civil administration of - and the efficient extraction of profits from - what was, at long last, becoming a true colony" (Florida 1995: 23).

The last remark refers to the fact that the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, which had been established in 1602), declared itself bankrupt in

1798 and the territory it controlled would become a colonial territory over the following century. It is in this context that new approaches to colonial administration became a necessity for the VOC. The 19th century saw the rise of a structured, systematic attempt to learn about Java. The methodological backbone of this approach was first philological and subsequently ethnographic. Critics of these early Dutch scholars accuse their work of complicity with the needs of the colonial mechanisms of control. Both Nancy Florida and John Pemberton (1994: 64) have argued that after the Java War of 1825-1830, which was led by prince Diponegoro as a *jihad* against the Dutch (see Spirituality), the colonial philologists tried to persuade the Javanese cultural elite to move away from Islamic fundamentalist thought. They promoted an interest in classic (which is to say Pre-Islamic) literature and helped create a rarefied, politically emasculated elite that devoted itself entirely to cultural pursuits.

Can we interpret this as the creation of 'Java' as a politically motivated category? If so, then this is a classification system that by tearing apart *the Javanese* from *the non-Javanese* served to further the goals of the empire. Are elisions in intellectual categorization a reflection of engineered elisions in society? The opinions of Pemberton and Florida, as well as ample historical evidence, suggest we can answer this question in the affirmative. *Divide et impera* had long been the *modus operandi* of the Dutch. In 1755, they convinced the Mataram prince to divide his kingdom into Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta. Thoroughly distinct cultural categories have emerged from this

division. Artists can distinguish minute differences between Yogyanese and Solonese styles of performance and puppet carving. A sense of confrontation and difference between these two places was politically important in the 19th century, since the elite were too busy working out the subtleties of their antagonistic identities to organize any coordinated resistance against the Dutch.

Postcolonial critiques easily identify a connection between colonial administration and colonial-era scholarship. Sometimes, the scholars in question seem to provide arguments to support this connection. One of the best known examples of such a case is Bronislaw Malinowski, the champion of the ethnographic method and one of the most famous anthropologists in history. He explicitly advocated intervention, described as "practical anthropology", which outlined political organization, jurisprudence, land tenure, financial systems and taxation as subjects of research (Malinowski, 1929). However, we should also be careful of extrapolating this attitude to provide a description of the entire anthropological enterprise undertaken in colonial times. As Bremen and Shimizu note:

Anthropology is a complex thing. It thrived in the colonial period, but it's not inherently of it [...]  
Anthropology is transgenerational and transnational. It is not fully congruent with all

the contexts in which it is found. (Bremen and Shimizu, 1999: 2)

Or as Talal Asad mentions in the introduction to *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*:

I believe it is a mistake to view social anthropology in the colonial era as primarily an aid to colonial administration, or as the simple reflection of colonial ideology. I say this not because I subscribe to the anthropological establishment's comfortable view of itself, but because bourgeois consciousness, of which social anthropology is merely one fragment, has always contained within itself profound contradictions and ambiguities and therefore the potentialities for transcending itself (Asad 1973: 20).

Take for example the work of W.H. Rassers, the now practically forgotten *wayang* researcher. His work was careful, methodical and profoundly respectful of the tradition he was investigating:

Only patient and close study of "the Javanese facts" offers us any prospect of obtaining reliable, objective results (Rassers 1957: 115).

The firm belief in the attainability of objectivity seems odd in retrospect, but we should remember that he was part of the Leiden University, the main site of structural anthropology in the Netherlands. He was eagerly trying to develop a "culture science" [cultuurwetenschap], much in the tradition of J.B.P de Josselin de Jong and G.A.J. Hazeu. But leaving this aside, what is striking about his approach is his insistence on Javanese facts, by which he means paying attention to the performances themselves and to what Javanese spectators have to say about them. In his book he constantly takes issue with the opinions of one J.W. Winter (who published an article about *wayang* in 1824, just one year before the outbreak of the Java War) for doing exactly the opposite and forcing his own interpretations onto *wayang* without considering local exegesis.

Dutch *wayang* scholarship has come under much criticism recently (for example in Sears 1996 and Kleinsmiede 2002). Part of this criticism is grounded on the accusation that Dutch scholars invented a particular version of *wayang* to suit their needs (for an exaggerated version of this argument see Schechner 1993), and that they did so by overemphasizing the linguistic realm. But a closer look at the work of Hassers demonstrates this was not always the case. Despite his training in philology, he proves himself a thoughtful, sensitive observer of non-linguistic aspects of *wayang* (in fact, much of what he says has

to do with the *kayon* and its pictorial significance and with the spatial organization of the audience in a performance). Further analysis of the work of cultural scientists from the Leiden University in the early 20th century should also convince us that the links between anthropology and colonialism are varied. In fact, the structuralists of Leiden opposed colonialism and were amongst the most vocal proponents of the "ethical policy" (Wolf 1999: 311).

My objective here is not to provide an apology for colonial-era anthropologists and their work. If I mention them, it is in the hope that a nuanced analysis of the relationship between anthropology and the colonial past would dismantle reductionist readings of the usage of taxonomies as necessarily instrumentalist, simplistic or otherwise contaminated by distinctly colonial endeavors. Those ideas, though, certainly haunt the taxonomic impetus and it is useful to remain aware their histories. Yet, on its own, this is not an argument against the usage of taxonomies in the research of *wayang*.

We should also be wise to remember that classification is not a European prerogative. Javanese interpretation of the world abounds in classifications. One need only remember the classification of *wayang* stories, performance segments, characters and movements that are common in Java. For example, characters are often divided into *luruh* (polite), *lanyap* (aggressive), *gagah* (muscular), *danawa* (ogres), *wanara* (apes), and *dagelan* (clowns). In other words, one should be wary of the uses of classification, without throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

### The essay as an approach

When I talk about the essay, I am referring to the literary essay as a genre that seems fitting to my particular needs. In my work I combine the systematic approach to description granted by a formal ontology with an essayistic style. By this, I mean that my texts are partial explorations of an idea based on subjective experiences. As Graham Good notes,

Ultimately, the essayist's authority is not his learning, but his experience. The essay's claim to truth is not through its consistency in method and result with an established body of writing. Its method is not collaborative and its findings do not need corroboration. Its claim is to yield flexibly to individual experience. Instead of imposing a discursive order on experience, the essay lets its discourse take the shape of experience. (Good 1988: 7)

Here we find a method that would satisfy Johanna Drucker's quest for plasticine. It is also a way to reconcile the problems of a strict classificatory project with the principle of a self-reflexive epistemology advocated by Morin. This subjective knowledge is, in fact, what gives rise to the essayistic discourse:

The truth of the essay is a *limited* truth, limited by the concrete experience, itself limited, which gave rise to it. The essay is a provisional reflection on an ephemeral experience of an event or object. If one event followed another, we would have a narrative; if one object followed another, we would have a descriptive catalog; if one thought followed another, we would have a logical argument. But in the essay, event and reflection, object and idea, are interwoven and limit each other's development.

(Good 1998: 7)

Although I am applying the essay as method, there is an important difference between a conventional literary essay and the essays I wrote. Note the way in which Good describes the structure of the essay:

The essay is a provisional reflection on an ephemeral experience of an event or object. If one event followed another, we would have a narrative; if one object followed another, we would have a descriptive catalog; if one thought followed another, we would have a logical argument. But in the essay, event and reflection,



object and idea, are interwoven and limit each other's development (Good 1998: 7).

In the essays I wrote, "object and idea" are only partially interwoven. In fact, the texts resemble the "descriptive catalog" mentioned by Good, where one object follows another (see Chapter 2). However, attempting to write the texts through an essayistic approach allowed me to pay more attention to the nuanced differences between performances in the same category. This highlighted the need for greater granularity and explanation in the ontology.

In my dissertation I combine two modes of analysis, two modes of invention. I make maps and tell stories. I cut up the world of *wayang* into distinct categories and then traverse those categories as an essayist, interpreting patterns of distribution based on experiences and intuitions. This combination is, however, not tidy and easy. The dissertation is a struggle between these two different regimes of representation. And this struggle is analogous to two other clashes, the one between tradition and modernity that is at the heart of each of the performances and the conflict between the cultural "inside" and "outside" in which I participate as a foreign researcher. These series of struggles can be understood as "interfaces" for reasons I will now turn to.

This dissertation is presented as a digital interface which I designed and programmed, but the way in which I want to use the term in the present discussion should be extended to a more general conception of the interface. In the vernacular understanding of the term, an interface is usually associated

with a screen which displays information and allows for some degree of interactivity. But this is just one kind of interface, a Graphic User Interface (GUI). In computer science, the term would include other artifacts (particular programming constructs, software/hardware interfaces, etc.). Here, however, I am interested in considering interfaces with a degree of philosophical imagination, as sites where struggles for meaning are enacted and not fully resolved. In this, I follow Alexander Galloway, who argues that:

The interface is a medium that does not mediate.  
It is unworkable. The difficulty, however, lies not  
in this dilemma but in the fact that the interface  
never admits it. It is true that it is false. It  
describes itself as a door or a window or some  
other threshold across which we must simply  
step to receive the bounty beyond. But a thing  
and its opposite are never joined by the interface  
in such a neat and tidy manner. What are called  
“writing”, or “image”, or “object”, are merely the  
attempts to resolve this unworkability (Galloway  
2012: 53).

As mentioned above, the interface between essays and ontologies is neither tidy nor easy. But thinking of their oppositions and frictions *as an interface* highlights the internal differences between their opposing epistemology.

Rather than ironing out such differences, I would suggest that projects which use digital tools should strive to bring attention to such oppositions, as I have tried to do throughout this dissertation. This also opens up different ways of considering the performances and my participation in them as an observer. Thus, the performances can be thought of as interfaces between the past of tradition and the present occasion for a performance. My exegetic work, as interpreter and translator, is an interface between the Javanese world and the international academic world at which this dissertation is aimed. The approach I describe above, results in an interface between the ontology and the essay which is enacted, if not resolved, by a digital interactive interface.

The method of this dissertation, as much as its format, is that of the interface. By constructing it in such a way, I present it not only as a reflection on the performances but also on what academic writing, as the creation of interfaces, can become. I believe this is an important challenge in many areas of inquiry but it is of particular importance in theatre and performance studies, as performance documentation becomes increasingly codified in digital archives that require new interventions in critical interpretation.



## Chapter 2 Aesthetics: Variables of Adaptation

### 2.1 Aesthetics: Variables of Adaptation

In order to analyze the aesthetic quality of the performances, I will first argue that *wayang* is a memory theatre and that the way aesthetic norms are re-interpreted can be understood by using two concepts: *intermediality* and *variables of adaptation*. As Marvin Carlson notes (2003), all theatre is a theatre of memory in that it participates in the recycling of actors, stories and objects (a process he calls ghosting). However, my concern here is to understand what happens to *wayang* as a memory theatre when new media are interwoven with its traditional aesthetics.

How then do new technologies and aesthetics affect the way *wayang* functions as a memory theatre? In order to answer this question, I will refer to these hybrid performances as intermedial *wayang*. In an article in *Performance Research* (Escobar 2013), I proposed the notion of intermedial tradeoff in order to explain how intermediality works in *wayang*. In what follows I expand upon some ideas from this publication. Simply put, the intermedial tradeoff refers to the ways in which certain elements are necessarily substituted for others when intermedial work is created which draws from a living performance tradition.

By saying that an intermedial tradeoff takes place I don't aim to reduce the complexity of *wayang kontemporer* to the narrative of a transaction, but rather to point to an essential quality of this process: some elements fade out of view as newer elements become part of *wayang*. However, this is not all there is to this process of transformation and not everything fits within the notion of a tradeoff. Therefore, I will also look at the way in which certain aesthetic conventions of traditional *wayang* continue to exist in intermedial performances, albeit in a modified form. My next proposed concept, the variables of adaptation, will address this issue.

Joseph Roach once described the performer as "an eccentric but meticulous curator of cultural memory" (Roach 1996: 78). Although originally formulated in a different context, this description is especially fitting for the *dalang*. Sitting cross-legged and smoking clove cigarettes in front of a cotton screen, the typical *dalang* has the sole responsibility for a performance that lasts about eight hours. Although he will remain seated in the same position throughout the night – enclosed by a large wooden chest, a screen, and two banana trunks – the *dalang* has immense resources at his disposal.

He has innumerable puppets, songs and stories to choose from in the solitary construction of his curatorial project. Hundreds of puppets stand ready for his use, either arranged on top of the wooden chest to his left or spread on the floor to his right. His assistant is always close at hand, should he need any extra puppet at any given moment. In his cross-legged position, his right foot will be

holding a metallic mallet called *keprak*, with which he will hit the wooden chest to his left in a rhythmical pattern that will instruct the *gamelan* musicians sitting behind him on which musical piece to play, and when to stop and begin their accompaniment. With his hands, he will manipulate all the puppets; a task for which he alone is responsible. He will also give voice to every character, narrate the stories and sing *suluk* songs.

The traditional performance is largely unscripted, but in a classic show (*wayang purwa*) the *dalang* will draw the stories from the *Mahabharata* (and, more rarely, from the *Ramayana*). The stories will never be merely repeated; they will be recreated for the particular context of any given performance. These stories have been transmitted orally from generation to generation, and each performance is a dialogue with the past, a confrontation with the inherited depository of stories, songs and techniques that constitutes the tradition. As Jan Mrázek notes:

The relation of Indian epics to *wayang* performances could be perhaps compared to the relation between a water-buffalo and a puppet: for the puppet to come to life, the animal had to be killed, skinned, the skin prepared, carved into a particular shape, colored, and so on. To suggest that people watch Indian epics when they watch *wayang* is like suggesting that the people watch water buffaloes (Mrázek 2005: 320).

A *wayang* show, more than many other performances, is always a theatre of memory, where the *dalang* – controller and curator – meticulously reinvents the past with his hands, his voice and his imagination. *Wayang* is always an exercise in the re-elaboration of cultural memory, where tradition is modified and re-crafted for the present. However, some artists in recent decades have also developed more radical re-elaborations of *wayang* by introducing new ideas, aesthetics and technologies to this memory theatre. They use tools and techniques so fundamentally different that *wayang* is not *wayang* anymore; or, at least not *only wayang* anymore, but a combination of *wayang* and something else. It becomes an intermedial *wayang*, a performance in a space of 'in-between-ness'.

I use the word "intermedial" following Chiel Kattenbelt and Freda Chapple's definition of intermediality as the reflexive inclusion of different media within a performance (2006: 11). Thus, in intermedial *wayang*, memory and imagination converge more evidently than they do in conventional *wayang*. Intermediality necessarily becomes an experiment in forgetting, since many things are left out as they are replaced by other tools and aesthetic conventions. Intermedial theory allows us to take a closer look at the materiality of this exchange by focusing on the aspects of different media that remain, and how they resensibilize each other.

Instead of describing the changes in *wayang* as the inclusion of media, an alternative analytic strategy would have been to consider these changes as



variations in style and content. However, this approach would fail to account for what I think is an essential quality of the re-elaboration of tradition in *wayang kontemporer*. Speaking in terms of style would imply that the works retain a certain artistic unity. I suggest that this unity, found in traditional shows, is dismantled through the inclusion of music, images, objects, stories and languages that don't correspond to it. These elements are not surreptitiously subsumed into the aesthetic unity of wayang, but their inclusion as different elements is clearly marked out and made explicit. New elements stand side by side with the conventional ones, they are not fused together. The resulting performances are more like a patchwork quilt than they are like a woven fabric. The media included retain their own logic and aesthetic coherence. If I can offer a comparison with western contemporary works of theatre that combine different media and artifacts, I would say they have more in common with the performances of Stelarc than they have with Julie Taymor's *The Lion King*.

One reason these performances are the way they are is that the creators of *wayang kontemporer* were often trained in other artistic media, such as painting, theatre and electronic music. Toward the end of this section, I will offer a more comprehensive overview of the interdisciplinary collaborations that gave rise to many of the performances I describe in this dissertation.

The notion of the intermedial tradeoff allows us to identify the elements which particular *wayang* performances lose and those which they gain, exploring

how *wayang* - both traditional and contemporary - is constructed at the crux of remembering, inventing and forgetting, as it is brought into a dialogue with other media – other ways of remembering and forgetting. Artists who are interested in reinterpreting aesthetic rules find a rich soil for experimentation in the combination of *wayang* and other media. The inclusions, interactions and conflicts between these media allow them to tackle issues regarding heritage preservation, the impacts of globalization on Java and the future of cultural memory.

#### Performance frameworks

Many of these performances are not scripted plays, but rather a set of rules created by the *dalang* for a series of similar performances that will bear the same name. In order to avoid confusion I will speak about a specific (recorded) performance as a performance instance and I will refer to the aggregate of these instances as a performance framework.

The videos, as I have discussed, are a limited rendition of what are often long creative processes, where constant interrogation and improvisation generate not one but several versions of a similar performance. In the case of *wayang*, the performances themselves are the result of a combination of different creative processes, which we could refer to as rehearsal and improvisation. Improvisation is very important in Java. Rehearsal is seen as a 'foreign' strategy imported into *wayang*. In her book *Improvisation of The Javanese Script*, Judith

Bosnak looks at the development of several improvisational and rehearsal structures for the case of *kethoprak*:

It is the pleasure of shaping the action on stage that keeps the actors on their toes. Given the fact that their information states differ, their knowledge of the developments on stage is limited. This calls for a flexible and creative attitude towards the available mnemonic and structuring devices and towards the other participants of the staging process. The outcome of each performance remains a surprise (Bosnak 2005: 71).

Similar dynamics could be identified within *wayang kontemporer*. As explained above, I propose to call each individual performance (or recording), a performance instance and to recognize that it belongs to a performance framework. A performance framework is the set of ideas which define that which would constitute a performance of Catur Kuncoro's Wayang Hip Hop or Slamet Gundono's Wayang Tanah. Each performance framework is a mixture of improvisation and predefined scripts.

For example, Mirwan Suwarso's *Jabang Tetuko* was rehearsed following the model of western musical theatre, with no room for improvisation. It is therefore constituted entirely by predefined scenes. Raden Saleh by Ananato Wicaksono (Nanang Kancil) and Ledjar Soebroto is mostly based on a script by Ardian Kresna. However, it includes a comic scene of variable duration (one of the times I saw it, the comic scene was 45 minutes long, another it was 7 minutes long). Therefore, *Raden Saleh* is a combination of both strategies.

## Variables of Adaptation

When the intermedial tradeoffs occur, not everything that is traditional disappears, as many conventional aesthetic mechanisms linger even in the most innovative performances. The aesthetic rules of traditional *wayang* (the *pakem*) can be adapted in many ways. In order to account for these multiple possibilities, I have suggested the image of a circle that can be extended and reshaped. The original circle constitutes the *pakem*, the new shapes that emerge from the adaptation can be thought of as the result of variables that push the boundaries of the *pakem*. I identify the main variables as music, space, story, materials and language. The diagrams for each of the performances are available from the panel on the right. For a more detailed explanation of the diagrams, see the introduction to this dissertation.

Although these variables can be interpreted as semiotic categories, my interest here is to understand them from the point of view of the artists, that is, as creative variables. I suggest that these variables are the main practical considerations that the *dalang* face when confronted with the creative challenge of devising new work. In other words, these variables are the building blocks for the creative experimentation that constitutes the process of devising *kontemporer* performances. I derive this conclusion from my conversations with the *dalang* and from my own experiences. Therefore, in the sections that constitute this chapter, I describe the creative process of tinkering with the possibilities of these variables. Each section starts with an

anecdote of my own, often failed, attempts to learn how to use the different elements of *wayang*.

### Intermedial Journeys

The sections in this chapter describe the aesthetic innovations of *wayang kontemporer* identified along the five variables of adaptation. But before launching into the different sections, I will sketch a history of intermedial adaptations in *wayang* by describing the aesthetic ambitions of key practitioners. In all cases, their work was influenced by two cultural forces: interdisciplinarity and globalization.

The intermedial aesthetics of these performances can be accounted by the fact that many innovators were trained in other disciplines or worked in close collaboration with artists from different disciplinary backgrounds. This factor is closely related to the second one, as many of these innovators have traveled abroad extensively. The globally attuned sensitivity of these artists, fueled by international travel and increasing exposure to other cultural forms in Internet-connected, post-Suharto Indonesia, accounts for the myriad cultural influences that can be identified in *kontemporer* performances.

Following Edwin Jurriens, I describe this combination as an example of cultural travel, a two-way process of cultural influence:

Syncretism or hybridity can be seen here as a  
comment on the local being the product of the

global traffic of people and things, while the  
global obtains its shape only in local, historical  
contexts (Jurriens 2004: 175).

Global and local, these performances are shaped by the confluence of localized heritage and global influences. A short overview of the work of these artists will set the stage for the subsequent analysis of the music, space, language, stories and puppets used in *kontemporer* performances. One of the most important *wayang* innovators in the late 20th century was Ki Sigit Sukasman (1936-2009). He was a visual artist with a life-long fascination with *wayang* carving. His quest to redefine the morphology of the puppets ushered in a new era of visual creativity to the world of *wayang*. His international career began when he visited the World Fair in New York in 1964 and the Netherlands in 1965.

Shortly after, he settled in Germany for several years before returning to Indonesia in 1974 to take care of his ailing mother. Although his obsession with *wayang* carving had accompanied him since childhood, it was only then, in his late thirties, that he began to perform *Wayang Ukur* (Measured Wayang). He was known for his obsessive attention to every detail of the *wayang* performances, which would be polished over extensive rehearsal processes.

He was never the *dalang* himself; three *dalang* were responsible for puppet manipulation in his shows. He was thus a meta-*dalang*, controlling the controllers. Hardja Susilo compares his role in the performances to that of a

theatre director (Susilo 2002: 179-188). In his performances, he used specially crafted puppets, a front stage and a great number of light fixtures with colored gels. He was a master in creating three-dimensional illusions on the *wayang* screen. By instructing some *dalang* to sit behind the screen and others to sit in front of it, he explored different registers of visuality, urging the *dalang* to delve in the nuances of shadow, colors and size afforded by the puppets.

He would often include actors and dancers in the show, who would stand behind the screen or on a raised platform above it, in order to suggest a wide array of visual effects. Hardja Susilo describes Sukasman's work as "a fine art presentation by an individual artist" (Susilo 2002: 179), which attracted little popular acclaim. Although Sukasman's influence on the work of subsequent *dalang* has not been fully acknowledged in the literature, the *kontemporer dalang* of the 21st century will readily recognize in conversation their artistic debt to the influence of Sukasman. Some *dalang* have even continued to perform in the style of *Wayang Ukur*, though most observers despise these imitations, pointing out that the careful attention to detail that characterized Sukasman's shows is now absent.

To illustrate the ways in which his memory is kept alive, I will refer to an unfortunate performance that was offered in honor of Sukasman three years after he passed away and to the comments that were given by the spectators. In Java, *wayang* performances are often offered one thousand days after someone's death (*peringatan seribu hari*). In Sukasman's *peringatan*, which I

attended in 2012, a performance inspired by *Wayang Ukur* was presented. However, the lights went off shortly after the performance began. An audience member said to me that this was the work of *mbah* Kasman (as Sukasman was affectionately known), who was sabotaging the show from the other world for failing to adhere to his exquisite perfectionism. This comment was not meant as a joke. People believe today that no one can live up to the expectations of the late genius.

The memory of Sukasman lingers in the minds and the works of *dalang* kontemporer, many of whom worked with him or saw his shows (which were also transmitted by the national television station TVRI). One of his most famous disciples is Heri Dono, probably the most famous Indonesian visual artist alive, whose paintings, installations and performance pieces are inspired by Sukasman's relentless tinkering with the meanings and shapes of *wayang* puppets. *Wayang Legenda* and *PhARTy Semar*, are his most famous *wayang*-based performance pieces. The latter is an installation-performance which was described by Tim Behrend (1999) as a commentary on politics, the art market and the millennium change. It uses the complex character of Semar as a starting point for a postmodern exploration of *wayang*: "The characters presented in *wayang* umbrage were wholly decontextualized in this presentation, but their familiar roles, types, and identities were relied upon to construct the theatrical platform on which the overall ritual import of the performance could then be erected" (Behrend 1999: 217).



Eko Nugroho is another world-traveling, Yogyakarta-based visual artist whose work spans installations, paintings, weaving, visual novels and graffiti. He is well known for his trademark characters: surreal cyborgs made from equal parts fruits, everyday objects, robots and hipsters, which can be found in comic books, T-shirts, and as a commissioned graffiti decorating a wall in the Salihara cultural center in South Jakarta. In 2008, he decided to turn his distinctive creations into *wayang* puppets and use them in performances. In collaboration with theatre writer Gunawan 'Cindil' Maryanto and *dalang* Catur Kuncoro, he created *Wayang Bocor*, a series of performances based on Cindil's stories and Eko's characters. Once, in a conversation over *soto* (a noodle soup with beef), Eko explained to me that the name *bocor* (leak) describes the philosophy behind the collaboration. It is a permeable *wayang*, where everyone's ideas leak into the perspectives of others. It is an adaptation of *wayang* that explores the porosity of *wayang* conventions, leaking new waves of influence through its conventionally water-tight epidermis.

Tavip is another visual artist who has made his own version of *wayang*. After studying with Solonese puppet makers and earning a graduate degree in visual arts from ISI (Indonesian School of the Arts – Solo), he created translucent *wayang* puppets made of plastic, which led to a collaboration with his mentor Nano Riantiarno, a theatre-*wayang* hybrid trilogy titled *Sie Jin Kwie* (2010-2012). Interdisciplinary influences are not limited to the visual arts. Writers have also proved essential to some of the most interesting developments of *wayang*. Sujiwo Tejo, a household name in Indonesia, built a career as a

journalist and a writer before becoming a *dalang* and a singer. His performances rely on a poetic use of the Indonesian language and on musical hybrids, based on *gendèr* melodies, jazz, folk and pop. Matthew Cohen describes his performances as a combination of “metaphysical speculation and political commentary with the surreal” (Cohen 2007: 359).

Elizabeth Inandiak is a French activist, reporter and novelist who has been living intermittently in Indonesia since 1989. Four of those years were spent writing a novel based on the Javanese literary work titled *Serat Centhini*: “when reading *Serat Centhini*, it was as though I had found my soul mate to explore life with” (Inandiak interviewed by Sudarman, 2009). The *Serat Centhini* is a nineteenth century literary work written in verse which combines esoteric religious wisdom, vividly described erotic passages, and an almost encyclopedic compendium of Javanese art and ceremonies. Inandiak's novelized version of the literary work first appeared in French in 2002 under the title *Les Chants de L'Ile a Dormir Debout - Le Livre de Centhini* (Songs from an Island Beyond Belief – The Book of Centhini) and in Indonesian in 2008 as *Centhini, Kekasih yang Tersembunyi* (Centhini, The Hidden Lover).

*Serat Centhini* had a strong tradition of being recited, which fueled Inandiak's dream to adapt it for the stage. In 2007, she performed the first version together with dancer Ninik Didik Thowok, and in 2008, she developed a collaboration with *dalang* Slamet Gundono, titled *Cebolang Minggat*. This performance is based on “Cebolang Minggat,” one of the chapters of *Serat*

*Centhini*, and will be discussed extensively throughout this dissertation (see the sections on Art, Youth and Spirituality in Chapter 4). Both Inandiak and Slamet Gundono act in the performance. Part literary recital, part *wayang*, part theatre, this performance has been hailed as Slamet's masterpiece.

The late Slamet Gundono was trained in theatre and his work drew “on a range of dramatic registers and the virtuosic talents of Gundono himself as actor, puppeteer, storyteller, and musician” (Cohen 2007: 358-9). His performances are not the only *kontemporer* shows that have been shaped by contemporary theatrical dramaturgies. *Teater* (theatre) has been a decisive influence for many of the *dalang*. Nanang Hape and Enthuis Susmono also give credit to *teater* for increasing their histrionic skills. Furthermore, some of the *kontemporer* performances are the result of collaborations with theatre directors, most notably theatre Koma's Nano Riantiarno who, as mentioned above, developed a three part collaboration based on the Chinese epic *Sie Jin Kwie*.

Musical collaborations are also common in the *kontemporer* performances, and guest musicians include Jazz performers, Hollywood-based composers and hip hoppers from Yogyakarta. Many *dalang* are also virtuoso music players and composers, such as Slamet Gundono, Catur Kuncoro, Nanang Hape and JIitheng Suparman. They have created their own synthesis of Javanese traditional music and other musical genres.

The overview has explored the work of several artists whose work has laid the stage for the innovations in music, space, language, story and puppets observed in *wayang kontemporer*. The following sections will analyze these dimensions in detail, classifying each of these variables of adaptation as conventional (those that maintain clearly defined *wayang* conventions), non-conventional (those that incorporate innovations clearly distinct from such conventions), and mixed (those which integrate a combination of the two). In the last category, conventional and new elements are still identifiable.

These categories are productive for analysis, but they are not without limitations. As Jeremy Wallach notes:

Totalizing syntheses of genres do not occur in Indonesia or anywhere else. The reality is that [...] “foreign,” “Indonesian, and “regional” genres coexist with various hybrids of those genres – hybrids that rarely, if ever, entirely subsume their constituent elements (Wallach 2008: 244).

The distinctions I propose are held throughout this chapter only to the extent they are useful. Although each section constitutes an attempt to identify patterns that group different performances together, whenever necessary, these sections also traverse the continuity among the categories with a higher

degree of ontological granularity. The sections pay attention to instances that seem vague or contradictory. Without abandoning the categorization principles outlined above, these examples also allow for a nuanced analysis of specific cases that problematize strict categories.

## 2.2 Language: The Question of Belonging

My experiences of speaking Indonesian and Javanese are very different. The following anecdotes illustrate my personal quest to learn these languages. However, my conclusions are generalizable since they confirm statements often found in the literature and in many ways help explain the dynamics of language at work in *kontemporer* shows.

I started learning Indonesian in December 2007 from an audio coursebook I ordered from the internet. I had just been awarded a Darmasiswa scholarship to study Indonesian which would begin the following February and I was getting myself ready for this experience. I was teaching at a university in Mexico City. Since I had recently been hired, I was not entitled to holidays. So I clocked in and out of daily eight hour shifts, even though the university grounds were completely empty and I had no assignments of any kind to be completed during the December semester break. I used the serenity of the ghost university to immerse myself in the study of this new, mysterious language. I tried to listen to as much of it as possible, trying to become familiar with the patterns and the sounds, the new textures of this language. I also started memorizing basic words and conversations. Of course, when I first arrived in Yogyakarta on the 14th of February 2008, this knowledge did not get me very far. People did not really understand my basic Indonesian and I could not understand them either. But things quickly changed and by the end of my first stay in Indonesia I managed to become reasonably fluent.

I was enrolled in the introductory course at Gadjah Mada University. My main motivation to learn the language was to be able to communicate with my *wayang kulit* teachers, but the situation I found at the university inspired me to excel at learning the language. I quickly realized that most of my classmates had not even the most rudimentary knowledge of nor interest in the Indonesian language. Most had signed up for the scholarship as a way to justify a year of holidays in an exotic location. The Darmasiswa program is a controversial initiative in Indonesia. One thousand foreign students receive a generous monthly stipend from the Indonesian government to study Indonesian languages and culture. Some take the opportunity for study and cultural exchange seriously but must don't attend classes regularly and spend their time traveling (and complaining). They often leave with only the most basic understanding of the Indonesian language and of whatever cultural form they had been funded to study. Indonesian critics of this program rightly point out the fact that there is no equivalent program to support local, talented arts students who can't afford to go to university.

Aware of this situation, I tried to be as serious as possible about my studies. I was quickly transferred to an advanced class and spent most of my time during my first year in Indonesia learning the intricacies of formal, written Indonesian. Many foreign students of the language point out the big gap between formal and informal Indonesian. Many foreigners disdain the approach of formal language schools and choose to focus on learning the 'real' Indonesian. This 'real' Indonesian does not allow them to read novels or newspapers, or watch serious films and theatre performances. One of the ironies of Indonesian is that

despite being hailed as "easy to learn" by countless foreigners and guidebooks, I've only met a handful of foreigners who could read novels or even newspapers. And I've only ever met two foreigners who could write idiomatic, grammatically correct phrases in Indonesian. I decided to devote as much of my attention as possible over the coming years to learning the dynamics of everyday conversation and the intricacies of the more formal Indonesian.

During my first year, I used every possible opportunity to speak in Indonesian. This was facilitated by the fact that I was living in the outskirts of the city, in an area where no one could speak English. My first *wayang* teacher, Pak Parjaya did not speak a word of English and this also forced me to communicate in rudimentary Indonesian and to acquire a richer vocabulary and fluency over my first six months as his student. Even back then, people sometimes thought I was Indonesian. Unlike most foreigners they met, I have dark skin and they believed I was possibly the child of a mixed marriage (unlike Western foreigners, I would never be described as *bule*). Or they thought I was from some faraway island, which explained differences in physiognomy and accent. My accent is also less pronounced than that of most foreigners because my native language (Spanish) shares many sounds with Indonesian. A mirror phenomenon confirms this observation: many Indonesian speakers have a very natural accent in Spanish.

After my first six months in Yogyakarta, I was given a scholarship for graduate studies in the Netherlands and I moved to Maastricht. In the next few years, I continued to improve my Indonesian. I returned a few times to Indonesia and



when I was in the Netherlands I shared a house with Indonesian students. In 2010 I relocated to Singapore, and the proximity with Indonesia allowed me to spend several months each year in Yogyakarta. In these more recent visits I have concentrated on the study of Javanese, which has proved to be a very different problem.

Two formal aspects make Javanese more challenging to learn. The pronunciation is harder and, of all the languages in the world, it is the language with the highest degree of differentiation among formal and informal registers. But the biggest challenge is finding an opportunity to practice it. Indonesian people are used to the sight of foreigners who are learning Indonesian and they go out of their way to teach new words and speak slowly to foreigners. They welcome the slightest sign of fluency and forgive the worst errors. But none of this patience and understanding is extended to the learner of Javanese. A Javanese-speaking foreigner is still a rather unusual occurrence. The tiniest mistake will trigger mockery in one's listeners and make them switch, irreversibly, to Indonesian. If you don't pronounce a word well in Indonesian people will try their best to guess what you mean, but no such licence is extended to Javanese. Javanese listeners are not willing to exercise any degree of hermeneutic flexibility when it comes to the interpretation of the unorthodox pronunciations of words. And this applies to non-Javanese "foreigners" as well. The case in point is my friend Arie. He was born in North Sumatra but all his ancestors are Javanese. He has spoken perfect Javanese since childhood, but he does so with a thick Sumatran accent. Even his friends in Java consider this accent too funny to go unpunished and they reply

mockingly to him. In Indonesian! People are unforgiving of his accent, even though he has been living now in Java for over ten years and is married to a Javanese woman and is the father of a Javanese baby. For fear of mockery, he refuses to speak Javanese even to his in-laws.

My progress in Javanese has been slower than in Indonesian. I have studied mostly with private tutors and I have a growing number of friends who are willing to converse with me in Javanese. At the moment, I have become almost fluent in the lowest register of the language (*ngoko*). Yet, although I can have a conversation on any topic with my friends, strangers would never speak to me in Javanese. I only speak with two *dalang* in Javanese, Catur and my teacher Sri Mulyono. Both of them often invite me to participate in their shows, since a Javanese speaking foreigner is a perfect attraction to include in the comic scene (Richard Curtis 1997 reports a similar situation). But for the most part, my research was conducted in Indonesian.

These anecdotes illustrate the difference in the perception of these two languages. Indonesian is friendly and shared across the board. Javanese, by contrast, is selective. It is the language of intimacy, and in-jokes. These different ideas of language are articulated, more clearly than anywhere else, in the selection of language used for *kontemporer* shows.

#### Conventional Language Use

The conventional language for *wayang* is Javanese. Eleven of the performances I analyze are delivered exclusively in Javanese, but we could distinguish a nuanced use of the language among them. Some of them

privilege *ngoko*, the lowest register of the language: Wayang Hip Hop, Wayang Kampung Sebelah, Wayang Onthel, Lara Tanpa Liru, Perseteruan Getah Bening and Wayang Kancil. Slamet Gundono's performances, Jendral Karna, Pertaruhan Drupadi, and Wayang Tanah, use Tegal turns of phrase extensively. A third group, consisting of Sugriwa dan Subali and Sumpah Pralaya, maintains the full spectrum of the Javanese speech levels. Consider for example the following excerpt from the latter, which uses high Javanese.

ABIMANYU. Nimas, jejantungipun kakang, cah  
ayu. Soroting netramu lir pandam kamarutan.  
Satemah gawe pepadang telenging kalbu, yayi.  
  
UTARI. Pangeran. Pangandikanmu dadi wiwara  
kabahagyan. Lir tibane riris ing mangsa ketiga.  
Kang mahanani puspa layu ana pangarep-arep  
bakal semi.

The English translation is as follows:

ABIMANYU. *Nimas*. Oh beautiful, my heart is  
pounding. Your eyes shine like oil lamps. And  
they light up my heart, *yayi*.  
  
UTARI. Prince, your words bring happiness to  
me. Like rain falling in the dry season and letting  
the dying flowers know that their buds will grow  
again.

In *Sumpah Pralaya*, the poetic usage of the Javanese language stresses the atmosphere of courtly reverence and solemn acceptance of roles that is central to the themes of this performance. Despite their differences, all the performances which use Javanese share a commonality. Even though they engage in radical adaptations of other aspects of the *wayang* conventions, they choose to remain faithful to the traditional language used. These are the most hermetic of all the *kontemporer* adaptations, since they have a smaller target audience than the rest of them. Many of the *kontemporer* performances are popular with audiences not fluent in Javanese: young people who do not master the intricacies of the language, Indonesians from other islands who reside in Java, as well as those living in other provinces who watch touring performances or televised recordings of them. I will hypothesize that using Javanese, a hermetic language, in a *kontemporer* performance suggests a particular idea of Javanese culture.

One way to explain this is by referring to the attitudes of the Javanese towards people learning this language. As the anecdote above illustrates, being addressed in Javanese is an act of inclusion. When someone replies to you in Javanese, it provides you with evidence of tacit acceptance. It grants you access into a community and allows you to say certain things in certain ways. This is no easy feat. Even when non-Javanese Indonesians speak this language, their interlocutors tend to mock them and reply in Indonesian. I will suggest that the reason behind this is a historically inherited tendency to hermetically seal off the idea of what it means to be Javanese.

Following Heather Sutherland (1979), John Pemberton rehearsed the idea that the notion of *cara jawi* or “Javaneseness,” as a hermetic construct, first emerged in the early nineteenth century. It was a reaction to the increasingly tight political control imposed by the Dutch. Thus, *cara jawi* was set in opposition to the Dutch way, the *cara walandi*:

As the movement of late eighteenth-century Javanese rulers became increasingly limited because of Dutch intervention in palace affairs, the Kraton Surakarta thus transposed its focus, as if inward, toward the self-contained details of state ceremony and etiquette. Behind palace walls, ritual process unfolded as a program of events before a seated, privileged, audience (Pemberton 1994: 64).

At first, *cara jawi* referred to the way of dressing but then it came to encompass other things as well, until it became “a self-contained, ideally invulnerable, thoroughly 'Javanese' world” that would include “'Javanese' language, cuisine, literature, customs, and so on, down the line demarcating classic cultural difference” (Pemberton 1994: 66, single quotes in the original). This is the origin of its complex relationship to the non-Javanese world, which it excluded yet upon it which depended.

The long-term effect of this appropriation was a sense of self-assurance strong enough to seal

foreignness out [...] and, at the same time,  
refined enough to attract and draw the foreigner  
into a “Javanese” world that was, by definition,  
impenetrable (Pemberton 1994: 67).

When Pemberton describes this long term effect he had the New Order in mind, but I would suggest that this idea persists even after the demise of Suharto's regime, and characterizes ideas about Java still embodied by even the most radical Javanese artists.

In a strategic conservatism that embraces aesthetic innovation but refuses the temptation of the language shift, the *kontemporer* performances that use Javanese incline the balance of the linguistic intermedial tradeoff towards a hermetic solution, in full support of long established, deeply embedded ideas about what it means to be Javanese.

#### Intermedial Language Use

In *Shifting Languages* (1998), Joseph Errington suggests two key aspects of how Javanese is being used in Indonesia. Speakers often take part in code switching, an “interactional process when bi- or multi-lingual speakers juxtapose elements (minimally phrase-long) of two languages” (Errington 1998: 5), as they switch between Javanese and Indonesian. Secondly, he describes a general, historical shift towards an increased usage of Indonesian in situations where Javanese was previously more common (for example, familial intimacy and cultural ceremonies). The patterns of code selection Errington identifies in everyday interactional processes also provide a fitting

template to describe code selection in the *kontemporer* performances. The *dalang* have three possibilities: speaking the conventional language (Javanese), shifting to a non-conventional one (Indonesian) or mixing them (code-switching). In other words, these correspond to the intermedial tradeoffs in the linguistic realm.

The performances that combine different languages participate deliberately in the logic of the language shift. There are two performances in this category. The first one is Cebolang Minggat, which is spoken in French, Indonesian and Javanese. In the opening sequence, this multilingual character is explicitly addressed when Elizabeth Inandiak ponders the influence of this linguistic mixture:

Yang akan kami beberkan malam ini, bukan serat  
Centhini yang asli yang disusun di Kraton  
Surakarta pada abad ke 19 tetapi Centhini abad  
ke 21 Centhini yang berkelana dari tembang  
Jawa berjumpa dengan syair Perancis [...] lalu  
pulang kampung sampai ke logat Tegal.

The English translation is as follows:

That which we will present tonight is not the  
original Serat Centhini which was written down  
in the Surakarta Kraton in the 19th century, but  
a Centhini for the 21st century. A Centhini that  
has traveled away from the Javanese songs in

which it was composed. It has met French poetry  
[...] and now it has come back to the Tegal  
dialect.

Let's look at the actual way in which code switching takes place. Elizabeth speaks in French in two moments of the performance. Both of these interventions constitute narrative fragments. Slamet Gundono only says one word in French (and it is unfortunately incorrect but promptly corrected by Elizabeth). Slamet speaks only a few times in Javanese and all of these utterances seem to be the product of improvisation rather than of a pre-defined plan. Therefore, whereas the multiplicity of languages present is important, the actual criss-crossing of languages is limited and straightforward. In some other performances (as I will analyze later) a close analysis of the moments languages change leads to meaningful results: we can readily imagine reasons for the language change.

In those cases, switching languages is an act of meaning-making; but not here, where there is no reason behind specific instances of language switching, other than the lack of shared languages among the performers. Nevertheless, I think that the multiplicity of languages is in itself meaningful. It indicates that the story can be universally understood. When I spoke to Elizabeth about her prolonged work with *Serat Centhini* she said she became enamored by the literary because of its universality. The warm reception in France of her novelized translation attests to this. Therefore, the *notion* of using other languages is more important here than the actual *pattern* of such usage. But



we will see that this is not necessarily the case in another multilingual performance.

The other multilingual performance is *Wayang Mitologi*, where the main narrative is in Indonesian but the *gara-gara* scene is in Javanese. This performance presents a situation that is the opposite of *Cebolang Minggat*. In *Wayang Mitologi*, the multilingual character is not explicitly addressed. However, the linguistic selection for different parts of the performance is more meaningful. The only scene delivered in Javanese is the comic interlude, a playful and intimate moment of any performance. Indeed, theorists of code-switching in Java argue that Javanese is more closely associated with situations of greater familiarity and this performance adheres to such a principle. It is also worth noting that in traditional performances, the *gara-gara* is always presented in *ngoko* (the lowest register of Javanese), as is the case here. Of course, all of the *dalang* discussed in this dissertation are bilingual, but this performance brings out this bilingual character more than others. As John Edwards notes:

The importance of being bilingual is, above all, social and psychological rather than linguistic. Beyond types, categories, methods and processes is the essential animating tension of identity. Beyond utilitarian and unemotional instrumentality, the heart of bilingualism is belonging (Edwards 2009: 255).

Exposed bilingualism made explicit through code-switching in this performance addresses the possibility of double belonging. Paraphrasing Edwards, I would say that the importance of bilingualism in this performance is social and psychological rather than thematic. I don't think it bears a direct relationship to the theme of the performance. But the usage of both languages has a social and psychological significance and creates a *wayang* hybrid that is both Indonesian and Javanese. The recurrence of instances such as this, where there is no explicit connection between the aesthetic choices and the themes is what justifies analyzing both aspects separately, as I do in this dissertation.

*Wayang Mitologi* and *Cebolang Minggat* illustrate different avenues for multilingualism in *kontemporer* performances. In one we witness multilingualism as a statement of universality; in the other, bilingualism is the echo of daily practices of code-switching. In *Cebolang Minggat*, any segment could have been presented in French or Javanese without altering the meaning and mechanics of its multilingual character. However, if another segment were to have been presented in Javanese in *Wayang Mitologi*, this would not set in motion the same set of associations (of the *gara-gara* scene as an expression of an intimate Javanese world). Despite their differences, both of these performances express double belonging more clearly than other performances, through a carefully weighted consideration of the intermedial tradeoff posed by the choice of language, opting for a dual strategy of bilingualism. But navigating multi- and bilingualism is still an unusual approach and perhaps a difficult issue to tackle. We can see this in the fact that only two performances were discussed here; Mixed Language Usage is the smallest

category in all of the performances classified in this dissertation. This is particularly remarkable since, in most variables, the mixed category is the most commonly occurring one.

The trend in the usage of language within *kontemporer* performances is far from clear, and the rest of the performances analyzed here are equally divided on each end of the spectrum, as eleven performances use Javanese and eleven use Indonesian. The previous two sections addressed associations triggered by adhering to Javanese or by mixing languages in a performance. The next section considers the implications of using Indonesian as the language of *wayang kontemporer*.

#### Non-conventional Language Use

The Javanese language is so closely linked to the idea of *wayang* in a traditional context that its substitution for another language can be considered an important departure from conventional aesthetics, even if that language is the official language of Indonesia. The usage of Indonesian, furthermore, has important connotations within the history of the country, since it is a language of relatively recent adoption.

There have been several attempts to make *wayang* more "Indonesian". The most notable proponent of using Indonesian was Bambang Murtiyoso who created an Indonesian language *wayang* in Surakarta in 1981 (Cohen 2007: 357) called *Wayang Sandosa* (from the abbreviation of *berbahasa Indonesia*, "in Indonesian"). Nanang Hape's *Kalimataya* is an example of a performance presented in a *sandosa* style, which was performed in Surakarta. Sukasman's

*Wayang Ukur* also had ideological motivations to choose Indonesian as its language of transmission, since he aimed to make it more modern and communicative.

These are examples of performances that have ideological motivations for the language choice. But there are other performances where the language choice was determined by the place where they were performed. The *Ukur* performances often took place in Yogyakarta, as is the case for *Sungsang Bawono Balik*. *Wayang Republik* was also presented in Yogyakarta but, due to its topic, its addressees were non-Javanese as well. The objective of the performance was to demonstrate the importance of the city of Yogyakarta to all Indonesians (for a fuller description see the sections on Music and Politics). Consider, for example, the opening sequence of *Wayang Republik*:

SUKARNO. Kawan-kawan! Kawan-kawan, saya  
mohon untuk tenang! Tidak ada yang lebih baik  
daripada kita berfikir jernih dalam mengambil  
keputusan. Saya juga akan tegaskan kepada  
saudara-saudara dan kawan-kawan semua, tidak  
ada bangsa ataupun orang yang mau dijajah  
ataupun dihisap oleh bangsa lain. Saya tegaskan,  
tidak ada!

The English translation is as follows:

SUKARNO. Dear friends, I ask you to be patient.  
We should make decisions with a clear head. I

will explain to all our comrades that no person or  
country wants to be oppressed or colonized by  
others. No one wants this I say!

In this sequence, an emotional Sukarno addresses a group of eager Javanese nationalists in Indonesian, the language of the independence struggle. Even though the performance was presented in a Javanese-speaking city, the usage of language is closely linked to the themes of Wayang Republik. However, several of the performances that use Indonesian were presented in non-Javanese speaking areas. Many of them were performed in Jakarta: *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas*, *Jabang Tetuka*, *Raden Saleh*, *Sanditama Lagu Laga*, *Sie Jin Kwie*, and *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*. *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda* was performed in Bandung and *Dewa Ruci* was performed in Bali.

This geographic diversity is linked to the history of Indonesian, which is an "artificial" language. It was officially adopted as the language of the pro-independence struggle in the Second Youth Congress in 1928, and then ratified in 1945 upon the proclamation of Independence. As Soenjono Djardjowidjojo notes, "It didn't have the problem of any foreign language overshadowing it" (Djardjowidjojo 1998: 36). After Independence many efforts were taken to ensure the spread and acceptance of the newly established official language. The *Pusat Bahasa* (Language Center) was one of the newly set institutions in the Indonesian Republic, and its role was to promote and research the usage of Indonesian and other languages. This institution had an active role in promoting the literary usage of the Indonesian language (Djardjowidjojo 1998:

40), and these efforts are perhaps the precursors to the wide-spread usage of Indonesian in *wayang* performances. In Indonesia, linguistic/cultural identity has been the focus of debates and has been targeted by language policies. Indeed, if Indonesia is a modern artificial creation, an 'imagined community', as suggested by Benedict Anderson (1991), language policy has been a major aspect of the cultural engineering of the nation. Language policies have created both a shared national fantasy and a tapestry of fractured identities, which are represented by the usage of Indonesian in the *kontemporer* performances.

The choice of language is not always a purely practical consideration, since most *wayang* spectators speak both Indonesian and Javanese. Rather, we can assume it has other implications and it sets in motion a complex set of expectations and cultural codes, which can be explained using Zane Goebel's analysis of the different semiotic registers that characterize language use in Indonesia. Following Asif Agha (2007), Goebel defines a linguistic interaction as a semiotic encounter within a system of constantly emerging semiotic registers (SRs). Enregistrement is the process by which certain ideas and categories get embedded in the SRs, which is linked to the historical conditions of language use in Indonesia: "Colonial and post-colonial policy and practices relate to institutional representations of language use and how this has figured in the formulation of SRs linking language use to performable social categories of personhood and relationships" (Goebel 2010: 3). He identifies a first SR "made of signs such as Indonesian, objectivity, development, education, and the ethnic other" and a second one, occupied by languages other than

Indonesian, enregistered with ideas of “religion, ethnicity, intimacy” (Goebel 2010: 12). The first becomes a space to “talk about the world” and the former is one to talk about “personal life worlds” (Goebel 2010: 23).

An Indonesian language *wayang* transgresses these categories: it compels the audiences to interpret personal life-worlds in the language of objectivity and development. Thus, it is one of the most radical aesthetic adaptations of *wayang*. I don't offer a detailed account of the usage of Indonesian in this non-conventional performances because none of them are explicit about their usage of Indonesian. As I mention above, the usage of Indonesian is certainly ideologically motivated in some cases. But even in those performances a close analysis of line by line utterances does not add on to this initial impression. The non-conventional linguistic character of these performances does not reveal itself more clearly through an analysis than through a statement. In all of these instances, the language choice is a blanket that covers the totality of the *wayang* performances, not a newly woven fabric that denotes specific angles and curvatures of the shape it covers.

This reveals there are important differences between mixed and non-conventional performances in terms of language. Mixed performances in this section retain certain aspects of Javanese and its implications, which are mostly psychological and social. These performances are modern but thoroughly Javanese. Non-conventional language use suggests, by contrast, an alternative, an idea of the contemporary which is not linked to a Javanese

linguistic identity. In Indonesian-language performances, being modern means stepping outside of conventional Javanese identity markers.



### 2.3 Music: The Dramaturgy of Emotions

I have tried (and failed) to learn *gamelan* on different occasions and I have been invited to participate in the creation of *kontemporer* soundtracks. Reflecting on these experiences, I suggest points of continuity and identify differences in the ways the music is prepared (through rehearsal or composition) and used in the performances.

I first started learning *gamelan* in 2008, the first time I arrived in Indonesia. The *saron* is deceptively easy to learn. I had no problem playing along if I read from a piece of paper that was given to me where the piece was outlined. But I found it impossible to understand how people switched between the different segments marked out in the piece of paper. Everyone seemed to know when to progress and when to go back except for me. But my incompetence enlightened me to the nature of *gamelan* music, which is organized through a series of cycles. The numbers written on the piece of paper constitute the melodic skeleton (*balungan*, which is the same word used to define the general structure of a *wayang* play). I also learned, although imperfectly, to listen for cues from the *pengedang*, who is the drum player and leader of the *gamelan* ensemble. In a *wayang* show, he sits close to the *dalang*, whom he listens to and observes for cues. These cues (*sasmita*, a word which also means an omen from the Gods in the *wayang* stories) are then translated into rhythmical signals for the rest of the musicians to follow.

This double character of the music, predictably structured yet improvised, is crucial to the understanding of how music works in a *wayang* show. This aspect

is generally missing in several *kontemporer* shows. Although some of them still use traditional aspects of the music, many of them don't depend on this improvisational character. For example, Enthus Susmono rehearses with his musicians so that everyone knows when to stop and end.

My second attempt to learn *gamelan* came several years later, when I stayed for three months in the village of Tembi to study Javanese. The highlight of the village is the Rumah Budaya Tembi (Tembi Cultural Center) which houses a small but beautiful collection of lovingly arranged Javanese objects, a hotel and one of the most impressive *pendopo* in Yogyakarta, a common place to attend *wayang* shows. On weekends, a community of amateur performers called *estehanget* ('icewarm' tea) gathered in the beautiful *pendopo* to learn *gamelan* together. I joined them, making timid attempts to master the mysterious craft of *gamelan* performance. What impressed me the most in these sessions was the ease with which they moved from conversation to music, with a few laughs and smoke puffs in between. I could never identify the moment where a new song would start (which is usually marked by the *bonang*). Suddenly, the *bonang* player, a skinny, long haired man in his thirties called Rudi would start, motivated by an invisible cue from Madek, the leader of the group. A couple of beats later we would all be playing along. I say we, but the truth is that usually this abrupt start caught me ill-prepared, still half sipping my tea or talking to the rest. Yet everyone else was able to instantly follow into the music, effortlessly and flawlessly. This character of the music, which can start and end abruptly is also central to the way the musical accompaniment of a performance is woven into its narrative. My third attempt to learn to play

*gamelan* was when I attended the Habirandha school inside the *kraton* of Yogyakarta (see Puppets). There, I learned more about the structure of the music throughout a *wayang* show and the *pathet*, which I will elaborate later in this section.

I was also privileged to participate in the creation of *kontemporer* music for Wayang Hip Hop. For the second anniversary of the group, Catur decided the group should have a song that was partially in Spanish and I was of course the designated composer of the lyrics. I was terrified but tried to comply with his wishes as best I could. His reason for using a relatively unspoken language was to use it as a veil through which to explore issues of social unrest. I immediately resorted to a phrase etched in the collective imagination of Latin American would-be protesters: "el pueblo unido jamás será vencido," [the people united, will never be defeated] a chant that was first uttered by the Chilean protesters in the 1970s but which has spread through Latin American and is a well known act of verbal agitation. It has been used in several songs and it seemed the right place to start. I wrote a few lines of feverish, rappable poetry and Catur composed the music to go with it, adding Javanese and Indonesian verses to my original lyrics. During several weeks I met with him and the rest of the *Wayang Hip Hop* musicians to record the song. The final result is sung in Spanish, Javanese and Indonesian.

We recorded the song at the house of Tyno, one of the young musicians who lives close to *kota gedhe*, the site of an ancient Javanese city. His family has a fried chicken business and we had to carefully zigzag our way through

enormous buckets of inert, featherless chickens queuing to be gutted. Tyno's father could blindly cut a chicken in seconds without looking at it once, directing all his attention to the more demanding business of gossiping with his neighbors.

Tyno's room had been cleverly adapted into a recording studio. A makeshift wall was erected in a corner, creating a partition that was covered by glass in one front. Professional microphones were linked by a series of cables to a computer equipped with state of the art, pirated software. We worked there for several days, recording, amending and re-recording the music. Despite being pre-recorded, hip hop tracks such as these can also be requested by the *dalang* at any point of the performance. Catur and his team have developed a complicated system of cues, not dissimilar to the *sasmita* principle outlined above, that allow him to improvise his musical requests. However, he cannot elongate or cut the musical fragments, a prerogative of traditional *dalang* that can shape live music during performances. The recoding sessions also share some similarities with the rehearsal session I was present at in Tembi Rumah Budaya. There is also a seamless movement from recording to smoking and drinking tea which also catches me off guard more often than not. Some things, though, are notably different. During the recording a mistake mandates for a stop and a new take. By contrast, in the rehearsals people just laugh in a good-natured way and make fun of the author of a mistake. The other difference is that we record our voices individually inside the isolated recording cabin, and part of the communal experience of the music is lost. Still, these experiences show that we can identify continuities between creation and performance in

both traditional and non-traditional settings. In what follows I extrapolate these observations to other *kontemporer* performances. In all cases, the music is closely linked to the progression of the affective narrative of a performance.

#### Conventional music

The music is an integral aspect of the emotional mood of a *wayang*. Therefore, the performances that maintain musical conventions recreate the affective qualities of a traditional performance's aural progression. *Wayang* is traditionally accompanied by a *gamelan* musical tapestry which aids the narration, punctuates the spectacularity of the puppet animation, and entertains the audience. The following short overview of how *gamelan* works in a traditional performance will describe its structural qualities and its main dramatic functions in the performance.

A *wayang* show is divided into several sections, each of which corresponds to a particular moment of the dramatic action and to a specific musical mode called *pathet*. In the Surakarta tradition, there are three *pathet*: *sanga*, *nem*, *manyura*. *Pathet* means modal designation, but there is some disagreement as to what it actually corresponds to. It is both the pitch range a particular melody takes and the feelings it evokes (Weiss 2006: 23). The division of the story and its musical accompaniment are closely linked together.

The melodies conjure feelings that correspond to specific moments in the performance. Consider, for example, Sri Mulyono's description of the usage of music at the end of the lakon *Dewa Ruci*. In this performance, Bima meets a miniature version of himself called *Dewa Ruci* who explains the meaning of life

to him (for a fuller description see Spirituality). In a traditional presentation of this story, a *gending* (melody) called *ayak-ayakan manyura* could be played when Bima returns to the world after his encounter with Dewa Ruci. Such *gending*, which is often played toward the end of a performance, acquires a particular meaning: "this *gending* truly reflects a feeling which cannot be described, the feeling of return to a rational state after meditating" (Sri Mulyono 1982: 177). The improvisational nature of the music guarantees that the *dalang* controls both the music and the story. As mentioned above, the *dalang* can request melodies with cues, called *sasmita*, and indicate the different sections and the end of a musical piece by hitting a wooden mallet called *cempala* against the puppet box, and by hitting a metallic mallet called *keprak*, held by his feet, against a set of metallic plates.

The structural qualities of the music allow the musicians to easily adapt the music to the rhythmical leadership of the *dalang*. As mentioned above, the basic melody is called *balungan*, which means skeleton, which is followed and enriched by all the instruments:

The bodily image of a skeleton is useful as an analogy for understanding the layered texture of Javanese music and its progression through time. If the basic melody is the skeleton, then the instruments that mark arrivals at the quarter, eighth, or sixteenth in the cycle are like the heart and lungs rhythmically keeping the body alive, and the many instruments that elaborate the basic melody add skin, hair, eye color, and even personality (Weiss 2006: 21).

The accompaniment is also cyclic. A piece usually contains at least two distinct sections, each of which can be cyclically repeated. Sarah Weiss describes them as suites, "strings of pieces related to each other by mode and in decreasing relative size, each with internal repeats, connected together" (Weiss 2006: 21).

The musical accompaniment of a *wayang* performance is not restricted to *gamelan* music alone. The *dalang* uses different vocal modes to elicit emotions, and tell the story. One of these vocal modes is called *suluk* (sung poems). These are special songs for specific events, like the appearance of certain characters, impending wars, or important announcements. There are also special *suluk* for particular emotions, such as love, anger, grief and indecision. Perhaps, their evocative power is more important than the actual meaning of the words they contain, which are sometimes unknown to the *dalang* themselves. As Geertz notes, "they are viewed more as abstract vocal music whose significance, like that of the *gendings* themselves, is in their *rasa*, in the feeling contained in them" (Geertz 1960: 280).

All of the performances considered in this dissertation are shorter than a conventional *wayang* and even the ones that most closely adhere to *wayang* conventions significantly reduce the complexity and variety of the music used. The most distinctly traditional is Ledjar Soebroto's Wayang Kancil. The music was improvised according to cues from the *dalang*, and it included *gending* appropriate to different moments, as well as traditional *tembang* and *suluk*. The only addition is related to the lyrics. Poetic fragments taken from the 19th

century literary work *Serat Kancil* - which was also the source of the stories - were adapted to conventional *gending*.

🎵 **Music of *Wayang Kancil*, *gamelan* melodies with new lyrics.**

The music of *Sungsang Bawono Balik* is also very closely related to traditional *wayang* accompaniment, except for the fact that it is shorter and does not follow the *pathet* structure. Nevertheless, the same musical fragments are often used in traditional performances.

🎵 ***Sungsang Bawono Balik*. Conventional *gamelan* music.**

🎵 ***Sungsang Bawono Balik*. Conventional music, and the singing of a *sinden*.**

I would suggest that the music of the two performances by Enthus Susmono I consider in this dissertation, Dewa Ruci and Sugriwa dan Subali, could also be considered mostly traditional. The same is true for Catur Kuncoro's *Wayang Republik*. In all cases, the *pathet* structure was absent, some of the songs were new versions of *gamelan* music composed by the *dalang*, and the music in these performances was not completely improvised. Therefore, the extent to which the music may be considered traditional is a matter of perspective. When compared to the rest of the *kontemporer* performances, they are doubtless some of the most traditional in terms of music. The main criteria for this classification is the usage of *gamelan* instruments. Other performances use them as well, but these are the only ones that don't combine *gamelan* and other instruments.



- 🎵 **Music of *Dewa Ruci*: New lyrics for *gamelan* music.**
- 🎵 **Music of *Sugriwa dan Subali*. *Gamelan* with some variations.**
- 🎵 ***Wayang Republik*. New, fast-paced *gamelan* music.**

Despite exploring new themes and developing aesthetic innovations elsewhere, the *dalang* that choose to keep conventional music maintain the link between music and story almost intact. The performances that use traditional music reveal a certain purism when it comes to stories. The stories they use are either fully conventional or wholly non-conventional, but never mixed. They also denote a certain conservatism when it comes to space. No performance with traditional music used a non-conventional spatial setup. In the musical realm of these performances, the intermedial tradeoff is rejected in favor of a melodic structure intertwined with the narrative progression. In these performances, one can listen to an earlier Java while contemplating the present one.

#### Intermedial Music

Music is one of the main ways in which the affective narrative of the performance is transmitted. A hybrid approach allows the *dalang* to construct a selective recreation of this affective, aural realm but to combine it with other elements. Several distinct possibilities can be identified in performances that do this: a soundtrack approach, traditional storytelling re-interpreted, trademark fusions, hip hop, and combinations of *gamelan* and other elements. In a way comparable to some performances that use Non-Conventional music (see below), Nanang Hape's Sanditama Lagu Laga has a 'soundtrack' musical

accompaniment. However, unlike fully non-conventional uses of music, here *wayang* conventions are used extensively, and combined with jazz-inspired electric guitar melodies, drums and new songs composed by the *dalang*. *Nanang Hape* has previously collaborated with the Helsdigen Dance Trio to create *Mahabharata Jazz and Wayang*, a performance that was presented at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

► ***Sanditama Lagu Laga. Gamelan, electric guitar, jazz and new songs from the dalang.*** The combination of music is also evident in the spatial setup of the stage. The *gamelan* orchestra is located stage right and a rock ensemble consisting of drums, a guitar, and a bass guitar are located stage left. Throughout the entire opening song, the *gamelan* and the rock ensemble can be heard playing together.

The music of Aneng Kiswanto's *Sumpah Pralaya* features new songs based on Javanese conventions. The songs are used to illustrate the story in a way comparable to traditional *wayang*. In a traditional performance, the *dalang* would often use *kandha* (narration of a passage in the story) before enacting it through *antawicana* (dialogue). However, in *Sumpah Pralaya*, it is not a *dalang*, but a *sinden* (female singer) who narrates a fragment through song before it is portrayed through dialogue. The following song precedes the dialogue it describes:

Bambang Abimanyu promised the priestess  
[Utari], that during the Baratayuda War he

would be killed and his body destroyed by a million weapons.

*Sumpah Pralaya*. New musical creations with *gamelan* instruments that use *wayang* narrative conventions.

A similar structure of alternating sung narration and dialogue is found throughout the performance. Although this pattern is structurally comparable to a traditional performance, here all the songs are interpreted by the *sinden*, they are new creations, and they use a slightly less refined language, making the meaning of the songs more apparent to spectators. While most *kandha* are delivered in *kawi* (a poetic register of old Javanese closely related to Sanskrit, which has fallen into disuse), the lyrics of *Sumpah Pralaya* were written in *krama* (a polite, yet still spoken register of Javanese).

Other performances in this category use the "trademark" musical fusions created by *dalang* who are also renowned musicians, notably Slamet Gundono and Sujiwo Tejo. Sujiwo Tejo's *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda* is accompanied by his fusion of guitar, jazz, pop and folk music. But a chorus also includes the song "Love Changes Everything" from Andrew Lloyd Weber's 1989 West End musical *Aspects of Love*. The fragment begins with the *dalang* singing a *suluk* while the *gendèr* plays in the background (stage right). Then, two minutes into the song, 'Love Changes Everything' begins. Here, the conventional vocal mode of accompaniment, the *suluk*, abruptly ends and the non-diegetic music with a

clear American musical theatre connotation begins in a perfect example of how the soundtrack music works in *wayang kontemporer*.

- ▶ ***Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*. Opening song with *gendèr* musical accompaniment, followed by 'Love Changes Everything'.**

Slamet Gundono, besides being a *dalang*, was a famous musician and singer in Java. All of his performances analyzed in this dissertation (Cebolang Minggat, Pertaruhan Drupadi, Jendral Karna and Wayang Tanah feature his characteristic singing style - which is often accompanied by a ukulele - combined with folk and *gamelan* music.

- ▶ ***Cebolang Minggat*. Slamet's song with ukulele, and *gamelan*.**
- ▶ ***Jendral Karna*. The music consists of *gamelan* orchestra, a ukulele and a saxophone.**
- ▶ ***Pertaruhan Drupadi*. Slamet intersperses his songs combined with narration and *gamelan* music.**
- ▶ ***Pertaruhan Drupadi*. A song punctuated by the rhythm of the *keprak*, *kandha* (conventional narrative) and *gamelan* music, which is then followed by Slamet's song and ukulele music.**
- ▶ ***Wayang Tanah*. *Gamelan* music and Slamet Gundono's songs, interspersed with narration and *gamelan* music.**

Many of the performances use hip hop together with musical conventions, and this music genre requires a detailed description. The most notable example is Catur Kuncoro's *Hip Hop*. But this combination is also found in Ananto Wicaksono's Raden Saleh and in Eko Nugroho's *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam*

*Kulkas*. I have discussed the usage of hip hop in *wayang kontemporer* in an article in *Asian Theatre Journal* (Escobar 2014) where I identify five reasons for the appeal of *Wayang Hip Hop*. One of those reasons is the combination of musical styles from diverse origins. Below, I reproduce the arguments from that article that pertain to the current discussion on the usages of mixed music in *wayang* performances more generally.

The center of hip hop culture in Indonesia is Yogyakarta, and the popularity and number of hip hop groups should be factored in if we are to understand the context where these hip hop hybrids are appreciated. The oldest and most famous group is Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF), a group that is led by visual-artist-cum-hiphopper Marzuki Mohamad, better known as "Kill the DJ." JHF was formed in 2003 but only achieved national notoriety in 2010. Their song *Jogja Tetap Istimewa* (Jogja is Still Special) became the unofficial anthem of the struggle against political reforms that intended to turn the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), a semi-independent entity in the Indonesian Republic, into an ordinary province (see Politics). The fame of JHF has been a mixed blessing for many hip hop groups in Yogyakarta. Due to their high profile, more people are aware of Javanese hip hop. On the flip-side, many characteristics of their music, which were not unique to them but shared by many groups, are now commonly recognized as their invention. Therefore, other groups that were working previously with them are now deemed to be mere copycats. However, as I will show in the following paragraphs, the diversity and objectives of the usage of hip hop music in Indonesia is quite wide-ranging. This diversity seems to echo the claims made by international scholarship on hip hop, which often

describe it as an essentially malleable genre. Bill Osgerby suggests that it is an example of the way "local audiences actively reconfigure 'global' commodities, images and texts", but he recognizes that the local is a "contested territory, one crossed by a variety of different identities and meanings" (Osgerby 2004: 148, 167).

Mixed usage of music creates hybrid affective atmospheres that induce spectators to feel they are both in a *wayang* performance and in a popular music concert. To provide an example of this, I will describe the way the musical styles are interwoven in *Wayang Hip Hop*. There are many ways in which the worlds of tradition and modernity come together in the musical accompaniment of *Wayang Hip Hop*, but the most notable one is their usage of *suluk*, or "high poetry", one of the many ways in which songs are used within traditional performances to carry the story forward. In a *Wayang Hip Hop* show, the *Lagu Pembuka* (Opening Song) begins with a *suluk* sung by the *dalang* in ancient poetic Javanese:

The fragrance of the flowers has spread,

The wind blows and it allows,

The aroma of the *gandung* flower to be carried  
away.

► ***Wayang Hip Hop* opening song.**

This specific *suluk* is often used after the opening scene of traditional *wayang* shows; it announces the introduction of the main "problem" or "issue" (*perkara*) that will drive the performance throughout the night. After the largely formulaic small talk of the first scene is completed, the *dalang* interrupts the *pocapan* or dialogue and sings a *suluk* like the one above to signal the introduction of the main problem.

After this song is over, those at the court discuss the problem that will become the main issue of the night's performance. Therefore, the *suluk* can be interpreted on different levels. On a narrative level, this easily-recognizable song tells the viewers and listeners that the main problem is about to be introduced. However, the content of the song itself can be understood differently. This particular song suggests that beauty will be spread through the performance. It is indeed a Javanese belief that performances "beautify the world" (*memayuning hayuning buwana*) in a similar way to flowers. In this sense, it has no direct connection to the narrative of the *lakon* (story) chosen for the night. A.L. Becker suggests that this is a defining characteristic of Javanese narrative techniques, which do not work in an Aristotelian fashion but rather through intersections between distant echoes from the past (in the form of songs) and the present of the performance being developed. He describes this as the production of "thick texture" which is preferred to what he describes as Aristotelian forward moving plots (Becker 1995: 30-37).

Towards the end of the *suluk* part of the *Lagu Pembuka*, an electronic hip-hop beat slowly fades in and it takes over the song completely. The "issue" or

reason for the performance is introduced through the next part of the *Lagu Pembuka*, namely, the chorus (in the Western pop-music sense), which is sung in Indonesian:

Hey! Come here with us!

And express yourselves with us.

Proud and loving of tradition.

Hip Hop? Yes! Wayang Hip Hop!

► ***Wayang Hip Hop* opening song. The chorus begins one minute into the song after the *suluk* ends.**

According to its creators, the objective of *Wayang Hip Hop* is to make *wayang* appealing to newer generations of spectators by combining elements from a globalized contemporary youth culture and from the *wayang* tradition. That which is at stake here is expressed in the song's chorus. The *perkara* (problem) is therefore introduced in a way which is analogous to the structure of a traditional show; namely, after the *suluk* described above is sung. This example illustrates the way in which different musical styles converge in meaningful ways as the structure of the song elaborates on Javanese storytelling and musical conventions.

Shortly afterward, there is another verse worth commenting: *jika salah, maafkan kami, ini hanya hiburan belaka* (if you feel wronged, well please forgive us). This is indicative of a cultural custom, where asking forgiveness for one's mistakes is important. Indeed, when presented with compliments,



*dalang* would sometimes say *kula nyuwun pangapunten menawi wonten kelepatan* which translates as "forgive me for my mistakes." This, or a similar phrase, could also be uttered before the performance and it is often repeated in written and oral form, in anything from book introductions to expert interviews.

Hip hop lyrics elsewhere in the world are often characterized by a more aggressive attitude, and this apologetic hint might strike some as odd. This difference should alert us to the fact that this is a complex blend of *wayang* music and Javanese *wayang* conventions with a "global" genre. The "coolness" of this performance is not entirely an imported feature, but rather the result of combining expressive means with different origins.

Budi Pramono, a classically trained *gamelan* musician who was involved with *Wayang Hip Hop* in its early years, now works with his own group, Km 7. This group has been featured in *kontemporer* performances as well, but they tend to use hip hop less extensively. The best example is Ananto Wicaksono's *Raden Saleh*, which features a hip hop song based on a poem from the 19th century literary master Ronggowarsito titled *Jaman Edan*, "Crazy Times."

Those who forget are the ones who win.

Especially if they forget God.

These are crazy times.

You cannot make a profit if you are not crazy.

🔊 In *Raden Saleh*, after the *dalang* sings, the hip hop song starts.

Ronggowarsito's description of the crazy times corresponds to the same time in which *Raden Saleh* lived, the mid-nineteenth century. This song is presented after a dialogue where Raden Saleh tells one of his assistants they are living in crazy times (see Art). This performance also includes narrative songs, which make it comparable to the soundtracks of Nanang Hape (whose work will be described below), since they combine narrative functions of musical theatre with *gamelan* music.

The Dutch troops went to war marching together. They have colonized my land and crushed the local people. They raised their weapons and killed their enemies. They raised their weapons and destroyed everything. Many local people died but their vigor burned like fire.

🎵 ***Raden Saleh*. Music with narrative function, which combines *gamelan* instruments and electronic beats.**

Other performances to be considered here use distinctly new versions of *gamelan* music. This includes Nanang Hape's *Lara Tanpa Liru* and *Kalimataya*. The music in both cases is a selective collection of *wayang* music and new musical creations.

🎵 ***Lara Tanpa Liru*. A modified version of traditional music, combined with additional instruments fades into a newly composed song.**

🎵 ***Kalimataya*. A new creation based on *gamelan*.**

🎵 ***Kalimataya*. A battle with *gamelan* music.**

Some performances combine traditional music with other musical registers and sounds, such as electronic music and everyday sounds - including bicycle sounds and market voices. These performances include *Wayang Onthel*, *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas*, and *Perseteruan Getah Bening*. The experimental music fragment in *Perseteruan Getah Bening* is followed by another experimental music piece accompanied by *keprak* rhythms.

- ▶ ***Wayang Onthel*. *gamelan* music and bicycle sounds.**
- ▶ ***Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas*. Electronic experimental music, urban soundscape and *suluk*.**
- ▶ ***Perseteruan Getah Bening*. Experimental music combined with a traditional mantra. This fragment is followed by another experimental music piece accompanied by *keprak* rhythms.**

In the last two cases, the music was composed by Yenu Ariendra, who was part of the team that developed *Wayang Bocor* under the direction of Eko Nugroho. The technical challenge of combining traditional *wayang* singing and the experimental music was described by Catur Kuncoro in an interview:

The first time I worked with Yenu was in the Yogyakarta Arts Festival in 2009, for something called *Wayang Pixel*, and it was not easy. The first time I heard his experimental music, my ears hurt and it was hard for me to adapt to those sounds. But then that feeling disappeared because I wanted to learn and understand that

language. So for example, there is a specific kind of music that you use for fights in *wayang*. But Yenu wanted to use recorded voices from people in the markets mixed with a sharp distortion, and he had me sing on top of that. I used a Javanese melody with Indonesian words. That process really allowed me to expand my views and to liberate my mind. So I had to be able to enter Yenu's dimension, his world, as it were. I tried this because I wanted to free up my thoughts. I tried to find a moment in the music that I could hold on to, however clumsily. I found that spot and it became my *gendèr*. So I could hold on to that and I began to enjoy the music. And then our creation had its own kind of harmony (Escobar: 2014b).

In the preceding paragraphs, I have presented an array of intermedial musical configurations. Classifying them merely as intermedial subsumes many internal differences, so I have opted for greater ontological granularity and considered different types of intermedial adaptations: a soundtrack approach, new interpretations of traditional storytelling, highly personal fusions, hip hop and combinations of *gamelan* and other elements. Despite their differences, they all craft new affective narratives, afforded by the combination of conventional music and elements from other aural realms.

In the digitally connected, gadget-equipped, urban Indonesia, personal music choices determine an individual sense of identity as much as in any other cosmopolitan location in the world. People carry around portable music players or play music constantly in their laptops as they work, study or surf the web. "Tell me what's on your playlist and I'll tell you who you are" has become one of the hallmarks of postmodern identity formation. The *dalang* whose work I analyze in this dissertation all have laptops, and phones with music playback capability. They have combined their connoisseurship of *gamelan* with the knowledge of a wide range of international music. This is similar to the world in which most spectators of *wayang kontemporer* live. But it differs significantly from the musical worlds in which their forefathers learned about music.

Java has always benefited from musical influences from far away, but the means for the transmission of foreign musical ideas is unprecedented. Identity, in terms of musical choice, is no longer as closely connected to cultural inheritance as it once was. The expression of cultural identity through music is now the result of personal curatorial projects that reflect a multiplicity of artistic and lifestyle ideals. The *kontemporer* performances that combine *gamelan* music with other influences reflect on this feature of cultural change. They combine the logic of the playlist and the traditional aspects of *karawitan*. The resulting musical accompaniment can be best understood as a hybrid affective narrative, where the musical progression still bears the traces of traditional *wayang* but it also incorporates the affective structures induced by lifestyle music and the logic of the playlist.

### Non-conventional music

Very few performances use music that is entirely independent from *wayang* conventions, and when they do so, they adopt different genres and their respective affective logic. These can be either "soundtracks" or popular music.

The music in many of these cases can be described as a soundtrack and its features make it perhaps more similar to Euro-American musical theatre (or films) than to traditional *wayang*. The realm of the soundtrack can be compared to non-diegetic music in film (Chion 1994: 73) since the songs are separated from the visual realm of *wayang* and they are external to the story-world (the diegesis). The music here generates an affective progression that is very different from conventional *wayang* and its *pathet* structure. However, these soundtracks help connect the performances to communities of music fans - what I will call the lifestyle music, following Jeremy Wallach (2008). In all these instances, the music was especially composed for the performances, dialogues were often sung, or the songs had narrative purposes. Four performances use music in this way: Catur Kuncoro's *Wayang Mitologi*, Mirwan Suwarso's *Jabang Tetuka* and Nano Riantiarno's *Sie Jin Kwie* and *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*.

The perfect examples of the soundtrack approach are *Sie Jin Kwie* and *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*, where the music was composed especially for the performances. The songs often convey important information about the plot and the characters' intentions.

An example of songs especially composed to tell the story in *Sie Jin Kwie*, where one of the main characters explains her plans through singing.

🎵 **Sie Jin Kwie explains his thoughts through a song in *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*.**

*Wayang Mitologi*'s musical accompaniment is a pre-recorded soundtrack that combines rock, electronic music and hip hop composed by Arul Fortis. The following fragment is an exchange between Narendra and Permadi, which is delivered through a mixture of hip hop and electronic music.

NARENDRA. What? You pair of bastards! Don't  
you dare speak like that!

🎵 ***Wayang Mitologi* A dialogue turns into a hip hop exchange.**

The music of Mirwan Suwarso's *Jabang Tetuka* was composed by Hollywood score-writer Deane Ogden – who composed music for films such as *The Hit List* (2011) and *The Sensei* (2008). It consists of a combination of rock, string ensembles and percussion music.

🎵 ***Jabang Tetuka*. Rock music, electric guitar and percussion accompany the fight scenes of the *wayang* shows, while the action is portrayed by a combination of actors, puppets and films.**

The actors occasionally conveyed their thoughts through songs. The following fragment corresponds to a song where Arimbi describes her feelings upon knowing that her baby, Tetuka, will be taken away from her (see Familial Ties).

*Jabang Tetuka*. Arimbi's song.

Not all the performances in this category adhere to the 'soundtrack' logic. In Jlitheg Suparman's *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*, which also makes no use of *gamelan* music, most of the songs are Javanese pop songs, with influences from *dangdut*. Although many of these are composed by the *dalang* himself, the show also contains well-known pieces. The performance I analyze here features two 'guest' performers: puppets representing *dangdut* singers Rhoma Irama and Inul Daratista, each of whom sings a well-known item from their repertoire.

► **A song by Minul Dara Tinggi, a puppet that represents Inul Daratista.**

The presence of *dangdut* in this performance is interesting. As Jeremy Wallach notes, this music "represents a refusal of the logic of lifestyle and by extension a rejection of the individualizing logic of global consumer culture" (Wallach 2008: 44). Even the most traditional *wayang* performances occasionally showcase *dangdut* guest performers in the *gara-gara* scene. *Dangdut* is a genre that can be found in a variety of contexts and which appeals to very different listeners. Wallach suggests this power is due to the fact it "bridges generations, from the smallest child to the oldest grandparent, and the imaginary ideal audience for *dangdut* is a community without distinctions of class or status" (Wallach 2008: 245). Inul and Rhoma represent the opposite positions of a *dangdut* controversy that shocked Indonesia in the early 21st century. Rhoma, the creator of *dangdut*, is a conservative Islam proselytizer. Inul is the most famous proponent of a new kind of *dangdut*, accompanied by



sexy outfits and dances, which was disdained as a perversion of the genre by Rhoma Irama (for a fuller account of the controversy, see Women.)

The lack of agreement of what *dangdut* should be opens up a space for creative opposition: Beyond the powerful apparatuses that regulate and monitor people's behavior lies an undomesticated space where people can do all sort of things that would be considered unacceptable according to middle class and elite standards of behavior. In *dangdut*, this is the space of exaggeration and excess, where it is the garishness of your outfit, the teasingly erotic way you swing your hips, the vulgar language you use, or the articulation of social issues that cannot be broached in the public sphere (Weintraub, 2006: 76).

Non-conventional music can feature in a variety of ways. By deleting the traces of traditional music, *dalang* are able to imagine alternative aural universes that create different affective experiences, by either following the logic of the musical theatre soundtrack or of Indonesian popular music. In all cases, this implies pursuing a different direction in the way the affective realms of *wayang* change and move. When describing the implications of using hybrid music in a *wayang* show, I suggested this was a combination of the logic of culturally-inherited musical identities with the possibilities of an individually-tailored musical playlist. Here, the intermedial tradeoff is resolved in the direction of inventiveness and innovation, as the echoes of the long tradition of *gamelan* music fade in the wake of personal musical agendas. However, these agendas are perhaps not as idiosyncratic as the mixed music performances, since the adoption of soundtracks or *dangdut* music effectively constitutes a generic

logic with a sound world more consistent both in itself and as a strategy for combining with other elements like puppets and actors.

## 2.4 Puppets: The Etiquette of Material Interactions

In this section I consider two interrelated practices: the making of the puppets and their usage in performance. I learned the basics of puppet making from Pak Bandi, an irascible and warm man who lives in the village of Gendeng, south of Yogyakarta. For several weeks, I would drive an hour from the North of Yogyakarta, avoiding the city by taking the Ring Road, and arrive at his studio in the morning. He worked at a large table installed in a porch just outside his house. Inside the house he had several paintings and glass engravings. Across from the porch, on the other side of a terrace there was a small bamboo-walled room where his sister's family produced *tempe*. He would sometimes not even look up as I sat down at the large table across from him. His bold head and tiny glasses gave him an air of passionate imperturbability that reminded me simultaneously of a watchmaker and a monk. But as we worked through the morning, he would begin talking longingly about the old days and the corruption of the current times.

He would reminisce sadly about the times when 70 percent of the village he inhabits was dedicated to the noble art of *wayang* puppet making, a proportion that has decreased to less than 5 percent in present times. Today, most of the children in the village are studying English rather than Javanese and dream of leaving for the city, much to the disdain of Pak Bandi. Pak Bandi is a man of high standards and inflexible daily rituals. At 12 pm, he would stop his work and drive across the village to a specific place where they make *gado-gado*. There are many more such places nearby, but he would only go to this

one place. Sometimes he would insist on bringing the food himself and sometimes I would go there with him. During lunch he sometimes asked me questions about my own home.

"Do you speak a local language or only English?", he asked. "I speak Spanish," I added to his confusion. "Why Spanish, is there no local language?" I summed up the colonial past of my country in two sentences. "So you don't speak any local dialect?" he insisted. I disappointed him with my negative answer. "*Wah!* I am sure your grandfather must be angry at you." I told him my grandfather also didn't speak any local languages and his disappointment only grew. He was probably imagining a land plagued by the cultural amnesia he sees in his grandson. In any case, he never asked about my country again.

I spent several weeks chirping off bits of leather and adding colors to the puppets. I did not become by any means a proficient carver, but this short experience brought certain qualities of the puppets to my attention. At every step of the process, they are made for the performance. The upper half of the puppet is made thinner so that it is easier to hold. The hinges and handles are carefully placed to guarantee optimal flexibility and comfort. I would later spend many years trying to learn how to bring them alive.

I first started to learn how to control the puppets from Pak Parjaya, but his pedagogical principles were too mysterious for me. In a normal session, he would take two random puppets and show me their respective motions. When I asked him to repeat them for me, he would do something completely different, often with different puppets. Through the six months of this first

learning experience I was able to familiarize myself with a wide array of patterns of motion, but it was impossible for me to commit any of them to muscular memory. The teaching approach itself did not allow for nuanced, precise reproduction of the movements.

When I returned to Indonesia in 2012 for my official, year-long fieldwork, I enrolled at Habirandha, the *pedalangan* school of the Yogyakarta Kraton, where I encountered a more formalized teaching environment. In stark contrast with the stochastic pedagogy of Pak Parjaya, here we worked on just one 20-minute scene for an entire year. The scene was repeated each week in the different classes, so we could pay attention to the handling technique (*sabetan*), the music and the narration. All the puppet movements had been carefully dissected for didactic purposes. A set of puppet positions, from 1 to 10, were abstracted into diagrams that decorated the practice room. Most of the students came from non-*dalang* families and for once, everyone else was as bad as me. But this system, which was considered ridiculous by my *dalang* friends and which could easily be made into a *Pedalangan for Dummies* book, was wonderful to me. It allowed me to learn how to move the puppets and it provided me with ample opportunity to satisfy my researcher's curiosity. Unfortunately, due to the constant need to travel and attend other performances, I was unable to continue the course. But I kept taking private lessons from one of my teachers, Sri Mulyono.

I also have some experiences making, or participating in the creation, of non-conventional puppets. For my first *wayang* performance in 2008, I drew some

characters based on *Mexica* (Aztec) characters and gave them to Ki Toro, who is both a *dalang* and a puppet maker and asked him to have them carved out.

They were supposed to be used in a performance that mixed projections and puppets and they were colorless. However, I asked Toro to maintain the kinetic conventions required for the efficient and comfortable manipulation of the puppets. Not all *kontemporer* puppets adhere to this philosophy. Sometimes the new creations are meant to be visually appealing and they create challenges to the puppeteer. Catur Kuncoro told me once that the puppets created by Eko Nugroho required him to learn (or rather, invent) a new way of handling them. Eko's puppets have sharp edges and hinges located in the midst of thick limbs. This make conventional handling techniques useless. The puppets are also bigger and heavier than conventional ones and Catur cannot hold two of them at the same time, adding to the challenges the *dalang* needs to overcome.

Innovations in puppet design can require new handling techniques. But the new handling technique itself can constitute the innovation. This is required, for example, when working with projectors. In my first and only *kontemporer* project called *The Secret Life of the Volcanoes*, I combined puppets and projections. The projection changes the idea of the screen. A white screen is an empty space, with more semiotic flexibility than a projected image. The movement and dialogue of the puppets can trigger changes in the perception of the space, as it is imagined by the spectators. By contrast, a fixed image

limits the imaginative possibilities and requires a more realistic progression between one space and the next.

### Conventional Puppets

The puppets can be understood in terms of both symbolism and embodied interaction. The conventional usage of puppets upholds the poetics of both aspects. *Wayang* puppets have disproportionately long hands. According to my teacher, Pak Parjaya, this represents human insatiability. But this is not their only symbolic function. On a pictorial level, they represent specific character traits. As Jan Mrázek describes, they are a combination of frontal and profile depictions of the characters. The colors, morphology and angle of the head are all indicative of inner qualities of the particular character represented. Some characters might be represented by different *wanda* (literally "face", a version of a puppet in a specific state), depending on the particular moment of the story when the puppet appears.

Several performances that may be classified as *kontemporer* still use the puppets in such a way: Lara Tanpa Liru, *Sugriwa Dan Subali*, Kalimataya, Kasmaran Tak Bertanda and Wayang Mitologi. However, these performances differ greatly from one another.

In Figure 2.1, we see one of the actors holding the puppet of Arimbi behind the screen. On the screen a clearly delineated shadow of the puppet and control rods is discernible. This image provides a good representation of what happens throughout the performance: all puppets are fully traditional, like the one appreciated here, but their positioning in the space is not.



FIGURE 2.1. Arimbi in *Lara Tanpa Liru*.

This is not very different from that which we can appreciate in *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda* (Figure 2.2). In this performance, the *dalang* and the puppet can be clearly seen denoting an unconventional spatial arrangement. In both cases, shadows are projected onto screens at certain moments in the performances.





FIGURE 2.2. From left to right: Dewi Indradi, Resi Gotama, the Cupu Manik Astagina, Anjani, Guwarsa and Guwarsi in *Sugriwa dan Subali*.

A very different image is presented in *Sugriwa dan Subali* (Figure 2.3) where all aspects denote a traditional approach: the puppet construction, usage and spatial arrangement. Even the story, though not its duration, is traditional.



FIGURE 2.3. Kresna, Bima and Arjuna in *Kalimataya*.

A third set of performances that use conventional puppets do so in combination with digital images. In Figure 2.3, we see Kresna, Bima and Arjuna, represented by conventional puppets against a digital backdrop, in *Kalimataya*.



FIGURE 2.4. Sujiwo Tejo manipulates Satiawati (left) and Prabu Santanu (right) in *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*.

Likewise, in *Wayang Mitologi* there is a combination of digital images and shadows of traditional puppets (Figure 2.5). However *Wayang Mitologi* constitutes an important exception among performances that use conventional puppets. In this performance, conventional puppets are used to represent characters outside of the *purwa* story cycles.



FIGURE 2.5. From left to right: Empu Rama and Empu Permadi in *Wayang Mitologi*.

What does this variety tell us about the usage of conventional puppets? We have seen performances where the spatial arrangements and the characters depicted are traditional (*Sugriwa dan Subali*), performances where spatial arrangements are not traditional but the characters depicted are (*Kasmaraan Tak Bertanda, Lara Tanpa Liru, Kalimataya*) and performances where both the spatial arrangements and characters depicted are not traditional (*Wayang Mitologi*). Looking at the puppet variable in isolation proves that using conventional puppets can suit many different artistic agendas, since the performances are thematically and aesthetically very different from one another. Some of them are very conservative in terms of their themes (such as *Sugriwa dan Subali*) whereas others include scenes of political parody (such as *Wayang Mitologi*) or are critical of conventional ethical values (such as *Kalimataya*). Even the visual atmosphere in which traditional puppets are inserted can be wide ranging: it can be fully traditional, it can be a traditional screen combined with lights, or an altogether different setting.

But do these performances still have something in common? Yes, since in all cases the conventions for pictorial depiction and the materials used were kept intact, maintaining the visual legacy of the puppets within *kontemporer* performance contexts. This was a relatively unusual choice by the *dalang* in the selection considered in this dissertation. Only five performances use conventional puppets, whereas 12 use combinations and 7 use non-

conventional ones. One reason for this is the influence of Sukasman in the development of *wayang kontemporer*. Being a visual artist and puppet maker, for him innovation in *wayang* was intrinsically tied to new ways of making and depicting puppets. However, the five performances described above demonstrate that it is possible to use time-honored puppet conventions within a multiplicity of artistic projects that are still works of contemporary *wayang*.

These performances maintain the ways characters are pictorially imagined, pledging silent advocacy for the traditional etiquette of embodied interactions between body and skin, controller and controlled, even in the most contemporary *wayang* shows.

#### Intermedial Puppets

There are many ways in which traditional and non-traditional ways of portraying characters can be combined in *kontemporer* performances. The combinations can also include new protocols for the interaction of puppets and people. In all cases, these new versions open up intermediate spaces for negotiations among flesh, skin and other media, which include: combinations of puppets and actors, different roles for the *dalang* (which can include more than one *dalang* per show), the intermingling of traditional and non-traditional puppets, or the combination of different traditional puppets not commonly used together (*kulit* and *golek*). They also allow for the emergence of new visual constellations of the *wayang* puppet morphology and its corresponding symbolism.

In some cases, there is a combination of puppets and actors, as in Jabang Tetuka and Wayang Hip Hop. In *Jabang Tetuka* the same characters are represented in different media. Arjuna is sometimes a puppet, sometimes a live actor and sometimes an actor recorded on video (Figure 2.6 and Figure 2.7). The same is true for most characters, although some appear only in puppet form.



FIGURE 2.6. An actor representing Batara Guru is suspended by cables in *Jabang Tetuka*.



FIGURE 2.7. The shadow of a conventional puppet representing Batara Guru as he speaks with the mortals, in *Jabang Tetuka*.

However, in *Wayang Hip Hop*, each character has a stable representation. The *punokawan* are always represented by traditional puppets, while Arimbi, Gatotkaca, Bilung and Bima are always represented by the same live actors (Figure 2.8).



FIGURE 2.8. From right to left: Bilung (as actor), the *dalang* and puppets representing Gareng and Petruk, in *Wayang Hip Hop*.

In some performances, the *dalang* doubles up as actor. In *Cebolang Minggat*, Slamet Gundono acts out some of the characters, as he and Elizabeth read out certain narrative fragments (Figure 2.9).



FIGURE 2.9. Slamet Gundono portrays Nur Witri and Elizabeth Inandiak portrays Cebolang in *Cebolang Minggat*.

In *Jendral Karna*, Slamet represents both Arjuna and Karna in the final duel where the latter dies. This was accomplished by a juxtaposition of video recordings of the *dalang* (Figure 2.10).





FIGURE 2.10. Slamet Gundono portrays both Karna(right) and Arjuna (left), in *Jendral Karna*. A conventional *kayon* puppet is seen in the background.

Besides portraying characters, sometimes the *dalang* represents himself, as a *dalang*, on stage. In some cases, he can use this to interact with actors. In Sanditama Lagu Lagu the *dalang* acts as the director, coaching a group of kids who are putting on a show about certain *wayang* characters (Figure 2.11).





FIGURE 2.11. The *dalang* Nanang Hape coaches a young man to portray a character in *Sanditama Lagu Laga*.

A similar device is used in *Perseteruan Getah Bening*, where the *dalang* sells magical potions before the performance begins (Figure 2.12).



FIGURE 2.12. The *dalang* Catur 'Benyek' Kuncoro (with the red hat) sells magical potions in the first part of the show.

Another example is *Pertaruhan Drupadi* (Figure 2.13), where Slamet talks to Drupadi, portrayed by an actress, advising her to find her own answers on how to lead her life (for a fuller description of this dialogue see *Women*).



FIGURE 2.13. Slamet Gundono and an actress representing Drupadi in *Pertaruhan Drupadi*.

Other performances combine traditional and non traditional puppets. In Wayang Tanah, most puppets are lumps of soil or other natural elements such as leaves (Figure 2.14). But Togog is a conventional leather puppet (Figure 2.15).



FIGURE 2.14. Slamet Gundono moves a puppet made of a leaf that represents the *kayon*.



FIGURE 2.15. The *dalang* holds a traditional puppet representing Togog.

In *Jendral Karna* and *Pertaruhan Drupadi* some puppets are represented by leather puppets, others by cooking utensils and others by *suket* (grass) puppets (Figure 2.16 and Figure 2.17).



FIGURE 2.16. Slamet Gundono holds a conventional leather *kayon* in his right hand a *suket* puppet representing Bima in his left hand.



FIGURE 2.17. Slamet Gundono uses spoons and other cooking utensils to portray characters.

Other performances where the puppets can be considered intermedial are those which use new versions of traditional puppets, also made of leather but which constitute variations on the traditional iconography. The most telling example is Enthus Susmono's Dewa Ruci (Figure 2.18). Here, the *dalang* uses a puppet of Bima that looks more human like (and a little like Enthus himself!) and a *kayon* that is more realistic in its depiction of trees.



FIGURE 2.18. New puppets created by Enthus Susmono: *Bima*, *Durna* and a new *kayon*.

Another example is *Wayang Ukur*. As mentioned in Aesthetics, Sukasman created new puppets based on existing *wayang* conventions. This can be appreciated in the puppets used in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*, which consist of slightly modified shapes of conventional puppets (Figure 2.19).



FIGURE 2.19. New versions of Canggik and Limbuk created by Sukasman in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*.

Lastly, *Sumpah Pralaya* must be considered intermedial as it combines *wayang golek* puppets, projections and *wayang kulit* puppets (Figure 2.20). Sometimes these combinations have narrative functions. For example, in the opening scene, a *golek* puppet representing Abimanyu thinks about his past. The episode he remembers is presented in the background, through the shadows of *kulit* puppets combined with digital images (Figure 2.21).



FIGURE 2.20. Two *wayang golek* puppets interact in front of a row of several leather *kayon*.





FIGURE 2.21. An image from Sumpah Pralaya. In the background, there are digital images and shadows created by *wayang kulit* puppets. In the foreground, there is a *wayang golek* puppet and a leather *kayon*.

Most of the performances considered in this dissertation can be classified as mixed in their usage of puppets. The previous overview lists eleven performances that play with embodiment, interaction and iconography. This playfulness leads to a great variety of intermedial possibilities in the combination of *wayang* puppets and other media, as well as modified versions of conventional puppets. Some of these performances re-imagine embodied cultural memory by offering unusual interactions between puppets and people. These can be combinations of puppets and actors, the combination of traditional and non-traditional puppets, the combination of different traditional puppets not commonly used together, or they can include different roles for the *dalang*. Other performances considered in this category selectively modify the iconography of the puppets to portray characters

through unprecedented visual configurations, while still drawing from the tradition.

However, all of these performances took place within either mixed or non-conventional spatial configurations. Some *dalang* used traditional *wayang* in new spaces, and (as we will see) some used non-conventional puppets in traditional spatial settings. But mixed puppets were never used in traditional spaces. Why? One can easily imagine that at some point one *dalang* will do this (or perhaps this has already been done but I am unaware of it). However, the lack of such a combination in this sample is worth commenting on. I don't suggest there is an intrinsic, unavoidable rule preventing such combinations. But there seems to be a limit to the places where liminal *wayang* beings were welcome, and these cyborg creations were only invited to inhabit spaces that were either wholly non-conventional or, at least, also hybrids.

Another striking characteristic is that most of these performances assumed non-conventional views on ethical themes. The only exception here is *Sumpah Pralaya*, which adheres to quite traditional notions of behavior. But it is tempting to suggest that a change in the material of the puppet corresponds to a change in the material of the story. Perhaps this is more than just a coincidence. In Indonesian, the word *bahan* can be used to describe the material of which the puppet is made but it can also describe the "material of the story" or *bahan cerita*.



## Non-conventional Puppets

My main criteria for classifying performances in this category are that both the characters portrayed and the way the puppets are made must depart significantly from the tradition. However, it is possible to distinguish between two ways in which this is done: some *dalang* loosely follow conventional guidelines for non-conventional puppets made from leather while others use non-conventional materials for the creation of the puppets as well. The nuanced distinction between the materials is important since the leather (*kulit*) is part of the ontology and even the name of conventional *wayang kulit*. Later in this section, I will analyze a performance that explores this material substitution thematically (*Wayang Onthel*).

Some performances use leather puppets that depart from conventional construction guidelines and that represent non-traditional characters. This is the different to the puppets described as intermedial, which are new versions of conventional characters. The performances in this subcategory are Wayang Kampung Sebelah (Figure 2.22), Wayang Republik (Figure 2.23), Raden Saleh (Figure 2.24) and Wayang Kancil (Figure 2.25).



FIGURE 2.22. The presenter in *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*.



FIGURE 2.23. From left to right: Hamengkubuwana IX, Sukarno, and a *kayon* representing the city of Yogyakarta. In the *kayon*, from top to bottom: the Merapi Volcano, the *Tugu Malioboro* Monument, the *kraton*, the Pelangkung Gading and the South Sea.



FIGURE 2.24. Raden Saleh in the eponymous performance by Ledjar Subroto and Ananto Wicaksono.



FIGURE 2.25. Puppets representing trees, plants and different animals in *Wayang Kancil*.

There is another performance where the puppets could be said to work in a similar way: *Wayang Kancil*, a performance where new creations, also made

by Ledjar Soebroto, represent the characters from the *Serat Kancil* (see Environment). The puppets are made of leather but they represent characters that are outside of the *purwa* story cycle.

Some performance use puppets made from other materials, such as plastic. This is the case for *Sie Jin Kwie* (Figure 2.26) and *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah* (Figure 2.27), as well as for the *Wayang Bocor* performances: *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas* (Figure 2.28) and *Peresteruan Getah Bening*. In both cases the creators are visual artists who use the transparency of the plastic in order to generate colored shadows. The *Sie Jin Kwie* characters are inspired by the iconography of Chinese stories and the Bocor characters are creations of Eko Nugroho's imagination which he also uses for T-shirts, installations and videos (Figure 2.29).



FIGURE 2.26. A puppet representing the young Sie Jin Kwie in the eponymous performance by Teater Koma.



FIGURE 2.27. From left to right: a royal adviser, king Lisibin, and Sie Jin Kwie receiving golden coins as a present.



FIGURE 2.28. A puppet representing Cah Ayu in *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas*.



FIGURE 2.29. A woman wearing a T-shirt (left) and an installation by Eko Nugroho at the Musée de la Cité in Paris (right). Both are representations of the same type of characters depicted in *Bungkusan Hati di Dalam Kulkas*.

There is one performance that makes an explicit link between its material of choice and its theme: Wayang Onthel (Figure 2.30), where puppets are made from discarded bicycle parts. The bicycle is thematically explored as a symbol of tradition, and an environmentally-friendly means of transportation. Industrialization, individualism, and the destruction of the environment are represented as the combined consequences of disregard for tradition. And the bicycles are explored as part of the solution.



FIGURE 2.30. From left to right: Pak Darso, Jambul and Jambul's wife.

In the performances that use non-conventional puppets, new materials are used and the semiotic richness of the conventional *wayang* is forfeited for other expressive possibilities. In the case of *Wayang Onthel*, the material substitution allows for the thematic exploration of its environmental agenda. In other cases, the makers of the puppets find new ways of conveying the inner properties of the characters. The most interesting experiment in this direction is *Wayang Bocor*, where surreal puppets represent the characters. There is no explicit link between the character and its shape, which is left to the interpretation of the audience. This open-ended symbolism contrasts with the clearly defined set of symbolic associations that are part of traditional puppets.

In the eight performances where the puppets can be classified as non-conventional, all the stories are from non-conventional sources as well. This close connection between the approaches of two categories, where they map fully onto one another, is an unusual occurrence in the performances analyzed

in this dissertation and it warrants interpretation. As mentioned above, performances with mixed puppets often take oppositional views in ethical debates, but they often derive their narratives from the *purwa* story cycles. However, when it comes to non-conventional puppets, the stories were always new. In other words, the *dalang* never made a wholly new puppet for a *purwa* story. This reveals an intimate connection between the characters and the puppets that portray them. That connection can certainly be reconfigured but never totally dismissed. When characters from the *purwa* story were used, the puppets were always traditional or mixed. This should not be surprising, since the word *wayang* means both a puppet and a character from the *purwa* story cycle.



## 2.5 Stories: Vessels of a Memory Theatre

Before my first trip to Indonesia, I was only vaguely familiar with the plot of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The first thing I did to learn more about the stories was read novelized versions of the *entire* stories. This was certainly not the best approach, for the stories are never presented in their entirety. A one night show usually deals with only a segment of the story, the life journey of a particular character or a side story (i.e., a story of Javanese invention not found in the novelized versions that take their inspiration from the Indian versions of the epics). However, this rough overview of the stories did prove useful at the early stages of my *wayang kulit* studies in 2008.

My knowledge of the stories would only increase gradually for the next few months, during which I attended many traditional performances. I attended them dutifully equipped with pen and paper and asked fellow spectators to explain the stories to me, since at the time I was unable to speak Javanese. I also overwhelmed my teacher Pak Parjaya with questions of the genealogy and exploits of my favorite characters. People often asked me for a favorite character and at that time I usually said it was Arjuna. I explained that I admired him because despite being very skinny, he was still a ladies' man. I was extremely thin during my first time in Java and people would always laugh upon hearing my explanation.

Learning from the performances was not very helpful since I only saw a limited variety of *lakon* (stories) being performed in my first six months. Soon, however, I discovered an entire sub-genre of Indonesian novels dedicated to

providing readable narratives of segments of the stories. One of my personal favorites in this genre is *The Darkness of Gatotkaca*, by Pitoyo Amrih (2008). The book is written in Indonesian but its title is in English. A more appropriate title perhaps would be *The Loneliness of Gatotkaca*, since the story details the solitary adventures of the young son of Bima. The author confided that he agreed with this but that he preferred the sonority of the word "darkness". The book portrays the psychological life of the hero in more nuanced a light than is usually common in *wayang* performances, giving it an almost realistic, contemporary dimension. Yet, there is no attempt by the author to deliberately incorporate any element from the contemporary world into the story as some *kontemporer* performances do (for example, by having Drupadi meet George Bush). In what follows I use this criterion to distinguish between traditional and intermedial story uses. If the stories are wholly located within the realms of a mythological world, I consider them traditional. If they incorporate elements of the contemporary world explicitly, then I refer to them as intermedial. In this sense, the non-conventional stories are those that come from outside the world of either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana. Adapting a story to *wayang* poses its own set of challenges. I also have some limited experience in this respect, dating to my first attempt to make a *wayang* show in 2008.

At the end of my six-month residence in Indonesia, I presented a show called *The Secret Life of the Volcanoes*. For this show, I adapted a well-known myth about the origin of two volcanoes in the city where I grew up. Almost three years later, in September 2011, I performed this story in a double bill show

with Catur Kuncoro's troupe, who were doing Wayang Mitologi, a performance that also deals with a myth surrounding the origin of a volcano in Yogyakarta. In between the two stories, we presented a *goro-goro* scene with two performers. I controlled Bagong and he manipulated Gareng and Petruk. We tried to use this scene as a space to reflect on the intercultural nature of the stories we had presented. Naturally, as befits the clown scene, this reflection had to be shrouded in humor. Bagong accounted for his strange accent by indicating he had spent some time traveling around Mexico, acquiring a strange pronunciation in the meantime.

This limited experience illustrates two principles at work in *kontemporer* adaptations. A valid reason for incorporating a new story into *wayang* is that such a story has never been presented through *wayang* before. This was certainly my initial motivation. But the incorporation of other stories (or other elements) also opens up the possibility of addressing themes not always discussed, as was the case in my collaboration with Catur in 2011.

### Conventional Stories

One could also analyse the stories in terms of their narrative model or structure. However, I have decided to focus solely on the origin the stories, regardless of how they are presented, since the main objective is to study the effect of the story that was selected by the *dalang*. *Wayang* is a memory theatre where stories are both important and unimportant. Most conventional performances are based on well-known stories and *wayang* aficionados are usually familiar with the plot of the story being presented. The stories are

important because a substantial part of the discussions that follow a performance revolve around the story presented. Yet, the story is unimportant in the sense that few people listen to the entire story. The stories are particular vessels for the transmission of memory where the idea of the story is sometimes more important than the story itself. That is why stories are explored here as building blocks for creative explorations. I will not dwell on the content and interpretation of the stories (which is addressed extensively in Chapter 3). Rather, I focus on the creative implications of using a story from a particular source: the classical *purwa* cycles, which correspond to either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana. The former is more often performed than the latter, which is most commonly reserved for dance dramas. The Javanese version of the Mahabharata is divided into 16 chapters (*parwa*). Each of these chapters can become the *lakon* (story) of an all-night *wayang*. But even the most traditional performances often depart from the main story line. This is the case in the *lakon carangan*.

A conventional *lakon carangan* which is often performed is Dewa Ruci, which provides the material for the eponymous performance by Enthus Susmono (for an interpretation of the spiritual meaning of the story see Spirituality). In another performance by Enthus, Sugriwa dan Subali, the story is taken from the Ramayana cycle. This is one of the few performances analyzed here based on this cycle. Its plot explains why Sugriwa, Subali and Anjani became monkeys (they are Hanoman's uncles and mother, respectively).

Wayang Tanah by Slamet Gundono is the only other performance considered for this dissertation that is inspired by a story in the Ramayana. In Slamet's version, Rahwana is portrayed as an irrational creature, drunk with the desire to marry his new-born daughter, who is successfully hidden from him and sent into exile. However, this story is only used during the first section of the performance. The second section consists of songs by Slamet and the third one is an agricultural ritual invoked to call the rain. Still, the narrative parts of this performance correspond to a *purwa* story, and they are not combined with narrative elements from the contemporary world (which is the criteria for the stories to be considered non-traditional).

Other performances use *purwa* stories from the Mahabharata. Sungsang Bawono Balik tells the story of Saroja Kusuma, Duryudana's son, who aims to change his ugly shape and achieve power (see Familial Ties for a fuller description). Sumpah Pralaya tells the story of Abimanyu, who pledges an oath to Utari which he is unable to fulfill and later dies in the Baratayuda war (see Familial Ties and Spirituality). Lara Tanpa Liru tells the stories of Gatotkaca and Karna from the perspective of their mothers: Arimbi and Kunti, respectively (see Familial Ties). Jabang Tetuka deals with the infancy of Gatotkaca and his fight against the giant Nalaprakana (see Familial Ties). Kalimataya begins with the *Baratayuda* war and ends with the ascent to power of Parikesit - Abimanyu's son and Arjuna's grandson - who inherits the crown of Astina long after the end of the war (see Familial Ties). This one is a traditional *lakon*, but it is not commonly performed. As Magnis-Suseno notes, generally speaking, "there are no *lakon carangan* after the end of the war, and the *Baratayuda*

*Jaya Binangun* [i.e., the Baratayuda War] ]is rarely represented" (Magnis-Suseno 1991: 62).

By choosing classical stories and not mixing them with other narrative elements, *dalang* adhere to a particular path in their reinterpretation of cultural memory. In these cases, like in all other *kontemporer* performances, the ethical interpretation of the stories can be problematized and other aesthetic dimensions can be heavily modified. In fact, five of the eight performances just described take oppositional attitudes towards ethical themes and the rest adhere to more conventional interpretations. Yet, the story as an essential vessel of memory transmission is firmly maintained at the center of these re-elaborations.

Tellingly, none of these stories were performed in a conventional space. In this dissertation, I hypothesize that the story is a vessel for the transmission of cultural memory and that the usage of the space configures the experience of the performance. Both of these ways of establishing links with the tradition are so strongly embedded in the cultural imagination of Java, that innovation seems to demand that, at least, one of them be reinvented if the performance is to be a *kontemporer* one. In the performances analyzed here, when the story was conventional, the space had to be either mixed or non-conventional. Traditionalism in the usage of the space and the story seem to be mutually exclusive.

This observation of patterns and regularities is perhaps the result of serendipity. The creations of the contemporary *dalang* are highly idiosyncratic

and an artist will one day perhaps make a performance that uses a traditional space and a traditional story and *is still* considered *kontemporer*. Innovation can come in many shapes. But *kontemporer* performances always keep something and change something, in a mechanism of imaginative substitution I have been calling intermedial tradeoff. In the performances analyzed here, either the setting for the experience of the performance or the main vessel for the transmission of cultural memory had to be reworked in order to reinterpret the *wayang* tradition.

### Intermedial Stories

The story is certainly a medium (according to the definition presented in the introduction to this chapter) and the usage of other narratives constitutes a resensibilization of perception. Thus, we can also consider these combinations in terms of their intertextuality.

The performances which rely on intertextual connections drastically combine the characters of the Mahabharata with everyday situations that correspond to the contemporary world. For example, in Slamet Gundono's *Pertaruhan Drupadi*, the heroine travels around the world and meets the president of the United States, George Bush (see *Politics and Women*). In *Jendral Karna*, the dialogues situate the action in an intermedial realm, which refers to the mythical time of the story and to the contemporary world at the same time. For example, the following conversation takes place between the *dalang* and a milk saleswoman with a plan to help Karna:

MILK SELLER. My milk has *international class* [in English].

DALANG. International class? Is that first grade or kindergarten?

MILK SELLER. What I mean is that my milk sells *all over the world* [in English].

DALANG. Oh. *The world*. I will kiss you in no time. When you say *the world* like that, your lips stand out. Just like an open Thermos.

MILK SELLER. But it's true.... My milk is drunk by all the Mexican cowboys.

DALANG. The Mexican cowboys drink milk?

MILK SELLER. In Texas. If hey haven't drunk my milk, they can't ride a horse.

DALANG. That's crazy!

Consider the way in which *Kunti* is described in the same performance:

DALANG. It is said that she was a combination of local and western beauty. Dewi Kunti was really beautiful and her whole body shone. If she was offered a drink you could see the drink's color as it passed through here [he points at his neck].



Every morning she went for a run, *man*. A morning jog. And in the late morning she went for fitness training. She always drank modern medicines to make her body strong. But she also drank traditional *jamu* drinks. So her eyes were fierce and beautiful as those of Demi Moore. Her hair was cut like Lady D. But she could shake her ass like Inul [Daratista]. She had a mixed beauty.

As a final example, we can note the way Basudewa describes Kunti's education:

BASUDEWA. Why would our dad Kuntiboja send you all the way to study in Los Angeles? For you to come back now like this. You have brought shame to our family. Pregnant! Its so shameful that you don't even know who it was!

Another example can be found in Wayang Hip Hop, where one of the *punokawan* is seduced by the drug trade, which is seen as a topical problem in contemporary Java (see Youth). Likewise, in Sanditama Lagu Laga, a group of young people living in Jakarta discuss the infancy of Karna and Gatotkaca, expressly connecting it to the lives of young people in Jakarta (see Familial Ties). Kasmaran Tak Bertanda presents the story of Bhishma's accidental murder of Dewi Amba, who swears revenge on him. Through many asides, Sujiwo Tejo compares the situations the characters find themselves in with situations in the contemporary world (see Politics).

When stories are maintained as vessels of cultural memory yet reconfigured, they allow the *dalang* to engage in a selective erasure of those memories, creating gaps in their progressions and filling them with references to contemporary Java. Mixed stories are often coupled with the love for innovation in many other aspects of the performances: none of these performances used traditional music or a traditional space. In terms of the ethical views presented in these performances, all but one suggest playful or even oppositional views on ethical themes. The exception is *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, in which the *dalang* espouses misogynist views.

#### Non-conventional stories

The performances which use stories that do not come from the *purwa* cycle take their narrative material from a variety of sources: 19th century literary works, non-Javanese myths, parodies of the modern world, and history. Many of these are not new, yet they are not conventional. One such example is Wayang Kancil, a performance that uses the wit of the mouse-deer *kancil* as a way of addressing environmental concerns in present-day Indonesia (see Environment). This story is based on the 19th century tales of the mouse-deer *kancil* compiled in the *Serat Kancil*.

A similar example comes from the *Serat Centhini*, a narrative literary work in verse which also dates from 19th century, and which provided the main story for Cebolang Minggat. This performance is based on one of the chapters of the literary work, where Cebolang - the son of a sheyik - wanders around Java in search of knowledge and pleasure (see Spirituality and Youth). A third example

of non-conventional stories is the legend of the origin of the Merapi volcano in Yogyakarta that provides the source material for the plot of *Wayang Mitologi*. In this performance, two expert *keris* makers create a weapon that surpasses the power of all the weapons known to the Gods; in retaliation, the Gods close down their workshop with rocks taken from the Himalayan mountain range, thus creating a volcano in Java (see Environment and Politics).

A non-Javanese myth provides the story for Teater Koma's Sie Jin Kwie and Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah. These stories which depict the adventures of the hero Sie Jin Kwie are standard plots for the Chinese-Javanese *Potehi* (glove puppet performances in the northern coast of Central Java). Teater Koma's versions explore the ascent of Sie Jin Kwie to power in the fight between the Kingdoms of Lisibin and Kolekop, and the subsequent attempt by jealous noblemen to discredit him (see Familial Ties).

Wayang Kampung Sebelah is a parody of the art market: Kampret asks his friend to help him get his paintings sold (see Art). Wayang Onthel is a parable of environmental destruction and capitalism (see Politics and Environment). Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas and Perseteruan Getah Bening are both inspired by newspaper articles that describe men who kill their wives and their lovers (see Familial Ties). Raden Saleh explores the work of the famous 19th century Javanese nobleman and artist who painted *The Capture of Diponegoro* (see Spirituality and Art).

Wayang Republik addresses the role of the city of Yogyakarta in the Indonesian struggle for Independence (see Politics and Music). There have been many

previous attempts to use historical events as the source of *wayang* narratives, but this is still considered as a non-conventional use of stories.

Under this category we find performances that use non-conventional stories, which can come from 19th century literary works, non-Javanese myths, parodies of the modern world, and history. In some cases, these stories represent forgotten legacies, like the sexual exuberance of *Serat Centhini* or the suppressed Chinese heritage in Java of *Sie Jin Kwie*. In other cases, there is an instrumental aspect in the choice of stories, as is the case in the usage of the *Serat Kancil* for environmental education in *Wayang Kancil* or the history of the Indonesian struggle in *Wayang Republik* for political objectives. In all the cases considered here, the constraints of traditional stories are seen as too limited for the thematic explorations desired by the *dalang*. The story, as an aesthetic variable and a vessel of cultural memory, is cracked open, allowing for other narratives to be used in the reconfiguration of *wayang*.

The whole gamut of experimental aesthetic possibilities is represented here. The three categories for each of the other variables are all represented in these eleven performances with non-conventional stories. In the selection of performances analyzed in this dissertation there are only two performances with mixed language, and both use non-conventional stories as the source for their plots. The plasticity of non-conventional stories is firmly indicated by two facts: every combination of categories and variable is represented here. And, when it comes to the stories, there are more performances in the non-conventional category than in any other.

## 2.6 Space: Configurations of Experience

Learning how to use space in *wayang*, as performer and audience, is the opposite of learning how to enjoy western theatre. In my actor training in university, I spent a considerable amount of time learning how to move around the space. Common acting exercises required the participants to develop an awareness of the space and of other people in it. In the place where I grew up, learning to be a polite spectator of drama entailed learning to keep still and be silent.

In order to create and appreciate *wayang* shows, I had to learn the exact opposite. As an audience member I had to learn to walk about and make loud comments to fellow spectators. As a performer, I had to learn to stay in place. A common rehearsal exercise with Pak Parjaya in Java consisted of sitting still for several hours. A *dalang* is supposed to remain cross-legged for seven or eight hours without interruption. As preparation for this, my teacher insisted that I remain in the appropriate sitting position for the duration of the class, which was between two and four hours. In fact, a common exercise for trainee *dalang* consists of sitting cross-legged in the shallow end of a river for an entire night (a practice called *kungkuman*), or to remain in this position for one night in a place that is famous for meditation, usually the tombstone of a famous *dalang* (particularly if he is your ancestor).

The *dalang* will not shift his position during the entire night, but the spectators are expected to wander freely around the venue of the performance. Few people watch the entire show, and those who do are

hardly static. Watching different segments from different vantage points might be a strategy to induce variation and avoid boredom, and to socialize with other spectators.

The patterns of behavior outlined above might change drastically in a *kontemporer* performance. Sometimes, these shows require an inversion of traditional expectations of behavior that echo what happens in a western theatre play. The *dalang* moves around the space and interacts with other performers, while the audience is expected to remain seated and silent.

Another way to understand the usage of the space is to look at what happens on the *wayang* screen as a symbolic space. The following reflections are a result of my first experiences learning how to animate the puppets with my teacher and of the show I created in 2008, *The Secret Life of the Volcanoes*, where I used a digital projector to cast digital images on the screen. As I worked on this show, my teacher highlighted the way digital imagery problematizes traditional puppet handling conventions. I believe that many of these issues have also been encountered by the *dalang kontemporer* whose work I analyze later in this section.

In a conventional show, the empty space on the screen is 'manipulated' through narrative and action. Learning how to animate the puppets implies learning how to use semiotic conventions for the creation of space. Let's suppose you have a certain character, say Arjuna, who is walking through the forest. In order to represent Arjuna's journey through the forest, the puppet would enter the space from the right, walk a few steps and then disappear

from the left. Then he would appear *again from the right*. But the space to which he now comes would be *different*. One can imagine this space as the continuation of the previous space. If this were a film, we could suppose that the camera has panned to the left, so now we see the space that was previously hidden. In a traditional show, this usage of the space in the empty screen requires the active imagination of the audience. Some *kontemporer* shows use the space in a different way, using colored lights and projections to convey specific locations in a more realistic way. The movements of the puppet which convey the journey of a character across a field or a forest are not needed in such a case, since it is the realistic imagery the one that is moved in order to generate the effect of spatial progression.

The ways in which puppets enter and exit the screen also change when digital projectors are introduced. The light bulb of traditional shows generates a light that is not uniformly distributed, but that becomes darker and blurred as it moves away from the center. Therefore, the shadows cast by the puppets are only sharp when the puppet is directly in front of the light bulb and when it is placed flush against the screen. Entrances and exits depend on this convention. When the puppet enters the space, the *dalang* holds it 30cm in front of the screen, either to his right or his left. Thus, the puppet casts a skewed shadow on the screen. Then the puppet is moved towards the screen, bringing the shadow into sharp focus. When the puppet exits the symbolic space in the center of the screen, the opposite effect is created. The puppet moves from a sharp focus to a blurry shadow. The light created by the

projector, by contrast, is evenly distributed and the progression from blurry to sharp focus is impossible to generate with a digital projector alone.

The usage of the projector thus changes the ontology of the symbolic space, from one that is eminently an imaginative realm to a surface where realistic images are projected. This ontological change requires technical adaptations.

The *dalang* need to find new ways to move the puppets in and out of the space. The following sections detail the way the stage and the symbolic space of the screen are used in *kontemporer* performances: sometimes reproducing conventional settings, sometimes substituting them for entirely new configurations and, more often than not, mixing these two possibilities.

#### Conventional Space Usage

The experience of a *wayang* performance is closely determined by its spatial configuration. This section analyzes what happens when this configuration is maintained. I will start by clarifying what is considered as the traditional configuration of the space in contemporary Java.

In most *tradisi* shows, foreign tourists arrive with their cameras and only witness the performance briefly and, most likely, from the side of the shadows. Yet, most Javanese watch the show from the side of the *dalang*.

The foreigners might watch it from the shadow side because of the expectations they bring with them. They perhaps think this is what they are supposed to see and the fact that *wayang* is often described as a 'shadow theatre' does not help (in the Introduction, I suggested that it could better be described as "the art of the *dalang*").



The reason for the divergence in expectations and the changes in the conception of the optimal vantage point for a performance is something worth exploring. In *Panji The Culture Hero*, W. H. Rassers (1959) suggests that, as far as we can gather from existing records, *wayang* spectators have always watched the shows from both the shadow and the puppet side.

In order to support this point, he presents an overview of the writings on *wayang* by Raffles, Winters, Poensen, Veth and Rouffer. Rassers asserts that the missionary C. Poensen (1972) was the first person to offer a description of the arrangement of the spectators in a *wayang* performance venue.

According to Rassers, Poensen was surprised that the women saw the shadows while the men watched the puppets. According to his informants, this situation was already old at the time and explained as an old *adat* (custom). G.R. Rouffer suggested that the distribution of the audience was a "corruption" of the original situation where all spectators watched the side of the shadows (qtd. in Rassers 1957: 130). Rouffer even hypothesized that this meant that the *wayang* was originally a performance offered for the benefit of women.

However Rassers finds Rouffer at fault and argues that this "original" situation never existed. In the earliest descriptions of *wayang* (written by Raffles in 1819 and Winters in 1824) there was no mention of the place of the spectators. Rassers suggests that it is possible to conclude, based on the commentary of *wayang* spectators of the late 19th century, that some spectators had always watched the puppets rather than the shadows and

that, in fact, this was the privileged place from which to watch a performance.

The Javanese wayang is two things at once: shadow-theatre and puppet-show [...] and further, it is primarily a performance of puppets, exclusively for the *tiang sepuh* and the *lare-lare*, the adult men and the boys; they alone see what is performed in its correct relationship and in the proper grouping [...] in so far as the *wayang* is a shadow-play, this is a secondary phenomenon, a performance for an audience of women and children, who apparently were shown little respect (Rassers 1957: 137).

According to Rassers a long tradition of watching the *wayang* from the side of the shadows helps explain some puzzling facts. It is well known that in a *wayang* show there is a difference between the characters that enter from the left and those that enter from the right. But this refers to the left and the right of the *dalang* and of the spectators watching from the same side as him. The second fact is the intricacy of the carving and coloring with which the puppets are decorated.

However, this traditional setup changed in the 20th century with the introduction of raised platforms that are now ubiquitous in traditional *wayang* performances. In order to understand why the introduction of the platforms was deemed necessary, we need to consider some aspects of Javanese etiquette. Earlier, village *dalang* did not always enjoy high privilege and status and they would sit on the floor while onlookers were standing up. The spectators were looking down on the performers, which could be

interpreted as offensive. The vertical hierarchy of sitting and standing positions is very important in a traditional Javanese context. If you visit someone at their home and they consider you to be of higher status, they will always sit on a surface that is at least as low as the surface on which you are sitting. This convention also governs the arrangement of the puppets in a *wayang* show. There are two *gedebog* or banana trunks in front of the screen. The upper one is reserved for characters of higher status and the opposite is true for the lower one.

Therefore, based on this perception of space, it can be said that the performers in the setting described above did not enjoy a privileged status. This is what led Nartosabdo to change the way the space in a performance was organized in the 1970s. He introduced the raised platform which is now ubiquitous in every *tradisi* show. Chairs and mats were provided for the spectators to look at the show from the side of the *dalang*. Reputedly, Ki Narto was also the first to instruct the *sinden* (female singers) to face the audience, and to clad the musicians of the *gamelan* in uniform colors. This story was told to me by Ledjar Soebroto, who worked in his early career as Nartosabdo's assistant. However, according to my teacher Sri Mulyono, the raised platform only became widely used much later, in the times when Anom Suroto became famous (the 1980s).

*Wayang* images from the beginning of the 20th century attest to the fact that there was no raised platform at the time. Whether the history above is the true origin of the usage of the stage or not, one thing is certain. Today, most

*tradisi* shows in Java use a raised platform and most of the audience looks at the musicians, the singers and the *dalang*. From the vantage point of the majority of the spectators, the *dalang* can be seen selecting and animating the puppets. As described above, when the puppets enter the stage, the *dalang* holds them either to the left or the right of the *blencong*, the light hanging above his head. As they are moved from this position to the center of the screen they project a shadow that can be appreciated from either side. Currently, there are no restrictions on who can watch the show from the side of the shadows, but few people choose to do so. In some performances, I have even seen the screen positioned flush against a wall, preventing anyone from seeing the side of the shadows. But preventing people from seeing the *dalang* would be unthinkable for a *tradisi* show. The *tradisi* usage of the space is not limited to the screen. During the *limbukan* (the scene of the female clowns Limbuk and Canggik), the *dalang* often interviews the *sinden*, asking them private questions about their lives. Although the *sinden* remain static during this scene, they become the focus of attention. The *sinden* are certainly visible throughout the night, but it is only in this scene that they become the focus of the spectators' attention and the dramatic epicenter of the performance. They are, for a moment, more like actresses than like supporting musicians. Similarly, the active space of the *wayang* spatial structure is also extended during the *gara-gara* scene. The "lens" of performative attention zooms out to include the rest of the platform. There, guest performers such as comedians and singers are often invited to

participate in the performance and they generally position themselves on the same platform as the musicians.

Four of the *kontemporer* performances use the space in this way: Catur Kuncoro's *Wayang Republik* (Figure 2.31), Andri Topo's *Wayang Onthel* (Figure 2.32), Ananto Wicaksono's *Raden Saleh* (Figure 2.33) and Jlitheng Suparman's *Wayang Kampung Sebelah* (Figure 2.34). There are no guest performers in the first four, so the action is restricted to the screen and the shows are generally watched from the side of the performers. The recordings of the archive are therefore mostly shot from that side but include some occasional footage of the shadows for most of these shows. The exception is *Wayang Onthel*; on the occasion of the recording, the screen was placed next to a wall, leaving no room to record the shadows.



FIGURE 2.31. A puppet representing Sukarno in *Wayang Republik*.



FIGURE 2.32. The space of *Wayang Onthel*. The musicians occupy the platform in the way they would in a traditional show. The *dalang* (in a red shirt) animates the puppets made from spare bicycle parts.



FIGURE 2.33. Nanang Kancil inserts a puppet representing Raden Saleh in the *gedebog* in *Raden Saleh*.



FIGURE 2.34. JIitheng Suparman animates two puppets placed on a *gedebog* in *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*.

*Raden Saleh* and *Wayang Kampung Sebelah* use this kind of setting but they both include guest performers. In *Raden Saleh*, halfway throughout the show, two songs are interpreted by musicians who place themselves in front of the platform where the rest of the musicians are located (Figure 2.35). *Wayang Kampung Sebelah* begins and ends with songs interpreted by a singer located in front of the musician's platform (Figure 2.36).



FIGURE 2.35. A guest singer occupies the space in front of the *dalang*, during a musical intermission in *Raden Saleh*.



FIGURE 2.36. Two guest singers perform on the platform in front of the screen in *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*.

All the performances in this category are seen from the side of the *dalang*. In a way reminiscent of traditional performances, the focus of the performance



sometimes includes guest performers. The experience of these performances is preserved in the way the *dalang* use the space, refusing the temptation of other settings and choosing instead a conventional setup as the stage for their aesthetic innovations in language, music, story and puppets.

There are fewer performances that use traditional space settings than those that use a mixed space or a non-conventional one. Firmly rooted in conventional configurations of experience, these *dalang* direct their innovations in other directions and they all share certain similarities. All of them use non-conventional puppets and non-conventional stories. Of those stories, two are historical (*Wayang Republik* and *Raden Saleh*), one is an environmental parable (*Wayang Onthel*) and the other one is a parody of artistic institutions (*Wayang Kampung Sebelah*).

#### Intermedial Space Usage

Many aspects of the experience of a *wayang* performance are determined by its spatial configuration. This section analyzes what happens when this is reinterpreted without completely dismissing its conventions. Traditional *wayang* is performed within the confines of a structured spatial setup, which consists of a screen, an electric lamp, and a raised platform. Several performances refuse the temptation of spatial intermedial tradeoffs, constraining innovation to language, music, story and puppets. Those at the opposite end of the spectrum rid themselves entirely of any physical trace of the traditional *wayang* space. Therefore, the ones that use an intermedial space choose a more eclectic path, which can take a multiplicity of forms: the

modification of the screen with the usage of colored lights or digital images, the appendage of prosceniums to *wayang* screens, the incorporation of several screens, or the transposition of miniature *wayang* devices into a different semiotic territory: that of the 'western' theatre stage.

In the last case, the performances use the proscenium stage in a way that echoes Chiel Kattenbelt's descriptions of the usage of space in Western European intermedial theatre. Space becomes a hypermedia that stages multiple media: *wayang*, film and actors. Intermediality theory conceptualizes the space as the stage of intermediality (Kattenbelt 2006), in other words, it is a meta-space where all the other arts are 'staged' and their intermedial relationships are rendered visible. This explains the spatial logic of several *wayang kontemporer* performances, where a *wayang*-within-the-play is staged in a proscenium theatre.

Other performances mix the conventional paraphernalia of *wayang* with non-traditional protocols of spatial dramaturgy. In these performances, sometimes the action is constrained to the screen, where special effects are created by colored lights and projectors. Although using projections and colored lights on the screen might not seem remarkable to spectators unfamiliar with *wayang*, I argue this is an important departure from the conventions. The main space of a traditional performance is the screen. When that screen is presented in a different light (literally), it becomes an entirely different kind of space.

As mentioned in Aesthetics, Sigit Sukasman was the first person to explore the visual appearance of the screen in a contemporary way. He used colored lights on both sides of the screen. Sometimes, he directed the performers to act behind the screen and coordinated the efforts of three *dalang* in his shows. The combination of different *dalang*, performers and colored lights allowed him to explore innovative visual compositions, which can be appreciated in *Sungsang Bawono Balik* (Figure 2.37).



FIGURE 2.37. Two *dalang*, one in front and one behind the screen animate two different sets of puppets. Seroja Kusuma and Kresna (held by the *dalang* on the right) move out of the space, for the next scene where Limbuk and Canggik will speak. This creates a visual effects similar to a crossfade in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*.

The inventiveness of Sukasman's exploration of colored lights served as inspiration for Enthuis Susmono. However, Enthuis is the sole *dalang* in his shows and does not use colored compositions as extensively as Sukasman.

Dewa Ruci (Figure 2.38) and Sugriwa dan Subali are examples of how Enthus uses colored lights in his shows.



FIGURE 2.38. Enthus moves two puppets representing fish while the lights change to purple and blue hues in order to represent the ocean in *Dewa Ruci*.



FIGURE 2.39. A golden ring encircles the *kayon* against a blue background.

This is an example of contemporary lighting techniques used in *Sugriwa dan Subali*.

Other performances use video projectors in order to combine digital imagery with the shadows of *wayang* puppets: Wayang Mitologi(Figure 2.40), Wayang Kancil(Figure 2.41), Kalimataya (Figure 2.42) and Sumpah Pralaya (Figure 2.43).



FIGURE 2.40. The translucent puppets of Petruk, Bagong and Gareng (from left to right) are seen against a digital backdrop generated by a projector. The digital image represents a *becak* (traditional "bicycle taxi") on the left and the original version of the *tugu* (a monument in Yogyakarta that connects an imaginary line between the volcano and the *kraton*) on the right, in *Wayang Mitologi*.

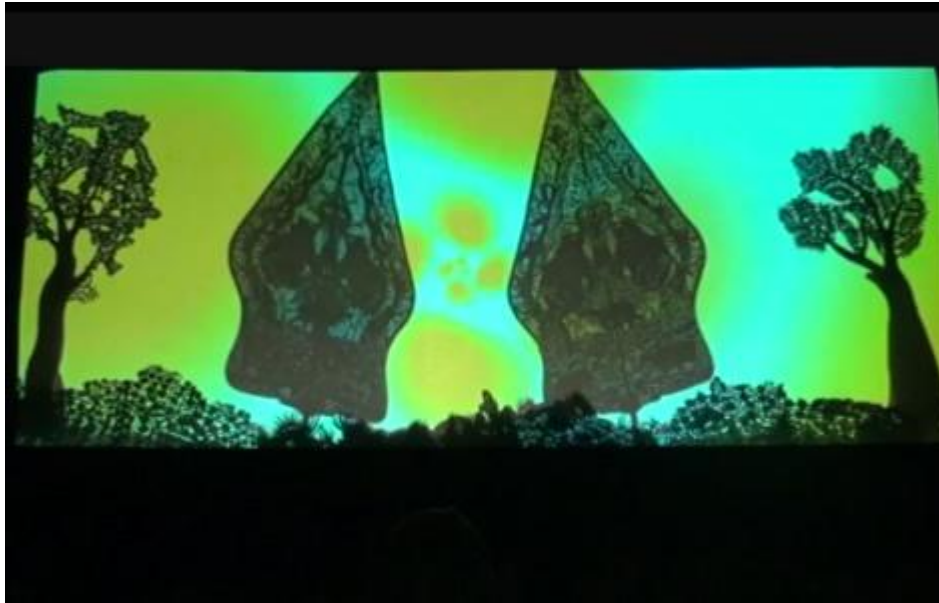


FIGURE 2.41. Two *kayon* move towards one another against a digital animated background with yellow hues in *Wayang Kancil*.



FIGURE 2.42. The a battle field in *Kalimataya* is represented by a combination of puppets and a digital image of a red square crisscrossed by pink diagonal lines, which suggests the atmosphere of the war.



FIGURE 2.43. A *wayang golek* puppet and a *kayon* can be seen on the left, with the hand of one of the *dalang* sticking out of the *gedebog*. In the background, the shadows of two *wayang kulit* puppets can be seen, framed by the outline of a non-conventional *kayon* and abstract digital imagery generated by a projector in *Sumpah Pralaya*.

Sometimes, the performances also use the space in front of the screen. For example, in *Wayang Hip Hop* there is an acting space in front of the screen (Figure 2.44).





FIGURE 2.44. From left to right: An actor representing *Mbilung* and playing the guitar, the *dalang*, and two actors representing Bima and Gatotkaca in *Wayang Hip Hop*.

The possibilities explained above are not mutually exclusive. *Kalimataya* (Figure 2.45) and *Sungsang Bawono Balik* (Figure 2.46-2.48) contain scenes where dancers perform in front of the intermedial screen.





FIGURE 2.45. Two dancers perform on a platform in front of the screen in *Kalimataya*.



FIGURE 2.46. A performer stands in the center of the stage, in front of a screen that is framed to the left and the right by two mythological horses (Sukasman's emblem for *Wayang Ukur*) in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*.



FIGURE 2.47. To represent a voyage into the future, two performers stand on a platform above the screen in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*. A rotating globe is seen behind them.



FIGURE 2.48. A wide shot of the spatial set-up in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*. The screen is in the center, flanked by sculptures of mythological horses. Above the screen, the platform with the actors and the rotating globe can be seen.

*Sumpah Pralaya* (Figure 2.49) and *Wayang Kancil*, besides containing projections of digital images, use a second performance space placed in front of the screen: a bare banana tree trunk with no screen, reminiscent of *wayang golek* shows. In *Wayang Kancil*, each of the two *dalang* occupy one of the performance spaces (Figure 2.50). Nanang uses the screen and Ledjar Subroto uses the *gedebog* (Figure 2.51 and Figure 2.52).



FIGURE 2.49. To the right, there are two *Wayang Golek* (three-dimensional wooden puppets) placed on a *gedebog*. To the left of these puppets, seven *kayon* are arranged in a flower-like shape. In the background, a digital image representing architectural features is projected onto a screen.



FIGURE 2.50. Ledjar Soebroto animates four puppets that are inserted into a *gedebog* in *Wayang Kancil*. The screen, which is not used in this scene, is in the background.



FIGURE 2.51. A side shot reveals Ledjar Soebroto controlling the puppets in the anterior performance space of *Wayang Kancil*.



FIGURE 2.52. The two performance spaces of *Wayang Kancil* used simultaneously, with puppets on the anterior *gedebog*, and a posterior screen with digital images and puppet shadows.

Other performances take place in a 'theatrical' space. By theatrical, I mean a spatial configuration that is reminiscent of the proscenium stage which, in Indonesia is associated with *teater*, or western style drama. In *Lara Tanpa Liru*, the *dalang* and another actor move around the space throughout the performance. At one point, the *dalang* sits down holding a puppet, while he himself plays the character of Kunti (Figure 2.53). He also uses a translucent piece of fabric as a screen in several moments of the performance. Although this fabric is reminiscent of a screen, it is not used in the same way as a traditional *kelir* (screen) (Figure 2.54).



FIGURE 2.53. Nanang Hape (left) holding the face and the central control rod of the puppet of Kunti in *Lara Tanpa Liru*.



FIGURE 2.54. Two translucent fabrics in *Lara Tanpa Liru*. In the left one, the puppets are placed behind the screen. In the right one, the puppets are placed in front of the screen. The two spaces represent events that happen simultaneously.

Another work by Nanang Hape, *Sanditama Lagu Laga*, includes a play within a play, which is presented on a proscenium stage. In this show, the *dalang* assumes the role of director for a play in which several young people (played by actors) become the characters of the play. Sometimes the shadows of *wayang* puppets are projected onto a posterior screen (Figure 2.55).



FIGURE 2.55. An actor in the center of the stage faces *wayang* shadows, projected onto a panel to the left of the actor in Sanditama Lagu Laga.

The space of Jabang Tetuka consists of three platforms, two of which have a screen behind them. The action of the plot is sometimes presented through *wayang* puppets manipulated behind one of the screens, while at others it is played out by the actors or presented through video projections shown simultaneously on both screens (Figure 2.56).



FIGURE 2.56. Three screens and the performance platform in *Jabang Tetuka*.

At the beginning of the performance, the video projected on the screen represents a TV broadcast, where a *wayang* character played by an actress becomes a television presenter, reporting on the news of the *wayang* world which will lead to the development of the plot of *Jabang Tetuka* (Figure 2.57).

DEWI SARASWATI. Welcome. You are currently watching the Marcapada Newscast, with me, Dewi Saraswati. We have just received the information that the king Kalapracana has sent an envoy to ask for the hand of Dewi Supraba – the most beautiful goddess in Heaven. There is no confirmation from Heaven yet on Kalapracana's proposal to Dewi Supraba. We are still waiting for a comment from Batara Guru.

BATARA GURU. No comment. No comment. I am at the pharmacy.

DEWI SARASWATI. In the meantime, thousands of giant armed forces are on the way to Heaven, as ordered by Kalapracana.

KALAPRACANA. No comment.

DEWI SARASWATI. These is the news at Marcapada. I am Dewi Saraswati. Good bye.





FIGURE 2.57. An image of Dewi Saraswati as a television presenter is projected onto a screen in *Jabang Tetuka*.

In *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, there is a suspended screen, where digital images of *wayang* shadows are projected. Below the screen, stage front, is where most of the action takes place. Here, the *dalang* uses one *gedebog* without a screen to place the puppets. The musicians are located to his right and his left. Behind him, there is a small raised platform that is used by the chorus singers for their occasional interventions (Figure 2.58). At times, a chorus occupies the space directly in front of the screen (Figure 2.59).



FIGURE 2.58. An image of Bhisma being pierced by an arrow is projected on a screen, while Sujiwo Tejo narrates the story in *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*.



FIGURE 2.59. The chorus sings against the backdrop of two *wayang* characters. The images of the puppets are digital projections on a screen in *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*.

Teater Koma's *Sie Jin Kwie* Trilogy was presented on the proscenium stage of the Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta. A metallic structure containing a *wayang* screen was wheeled in for the scenes that were narrated by *dalang* Tavip, and wheeled out when such scenes were over. The screen was made from a convex, white plastic surface surrounded by a decorated frame topped with the words "Wayang Tavip." This device was a self-contained performative space, fully equipped with puppets, puppeteers and light fixtures (Figure 2.60). As the structure was wheeled in and out, the usage of the space oscillated between a *teater* play and a *wayang* show. The two spaces were sometimes juxtaposed and their borders were transgressed as the *dalang* manipulated the actors (by changing their positions with his hands) and animated the puppets in the same scene (Figure 2.61).



FIGURE 2.60. The *Wayang Tavip* performance space in the center of the stage in *Sie Jin Kwie*.



FIGURE 2.61. Two actors interact with the puppets whose shadows are projected onto the screen inside the Tavip performance space in *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*.

Eko Nugroho's *Perseteruan Getah Bening* starts with a scene where the *dalang* sets a street stall in front of a screen and tries to sell miracle cures (Figure 2.62). The action later progresses to the screen itself, first showing only the shadow of the *dalang* and another actor (Figure 2.63), and then displaying the colored shadows of translucent, plastic *wayang* puppets (Figure 2.64). The performance is divided into two sections, each with its own narrative. And they each have a different spatial logic, joined by the brief scene where an actor and the *dalang* interact behind the screen.



FIGURE 2.62. Seven performers in front of the screen in *Perseteruan Getah Bening*.



FIGURE 2.63. The *dalang* and an actor interact behind the screen in *Perseteruan Getah Bening*.

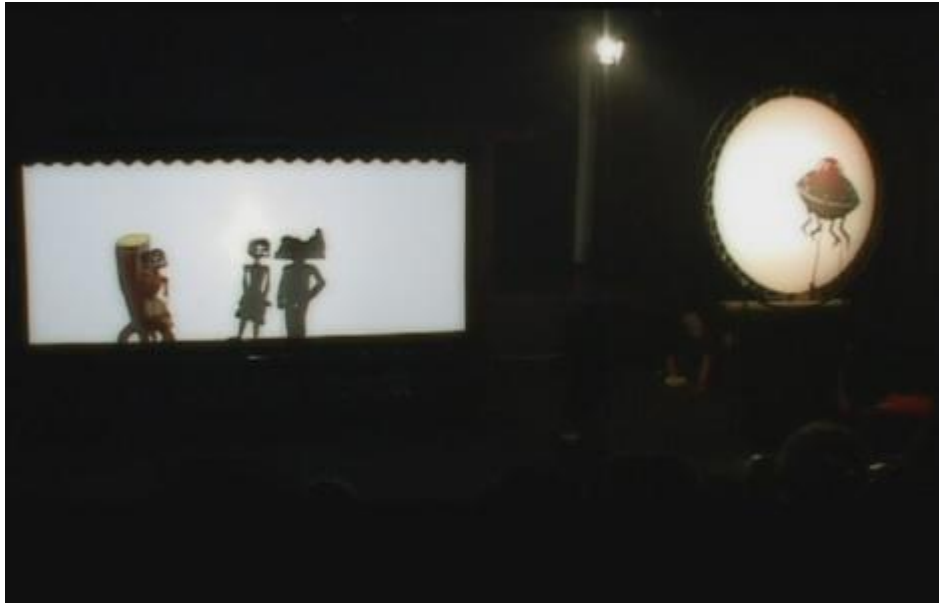


FIGURE 2.64. The shadows of the puppets projected onto a rectangular and a circular screen in *Perseteruan Getah Bening*.

In Eko Nugroho's *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas* there are three *wayang* screens of different shapes and sizes (Figure 2.65). The action transits seamlessly along these screens. When the action takes place in the left and central screens, the puppets are manipulated behind the screens and, therefore, only their colored shadows are visible. However, when the right screen is used, the puppets are manipulated in front of the screen, and both the puppets and their shadows are visible.

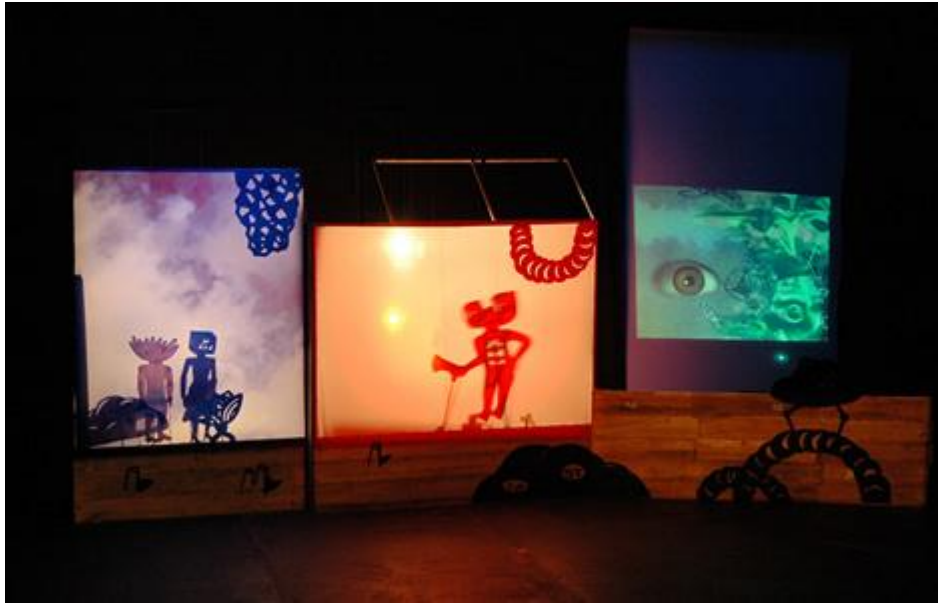


FIGURE 2.65. Three screens with a combination of digital images, colored lights and puppets in *Bungkusan Hati di Dalam Kulkas*. The screens are arranged on a proscenium stage.

This subsection has tried to answer one question: What happens when the space of *wayang* is reconfigured without completely dismissing its conventions? Through intermedial usages of spaces, images and lights, the *dalang* sometimes recreate selective aspects of a traditional *wayang* setup, allowing for new spatial interactions. In other cases, the *dalang* conspire with theatre directors to transpose those experiences into other performative realms.

#### Non-conventional Space Usage

Slamet Gundono was the only *dalang* who chose to rid himself entirely of conventional spatial markers for his performances, and this is true for all his performances considered in this dissertation: Jendral Karna, Cebolang Minggat, *Wayang Tanah* and Pertaruhan Drupadi. In these performances

there is no visible trace of the *wayang* spatial paraphernalia: no *blencong*, screen or *gedebog*. In this section, I will describe the spaces of all these performances in detail. This particular category requires establishing a link with Chapter 3: Ethics, since all the performances seen here also encourage non-conventional ethical reflections.

In *Pertaruhan Drupadi*, there is a banana tree but it is used in the background, to stack the puppets, and not as the center of dramatic action (Figure 2.66). The usage of space in all of these performances is closely linked to contemporary proscenium stage theatrical performances (Figure 2.67).

*Pertaruhan Drupadi* and *Jendral Karna* were originally recorded for a television production.



FIGURE 2.66. A *kayon*, Slamet Gundono and a *gedebog* with cooking utensils as puppets in *Pertaruhan Drupadi*. Abstract digital imagery is projected onto a cyclorama in the background. The shadow of the actress representing Drupadi can be seen to the *dalang*'s left.





FIGURE 2.67. The spatial set-up of *Jendral Karna*. The musicians are located to the left of the *dalang* in a space that represents a farm. Images of clouds can be seen projected onto the cyclorama in the background.

The studio where they were recorded had a concave cyclorama in the background where colored lights and images were projected. The *dalang* and actors occupied most of the space in front of the screen throughout the performances. In *Jendral Karna*, a special effect was used to generate two images of Slamet Gundono, as he played both Karna and Arjuna in the duel where the former dies (see Puppets) (Figure 2.68).



FIGURE 2.68. Two images of Slamet Gundono in *Jendral Karna*. This visual effect conveys the confrontation between Karna and Arjuna.

*Cebolang Minggat* was presented in Jakarta, at the main stage of the Salihara cultural center. The performance includes narrated fragments, in which Slamet Gundono and Elizabeth Inandiak, sitting side by side, take turns to narrate the journey of Cebolang (Figure 2.69). During the rest of the scenes, the story is enacted by actors, including Slamet himself [see Puppets]. There are also two *wayang* shows during the play, in which Slamet is of course the *dalang* (Figure 2.70). On both occasions, the *dalang* uses only the puppets to represent the *wayang* performance, and sits in the center of the stage.



FIGURE 2.69. Slamet Gundono (left) and Elizabeth Inandiak (center), who reads words from a laptop on the proscenium stage used for *Cebolang Minggat*.



FIGURE 2.70. The lights highlight Slamet Gundono as he holds the puppet of Bima in *Cebolang Minggat*.

Wayang Tanah was performed in a very different kind of space: a cavity that was dug out of the ground (Figure 2.71). There, the *dalang* and the performers moved around different parts of the space, covering themselves in mud (Figure 2.72).



FIGURE 2.71. The spatial set-up of *Wayang Tanah* in a cavity dug in the ground. Three illuminated areas can be seen. On the left, the *dalang* rests on a horizontal bamboo pole. On the illuminated area on the back the musicians play their instruments. On the right, the head and part of the upper body of a dancer can be seen.



FIGURE 2.72. An agricultural ritual at the end of *Wayang Tanah*.

In most of the sections of this chapter, I have kept ethics and aesthetics apart. This has allowed me to argue that aesthetic innovations do not imply ethical innovation. But the performances of Slamet Gundono considered here are an exception that require a different kind of attention. By ridding himself of traditional space markers, he generated different spatial experiences that encourage critical ethical explorations. He built (literally, at times) other worlds for *wayang* that demand a non-conventional, critical engagement with the contemporary world of Java. By using a television set where the past and the present come together, *Pertaruhan Drupadi* questions the passivity of women as a desirable quality (see Women) and *Jendral Karna* hypothesizes that certain connections are more important than blood ties (see Familial Ties). Using a *teater* space, *Cebolang Minggat* questions the true meaning of spirituality and art (see Spirituality and Art). And a cavity dug in the soil is the stage for *Wayang Tanah* to begin an investigation of environmental concerns

(see Environment). The traditional spatial experience is always communal and this aspect might or might not be maintained in *kontemporer* performances.

## Chapter 3 Themes: Inventories of Ethical Positions

### 3.1 Introduction

"Every human being is entangled in the problem of choice, and choice is central to the *wayang*" writes Sri Mulyono (1977: 16). An exploration of ethical choice is indeed central to *wayang* performances. Clifford Geertz describes an "almost psychoanalytic interpretation" of *wayang* as a common practice (Geertz 1950: 270). Many conversations in which I have participated – as witness or interlocutor – still address the issues that Geertz identified in the 1960s: the inner struggle between the self and temptations, or between self-control and passions, represented by the opposing sides of the Baratayuda war. Ethical commentary is an essential part of the discursive sphere that surrounds *wayang* in general, and specific performances in particular.

I wish to suggest that the ubiquity of these ethical obsessions characterizes *kontemporer* performances as much as *tradisi* ones. The prescriptive character of these ethical commentaries is sometimes highlighted: "As education for the young, self-knowledge for the adult, and philosophy for the old, the *wayang* has its answers to those questions and to the question of how to live our lives" (Mulyono 1977: 272). However, the ethical questions addressed in the *wayang* shows are sometimes also open to interpretation. As Franz von Magnis-Suseno notes, "the plays (*lakon*) are replete with moral ambiguity" (Magnis-Suseno 1997: 58), and this ambiguity invites discussion and disagreement.

When describing the reactions of the audience members to a particular story, Mulyono writes: “each one will see it in his own way, according to his own capacity and his own needs, for the *wayang* is so broad and so full of life that it can be a whole different world for each member of its audience” (Mulyono 1977: 26). It is worth noting this is the same author who stressed the educational character of *wayang*. He is not alone in embracing both possibilities: its instructive character and its open room for personal interpretation are common tropes in *wayang* parlance.

The subsections within this chapter constitute my personal interpretations of the ethical themes addressed by the performances selected for this dissertation. I have constructed these thematic explorations through my selective readings of the performances, which are informed by my conversations with audience members and *dalang*, and by my observations of key events in contemporary Java in the six year period I have visited Indonesia yearly (2008-2014). To borrow a term from Sonja van Wichelen (2008), each of these sections presents an “inventory of positions” within Indonesian society. What is remarkable about this inventory is the wide range of attitudes that are represented in the *kontemporer* performances. Each of the sections looks at how the performances tackle a particular set of ethical questions, offering many different answers:

1. Art: Spiritual Missions, Institutional Parodies. What should be the role of the artists in a society? What should be the role of artistic institutions in artistic production?



2. Environmental Concerns: The Urgency of Didacticism. How should people act in relation to pressing environmental concerns?

3. Familial Ties: Destiny or Strategy? What should be the role of people in a family and in society at large, according to their age and gender? Are the traditional ethical norms of behavior still valid or should new ethical compasses be sought?

4. Politics: Parables, Mockery and Activism. How should politicians act? What is the role of the common people in the political sphere?

5. Spirituality: Controversies of Belief. What does it mean to be spiritual? What should be the relation between an individual's spiritual quests and organized religion?

6. Women: Between Misogyny and Empowerment. What is the role of women in society? How can they fight their traditionally assigned roles of submission?

7. Youth: The Obedient Rebels. How should the youth behave? Should young people adapt to established norms or push them through rebellion?

Although each section groups together all the performances which deal with a particular ethical question, I distinguish between different ways in which they do this. The most fundamental distinction, which is the criteria used in the diagrams as well, is between the performances that briefly address a question (represented in the diagram by a small circle) and those that make that issue their central theme (represented by a big circle). I also differentiate between the ways in which the issues are elaborated, which can be either direct and

explicit or subtle and allusive. A third distinction is between the imperative character of the ethical explorations. Some of the performances make strong claims and explicitly suggest particular courses of action, whereas others just highlight questions without offering conclusive answers. A last distinction is between those performances with views that adhere to traditionally held notions and those that suggest progressive or controversial ethical attitudes.

While highlighting these distinctions, I give equal consideration to all of these modes of addressing the ethical questions. I dedicate substantial attention to tangential references, that is, to thematic references that are not part of the plot of the performances and which are elaborated briefly and then dismissed. I often analyze them with as much detail as the references that are explored in a more nuanced way through plot development. I wish to argue that, in the world of *wayang* – be it traditional or *kontemporer* – this way of referencing the current affairs of the world is a very important part of the performance. These commentaries are often a central part of what is at stake in the performance, and how it is interpreted. Hence, I believe it is justified to consider them as important to the meaning and implications of a given performance as other types of references to the themes.

### 3.2 ART: Spiritual Missions, Institutional Parodies

There are several ways in which art as an ethical theme is presented in *kontemporer* performances. Some of them are philosophical in scope, addressing the role of the artist in society, as a motor of change and a keeper of historical records. Others narrow this reflection to *wayang* as an art form which should be adapted to suit the times. In yet another subdivision, we can find a performance that parodies the institutions and the economic constraints that limit the work of artists. Yet, in all of these variations, ethical questions are addressed: What is the role of the artist in society? What are the ethics of arts practice?

I will start this section by suggesting that a local concept of art is better suited for the present exploration than a universal definition (in case such a thing is even possible). In *A Subversive Understanding of Seni*, artist and art critic Jim Supangkat makes a provocative suggestion: that the word 'seni', the most common translation of 'art', be taken out of the Indonesian dictionary. As a replacement, he proposes the Javanese word *kagunan*. Originally linked to the word *guna* (use), *kagunan* suggests a particular use: the development of the mind by expressing the sense of beauty (Supangkat 2009: 70). In his view, this definition is more appropriate to the way art is understood in Indonesia, since it "reinforces the link between *seni* and contemplation, proving that *seni* is not merely about forms of beauty that trigger a feeling of happiness due to visual aesthetics, but that it also reflects the moral esteem and spiritual development

that are deeply embedded in Indonesian art and culture” (Supangkat 2009: 71).

The character of art as an exploration of both beauty and moral or spiritual development is closely linked to the perspectives of most *dalang* I talked to. This section will begin by looking at performances which question the role of the artist in society. The work that addresses this most directly is Raden Saleh, by Ledjar Subroto and Ananto Wicaksono. This performance tells the parallel stories of prince Diponegoro and Raden Saleh. Diponegoro is commonly acknowledged as a Javanese hero, who led a war against the Dutch in the early 19th century, known as the Java War (1825-1830). Raden Saleh was “the first modern Indonesian painter” (Kraus 2006: 29) and one of his most famous works is called *The Capture of Diponegoro*.

In this performance the lives of Saleh and Diponegoro are intertwined. Yet, this is a historical fantasy. Among other things, Saleh was already in Europe when Diponegoro was captured, and he painted *The Capture of Diponegoro* 25 years later, upon his return to Java. But the fantasy presented in the performance is neither new nor accidental. The figures of both Diponegoro and Saleh are deeply ingrained in the collective Indonesian imagination and their lives and deeds are difficult to distinguish from the myths that surround them. This imagined idealization of them both allows the *dalang* to explore two themes: the role of the artist in society and the spiritual aspect of Diponegoro's war (the latter is discussed in more detail in Spirituality).

The performance begins with a fictional dialogue between a German man called Bayern and the young Raden Saleh:

BAYERN. Saleh Sarif Mustabat. I am surprised by your greatness; your ability for painting is unmatched. I want to send you to study in Europe, so that you can spread your wings wider in the visual arts world. I hope that this will allow you to create your masterpiece. Do you agree with my suggestion, Saleh?

SALEH. Tuan Bayern, I consider you as my own teacher in the matters of art. I would never refuse this, *tuan*. However, I cannot leave the world where I was born, which is currently overridden by pain as a result of the colonizers who have seized the right to live and insulted the pride of my people. Without hesitation, the warriors must fight to save their people. If I comply with your request, then what will happen to my respect for my land, *tuan* Bayern?

BAYERN. Saleh, a warrior need not bear a weapon or march into the battlefield. You can fight through your paintings. These are weapons of unmatched power. Show this! Show the world

that your people's pride is worth as much as that  
of those who have colonized you.

Raden Saleh left for the Netherlands in 1929 (Oorthuizen 2009: 26), when he was very young (his date of birth varies according to different sources, from 1807 to 1814). The initial objective of his trip was not to pursue the artistic mission so poetically described in the dialogue above, but to work as a clerk, as part of the retinue of a colonial official by the name of Deligne (Oorthuizen 2009: 26). In fact, it was only later that he was able to pay for painting lessons with the money he had earned as a clerk. He never met Diponegoro, although both Sanne Oorthuizen and Werner Kraus, who have written extensively about his life, hypothesize that he was sent into exile to prevent him from joining the political struggle which was stirring in Java. This hypothesis is justified by the fact that Saleh's family in Semarang was directly involved in the Java War.

Of the 25 years Saleh spent in Europe, most of that time was spent in Dresden. It was there that he was able to become a master painter and to achieve international recognition, after spending nine years in The Netherlands. However, the dialogue quoted above suggests that he went directly to Dresden, almost against his will, to learn a way to represent his people in the eyes of the world.

This suggestion is also not accidental. The performance was commissioned by the Goethe Institute in Jakarta as part of the opening of the first major exhibition of Raden Saleh's works to held in Indonesia, which was hosted in the Galeri Nasional [National Gallery] in Jakarta in 2012. In his opening speech, one

of the officials of the Goethe Institute said that Germany has always supported Indonesian artists and that Saleh was just the first of a long line of artists to receive recognition there. This historical claim is almost hilarious. Though Saleh did receive recognition and ample opportunity to exercise his art in Dresden, neither Germany nor Indonesia existed in the early nineteenth century. That said, however, the connection between several patrons and institutions in what is now Germany has proved central to the international careers of artists in what is now Indonesia.

Wanting to make their sponsors look good, the two *dalang* took the liberty of changing the story, thus making Saleh go to Europe against his proto-nationalistic instincts. However, it appears from historical documents that Saleh made himself a name and a home in Europe, where he stayed for 25 years. In Dresden, he was treated as an equal by the local aristocrats, intellectuals and artists. In Java, upon his return, he was unable to find a space for himself in Javanese society. He moved in with a European woman, opened the first art museum and the first Zoological garden in Java, and was the first to dig for paleontological remains (inspired by scientists he met in Europe). But he died "as a devastated man who failed to achieve recognition and equality" (Kraus 2006: 39). He was "the first colonial intellectual who finally could not find his place between the cultures" (Kraus 2006: 39).

The performance is of course not concerned with the life journey and failures of Saleh. Rather, he is presented as an unchanging figure. One way in which this is suggested is through his attire. Throughout the performance, the puppet

that represents him appears clad in white robes and a turban, even before leaving for Europe. However, when he first arrived in Europe, he dressed and behaved as a European dandy, “with all the manners expected from a young cosmopolite of the times, and that included unpaid debts at his tailor shop and sexual affairs with certain ladies in the city” (Kraus 2006: 33). It was only later, in Dresden, that he would refashion himself as a Javanese (Oorthuizen 2008: 28). This allowed him to build an aura of mystery around himself. This aura has continued to exercise fascination about his figure, long after his death. A growing number of academic and artistic works reference Saleh and “with every article that appears and every work of art that is produced, the functional ambiguity that the man himself created is renewed” (Oorthuizen 2008: 33).

Many people have contributed to the almost mythical quality of Saleh's life. Perhaps, Oorthuizen is correct to note that the first one to do so was Raden Saleh himself. In Europe, he invented a version of himself that granted him admiration and access to aristocratic and intellectual circles. He did not have a problem adapting his paintings to suit a version of Java that matched the expectations of his sponsors. He painted, for example, people fighting lions in Java, an island that was as lionless in the 19th century as it is now. But today, this invented version is sometimes taken at face value: “what was created as an invented representation of Javanese reality for a European public is now accepted by a postmodern Indonesian bourgeoisie as the representation of a real Indonesian past” (Kraus 2006: 38).



This presentation of Saleh in the performance as an idealized and unchanging character is thus not without irony. Who could accuse a contemporary *dalang* of inventing an idealized version of a man who made a career out of similar poetic licenses? As Oorthuizen notes, “if we ask the real Raden Saleh to stand up and be counted, we are therefore only going to hear the echoes of our own words” (Oorthuizen 2009: 34). The character presented in the performance, an unchanging Saleh, eternally committed to the spiritual endeavor of the Java War, indeed echoes particular voices: those belonging to the *dalang* who use the story of Saleh as an opportunity to say something about art and something about the history of Java. Thus, the performance is structured around the pivotal moment where the stories of Saleh and Diponegoro become poetically linked through a painting. *The Arrest of Diponegoro* [De Onderwerping van Diepo Negoro aan Luitenant-generaal De Kock, 28 Maart 1830], one of the most revered paintings in the history of ‘Indonesian’ visual art is, according to Werner Kraus, “an attempt at emancipation, an attempt to reformulate, on the artistic level, one of the most dramatic and traumatic events in Javanese history” (Kraus 2006: 39). At least, this is the way in which it is interpreted today. Werner’s interpretation is not far from the view presented at the end of the performance, where Saleh addresses Diponegoro. Right in the midst of the capture, when Diponegoro is halfway through a passionate monologue where he condemns the cowardice of his captors, Saleh appears. The story stops, the lights change and the painter addresses the hero:

RADEN SALEH. Human beings are imperfect. Life  
does not go according to our dreams and our

hopes. My prince, the story of your heroism will  
be represented in my work. I will show the world  
how fiercely you fought. Prince, your bravery  
and the way in which you defended your land  
and your people are the inspiration behind the  
screen of my own fight.

This scene is, of course, a poetic interpretation that makes no claims to historical accuracy. By highlighting the ways in which this performance substantially departs from 'real' history, I am not attempting a criticism. But pointing out these differences serves the purpose of showing how the story is reinterpreted to present a particular idea of Java and a specific idea of art, which are supported by common views on the importance of Saleh's representation of Diponegoro. Kraus states on *The Arrest of Diponegoro*:

It is the first representation, interpretation and comment on the contemporary. For the first time, a local artist left anonymity to proclaim that it was his job to comment on the world. For the first time in Southeast Asian history the artist as a topos established himself in the middle of society and took, self-assured, his seat in the front row, next to the political elites. This was an immense modern act. It was the prerequisite for the beginning of a new era, a prerequisite for modernity (Kraus 2006: 52).

Although Saleh's story as presented in the performance is a fictional account, it is, in a certain way, truthful. It is a viable representation of the way art is constructed today in Indonesia. This link is made explicit in the middle of the

performance. After the comic interlude, Ledjar, who has remained silent throughout the performance, talks to Rendra, a young theatre artist (not to be confused with the late W.S. Rendra!)

LEDJAR. This is the time where, if we don't keep developing and protecting our culture, the craziness will get out of control. But people are not paying attention. Cultural developments like this performance, who is thinking about them? If the makers themselves don't do it, they will be on their own. Isn't that so, *le*? Why are you quiet if I ask you a question? Instead of becoming stressed out, we can have an intermezzo. If we only listen to the stressful stories, we will become dizzy and crazy ourselves.

Ledjar is doing at least three things here. He is signaling the beginning of a segment with a different register, he is complaining about the lack of recognition he receives (and in doing so praising his own work), and he is calling for attention of Nanang, whom he calls *le* (son) and inviting him to a dialogue. Nanang then suggests that Rendra should be the one to answer Ledjar's questions, who continues expounding his views on art, especially on his own art. This segment is a relatively long moment in the performance and I will quote from it at length to give an indication of how the ideas are presented and elaborated. During the performance, as people listened to this

interaction, both Rendra and Ledjar were almost hidden from the audience's sight, as they were sitting in the dark with their backs to the audience, looking at the *wayang* puppets on the screen as they spoke. They were also not captured by the video cameras recording this performance.

Although this dialogue was always unscripted when performed, roughly the same ideas were repeated on the three occasions when I saw this performance. The following transcription corresponds to the performance I recorded on June 9th at the National Gallery in Jakarta.

LEDJAR. This culture belongs to our people. If it is not preserved, they will do whatever they want with it. And then I will end up confused. Someone asked me: "when will you perform again?" And I cannot answer. There is only a performance when someone requests it. But there have been no *wayang* requests for a while. What can art creators do? We should do this together. This should be for our people. This belongs to us all; the *wayang* culture in all its forms. It is a cultural treasure that belongs to our people. We need to keep it alive, and do it together for the people. It should be like that, right? What do you think, *le*?

NANANG. Ask Rendra.

LEDJAR. Oh, Rendra.

NANANG. What is your view on this as a young theatre artist?

RENDRA. Actually this is quite "heavy".

NANANG. Heavy? What do you mean?

RENDRA. This is what I think about my friends in the art world, especially in the performing arts, *mbah*. Sometimes it's difficult to find performances which are "clear." The more things change and develop, the more unrecognizable they become. If my friends and I don't follow the developments of this age, we will be considered "classic". And we fear that no one will watch something which is classic. That is the same case with *wayang*. Maybe that is the way things are, *mbah*. I am sorry, but that's what I think.

LEDJAR. That is true. It is true that our culture of *wayang* is considered too traditional, such as *wayang purwa*. But *wayang* can be developed. It is not limited to *purwa* stories alone. We can still conserve that one, though, and keep it alive. It is part of our culture.

RENDRA. Our roots!

LEDAR. But *wayang* can be further developed, because the art of *wayang* can be used as a medium to convey things. Just like tonight.

RENDRA. This is also a *wayang*, right?

LEDJAR. Yes. But the story need not be classic, right?

RENDRA. Yes, it doesn't need to.

LEDJAR It can follow the times. You can let the classic one remain a classic. But we can create our own developments. This is an example of that. The art of *wayang* can be easily adapted.

For example, I always comply with the wishes of the customers. In the Netherlands they want everything to be turned into a *wayang*. It is considered a good medium to communicate with the younger generation.

RENDRA. For example, in bread advertisements!

LEDJAR. Yes. I am also going to make *wayang luwak*, like the coffee! I will make a *luwak coffee wayang*! Because the *luwak* is the most exclusive coffee. And we should do something like that with *wayang*.

In the preceding exchange several ideas are presented: 1) culture needs to be preserved and developed, 2) *wayang* and theatre need not be classic, and 3)

they can be used to convey a variety of issues. These points encapsulate the ethical obligations of the artists as expressed in this performance by the *dalang*. The theme of the artist as witness and innovator is thus presented both through plot development and directly in this long address.

A similar exploration of the role of art is presented in *Cebolang Minggat*. At the beginning of the performance, Elizabeth Inandiak talks about the reasons why the *Cebolang Minggat* section of the *Serat Centhini* was written. The literary work was originally commissioned by Prince Anom Mangkunegara of Surakarta in 1814. *Cebolang Minggat* corresponds to four out of the original twelve books of the *Serat Centhini* (I quote this passage for a different purpose in Youth).

ELIZABETH. To his father, Pakubuwono IV, who was learned in the arts of grammar and etiquette, he [Anom Mungkunegara] said: "I will demonstrate that my passions and desires will one day bring me to the science of perfection." We must get to know the temptations that linger at the doorstep of spirituality. [The Indonesian wording plays with the similarity in the sounds of the words: *kebatinan* - spirituality and *kebatilan* - evil]. Unfortunately, after Pakubuwono IV passed away and shortly after the prince Anom inherited the crown, he was carried away by the

angels of syphilis. Had he achieved the perfection he was looking for? The annals of the Kraton are silent about his short reign. You cannot be both a king and a free man. Nonetheless, "The Exile of Cebolang" bears witness to his story.

Two ideas of the use of art emerge here. Anom Mungkunegara intended the literary work as a way to convince his father to accept a different way of living. Thus, art is discussed as a powerful tool that could help change the mind of a king and present a different philosophy of life. On the other hand, it is the testimony of a distant historical past and its protagonists. The power of art as an agent of change and as a tool for historical record-making were also explored in *Raden Saleh*. However, unlike *Raden Saleh*, *Cebolang Minggat* makes no specific claims about the role of the artist in the present. Other performances do the opposite. They don't explore the ethics of art through plot development, but use an interlude to discuss art. The least substantial of these is *Wayang Mitologi* which makes tangential reference to the ethics of art making in the comic interlude.

GARENG. You really put everything into your dance, Truk!

PETRUK. Yes, it has to be that way. Art requires total commitment.



Another performance that addresses a similar issue through a comic interlude is *Sungsang Bawono Balik*, where Sigit Sukasman uses the *punokawan* scene as an excuse to express his views on art, linking them more directly to *wayang*:

SEMAR. Nala Gareng. Don't forget who we are.

We form an underclass. We are only small and stupid people. If we give them [our masters] advice, they will certainly not take it. It will go in one ear and out the other.

GARENG. So what should we do, *ma*?

SEMAR. I have been trying for a while to communicate using the arts as a medium, since the arts have a universal character.

GARENG. That is great, *ma*.

SEMAR. The most important part is that this can bring together the perspectives of many people. So my dancing earlier is a part of the search for that which needs to be fixed and developed so that it's not boring.

The notion of *wayang* as something that should be developed to suit the times echoes the words of Ledjar Subroto in *Raden Saleh*. Despite being mentioned in the comic interlude, these words acquire importance by the mere fact that they are delivered by Semar. Semar is the moral adviser of the warriors and

kings of the *wayang* world, and it is not accidental that he is the one to deliver this message in response to Gareng's question.

There is another performance that deals extensively with 'art' but in a very different way. If *Raden Saleh* and *Cebolang Minggat* are solemn interpretations of the role of artists in society, who acquire historical and spiritual dimensions, *Wayang Kampung Sebelah* is a parody of art institutions. *Wayang Kampung Sebelah* is actually a performance framework created by Jlitheg Suparman. In this framework, new *punokawan* who represent villagers mock current affairs in Indonesia. The following excerpt corresponds to a performance developed specifically for the opening of the LAF [Langgeng Art Foundation] gallery in Yogyakarta. During the performance they parody the role of artistic institutions and the impoverished condition in which many artists live. This theme is foregrounded from the very beginning as they sing a song about the different fortunes of diverse singers:

You sing with all your heart, and you dance full  
of confidence.

Your spectators come and go.

However, you don't care.

Your competitors are the TV stars.

But you have a pure heart and you won't quit.

From night till morning you sing trying to make  
a living.

You're not that different from the famous stars

of the capital. [...] The only difference...

[aside] What is it *mas*?

It is the money you get! [...]

People have different fortunes.

Even in the richest nation, some people will be  
poor.

No matter how rich a country, some people will  
not be rich.

Some singers travel abroad while others travel  
by bus between cities. You sing with all your  
heart, and you dance full of confidence.

Your spectators come and go.

However, you don't care.

Your competitors are the TV stars.

But you have a pure heart and you won't quit.

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not be rich.

Some singers travel abroad while others travel  
by bus between cities.

Once the song is over, we are introduced to the two comic characters which  
will become the protagonists of the night's show: the modern *punokawan*  
Karya and Kampret. In this instance of the performance framework, Kampret  
wants to become a painter.

KARYA. What is your problem?

KAMPRET. My paintings aren't selling well, *lik*.

KARYA. Well, the problem is that you only paint  
in black and white. And I think that's no longer  
the current trend. You must follow the trends!

KAMPRET. So what's trending?

KARYA. The current trend is cubism.

KAMPRET. That's too easy. I have already tried  
taugism, cubism should be easier.

KARYA. What is taugism?

KAMPRET. Well, cubism is just drawing *kobis*  
[eggplants], right?

The linguistic joke sets the comic tone of the exchange between the characters.  
Kampret, not satisfied with the advice given to him, decides he needs to find a

curator. This provides the *dalang* with the opportunity to present a caricature of a curator to an audience full of curators.

KARYA. Do you actually know what a curator does?

KAMPRET. Of course I know.

KARYA. It's easy to be a curator, you just have to talk a lot. They just need to be able to talk and talk. And mention lots of theories. They have to pretend to be philosophical and use complicated words, and they can become curators. There's nothing difficult about it.

KAMPRET. Curators are the strangest of creatures. Aren't they? They just show up and then suddenly everything becomes an important occasion. But the only thing they do is criticize. That's the only thing they do!

For the next few dialogues, they will keep joking about curators which only triggers even more laughter from the audience of curators. Hong Ji, a puppet representing a curator walks in, introduced by Karya. Once this caricature of the curator is presented, Kampret tries to enlist her services. Happy with the news of glory to come, Karya organizes a music event, introducing puppets that parody well-known singers in Indonesia such Inul Daratista and Rhoma Irama.

At the end of their songs, the presenter asks Karya for their fees, but he has no money. He suggests to pay once he has received money for his paintings.

PRESENTER. This is over, please pay up so I can go home.

KARYA. Kampret should be the one to pay, where is he?

KAMPRET. What?

KARYA. You need to pay!

KAMPRET. Later, I will pay when Hong Ji pays me.

PRESENTER. What?

KAMPRET. Wait till my paintings are sold, they haven't offered a price for them yet.

PRESENTER. So how dare you order us around?

KAMPRET. Just wait a bit. If they sell well it will be a month...otherwise three months. And if three months are not enough, then three years.

PRESENTER. Isn't that nice for you? The ones waiting are in a hurry but the one who needs to pay isn't!

KAMPRET. That's it. I am really sorry.

KARYA. Yes.

KAMPRET. We are forced to postpone this.

Comic as they are, the lack of money and a pretentious circuit of art institutions echo the criticism articulated by Enin Supriyanto: "It is the market that serves as the axis for artistic production, here, in Indonesia, in the present day" (Supriyanto 2009: 124). She links this to the main problems she identifies in the situation of the contemporary arts: lack of historical awareness which leads to repetition, and an excessive dependence on capitalist art markets.

The performances that address the ethics of art making highlight three aspects: the role of the artist, the adaptability of *wayang*, and the role of institutions in artistic production. Both *Raden Saleh* and *Cebolang Minggat* paint a picture of the artist as a committed individual who can change perceptions and make historical records. *Raden Saleh* and *Sungsang Bawono Balik* present the need to adapt *wayang* to suit the times, as an ethical maxim. *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*, on the other hand, mocks the role of artistic institutions through a parodic presentation of curators and of unmet payment promises made by producers.

Can the way these performances tackle ideas about art be considered conventional? This is a difficult question to answer and it depends on how we conceptualize the meaning of "conventional". Could previous works of *wayang* espouse similar views? Yes. In the ideas raised by these performances there is nothing counterintuitive or directly oppositional to commonly held views. These performances speak highly about the role of the artist and mock the mechanisms of artistic sponsorship; conventional *wayang* has always done the same. It is not uncommon for *dalang* in traditional shows to speak, indirectly

or directly, about the importance of the artist. They often also mock their sponsors, in a way not dissimilar to the way JIitheng Suparman delivers a parody of the art market in a gallery.

The continuity, from the traditional to the *kontemporer*, of the devices (jokes and off-the-cuff allusions) used to address the role of the artist and the mechanisms of artistic production is especially clear in some performances. These are the ones that only raise these issues through tangential references (*Sungsang Bawono Balik*, *Wayang Mitologi*, and *Cebolang Minggat*). However, two of the performances discussed here (*Wayang Kampung Sebelah* and *Raden Saleh*) make these issues their central theme and explore their implications through plot development. This is certainly different from the way conventional *wayang* would address similar views. The central theme of the *purwa* plots is never the role of the artist in society or the mechanisms of artistic production. Thus, that which is “contemporary” about the *kontemporer* performances that discuss art is not the oppositional or unprecedented edge of their views, but the ways in which those views are explored through plot construction, in a way that directly represents the life of a particular artist and the apparatus of artistic production.





### 3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: The Urgency of Didacticism

This entertaining segment is over now. We  
should save the environment.

Wayang Kancil

B. and her friends just could not stop crying. They had spent six months of their lives organizing an event called “Cleaning Yogyakarta in a day.” In several European countries, similar campaigns had been successfully executed, where the citizens of a country (or sometimes a city) flocked to the streets in unison and collected the garbage that cluttered the streets and waterways of that place. B. had participated in several of those in her native country and, optimistic and relentless, she sought to achieve a similar epic transformation in Yogyakarta, together with a group of Indonesian activists. After realizing the scant enthusiasm with which many people reacted to her initial proposal, she had to scale it down. Progressively. Cleaning the city became cleaning the city center. Then, just some neighborhoods. Finally, it was decided that they would concentrate on cleaning the Kali Code, one of the four rivers that run through the city. Followed by a small army of volunteers, she led a day's efforts to clean the river. But it was a disaster. The little enthusiasm she had received all the way through did not prepare her for what was coming.

Though many of the co-organizers shared her passion and the ideas of the steering committee, several of the volunteers did not understand the

objectives of the activities. Instead of removing the trash from the rivers, they removed the plants and rocks that slowed down the flow of the water. Then, they threw the garbage that was on the riverbanks *into* the river. They thought the whole point of the exercise was to allow the garbage to be carried away by the river more easily.

Water pollution is a serious problem in Indonesia. Jakarta's Ciliwung is "officially the dirtiest river in the world" (Vitchev 2012: 155). Polluted waterways are to be found all over the archipelago, and they contain a mixture of industrial and household waste. The waste makes floods more common and less manageable, and also increases the risk of disease caused by microorganisms and by heavy metals found in the water. This is just one among a myriad of ecological problems that threaten Indonesia, which has the unhappy honor of topping the list of the worst practices that affect climate change and related environmental problems.

Indonesia has been referred to as the "ground zero of environmental change." In 2006, it was also described by the United Nations as the most disaster-prone nation in the world (Vitchev 2012: 152). Between 1998 and 2004, 747 disasters were recorded, which claimed 1920 lives (Kartodihardjo 2009). These disasters included floods, landslides and forest fires, which can be closely linked to human activity. Illegal logging, which is a growing problem in Indonesia, is said to increase the risk of floods and landslides. But there are also "trash landslides." Andre Vitchev reports an occasion where "garbage buried entire

communities of poor scavengers at an illegal dumping site outside Bandung” (Vitchek 2012: 154).

B.'s story illustrates the despair with which environmentalists often react to the lack of awareness and enthusiasm that seems common in Indonesia. However, environmental concerns have started to slowly crop up in public discourse in Indonesia. Awareness and a need for participation are on the rise and this is reflected in *kontemporer* performances in three ways. In some cases this is done through passing references. In others, the link between human actions and environmental effects are explored through parables. Lastly, one performance takes environmental concerns head on and has a direct pedagogic objective presented through the entire performance in a series of fables and direct addresses to the audience.

I will start by considering performances that address environmental concerns through tangential references, like Wayang Mitologi. In this performance, the Gods in heaven are suffering from an unusual heat wave. Batara Narada suggests this is the result of global warming, but Yamadipati simply admonishes:

NARADA. The cause is none other than "globar walming". I mean *Global Warming*, which is affecting Marcapada [the world]. Is that too difficult to figure out? The word difficult does not exist for the gods. Just a chicken's ass [word play].

YAMADIPATI. You are wrong. That is not what  
Sang Hyang Guru meant. You over there, you like  
speaking loudly and clearly, but wrongly.  
NARADA. Didn't I just say something truthful?  
YAMADIPATI. Yes. But global warming is a  
human problem. They caused it, and hence they  
shall deal with it.

Then the story continues and the Gods eventually identify another reason for the particular heat problem in which they find themselves in. However, this reference lingers in the background. At the end of the performance, the two narrators (a female and a male chicken) return briefly to this problem. These are their final lines.

MALE CHICKEN. In that case, we should also play  
our part in taking care of nature and our  
mountains, right?  
FEMALE CHICKEN. Yes indeed!

This reference to environmental concerns is hardly substantial, but it is indicative of the fact that environmental issues are part of public discourse which garner increasing attention in a variety of settings.

Other performances dedicate slightly more attention to green issues, although they do not amount to constituting the central theme of that performance. Consider the opening fragment of Wayang Tanah:

DALANG. I have seen a woman with a slender waist who can give birth without any help. And she can give birth to many children. Just like a rice field, from which transparent grains are born. She can give food to all of mankind. I have seen a woman with a slender waist who would receive any man. And she would not complain at all. But at the right time, she would talk about the events of life.

This is a reference to the earth as an abused woman. The *dalang* explores this theme for a moment, before connecting it to the rest of the narrative, which retells the story of Rahwana.

DALANG. Tonight, I do not know whether it is fitting to talk about the soil because people don't need the soil anymore, except for the farmers who plow the land. It is only my mother who cries for the soil. The soil is broken. Broken soil, fractured land. I do not know why the land is cracked like this. It is said that there was a king in Alengka. A human named Rahwana liked to dig up the soil. Rahwana always dug up holes for everyone. [...] Togog always reminded Rahwana:

"Hey, Rahwana, don't just stir up the soil! Don't  
just force the land."

Rahwana, an ogre, is often characterized as a personification of the drive for destruction. Here that destruction is seen as directed against the soil. The rest of the performance follows the story of Rahwana, and this aspect fades out of view but does not disappear completely, as the story of Rahwana-Sita becomes an allegory of environmental capture and abuse. The second part of the performance becomes a ritual with which people call for the rain. *Wayang Tanah* was originally performed during a time of drought. The altered pattern of the rainy season, with a higher instance of droughts and floods (see Introduction on *wayang banjir*), is linked, at least in people's minds, to a man-made ecological catastrophe.

Sungsang Bawono Balik takes a detour from its main storyline to address environmental concerns. The story deals with Raden Seroja Kusuma in his quest for knowledge and beauty (he is disfigured at the beginning). Toward the end of the performance, Karna takes him to the future, which coincides with our time. Karna parades a series of miraculous inventions in front of Seroja Kusuma, and dedicates special attention to the cell phone. But this marvelous display comes with a warning.

KRESNA. This is the extraordinary character of  
technology. But if it is used excessively,  
technology can also generate pollution. And  
pollution is poison. Not to mention what it does

for the development of weapons. Some people predict that this will bring the world to an end before the predetermined end of the World.

After this fragment is over, Seroja Kusuma and Kresna return to their own narrative time. In the same way as *Wayang Mitologi* and *Wayang Tanah*, this performance addresses environmental concerns squarely but momentarily and eventually the plot moves away from such concerns.

A very different perspective can be seen in *Wayang Onthel*, a parable that explores the link between human actions and environmental problems. Here, however, the action is situated in the contemporary world and not in the mythical realm of the Ramayana or the Mahabharata story cycles. In this performance, Pak Genjot dies and passes along his land and his possessions to his students; these are the land of the Bicycle Lovers' Association and many of its treasures, which include a collection of rules of how to make environmentally friendly bicycles. One of the students, Paijo, inherits the land and sells it. With the new flow of money, he starts acting like a millionaire. He changes his old ways and gets rid of his bicycle. He also becomes abusive toward his former friends.

DALANG. Paijo's actions became increasingly ruthless. And he managed to chase off the friends who had accompanied him since childhood in their quest for knowledge at the Bike Lovers' Association. Kuncung had inherited



the special treasures, such as the bicycle keys and tools, like the hammers, pliers and so on, that had earned them fame as the Bicycle Grooming Association. Gondes had inherited the "holy scriptures" of the association which described the rules for making economical and environmentally-friendly bikes. They had earned them fame as the Bicycle Thinking Association. [...] Paijo was greedy and only wanted to show off.

Wisdom and ecologically friendly traditional ways are seen to be destroyed by greed. At the end of the story, Paijo loses everything to a creditor and cries desperately. A broken man, he has neither his wealth nor his long-time friendships anymore.

Wayang Kancil is more explicitly pedagogic than any of the performances mentioned before. It refers to its own educational goals in several instances and advocates actions that can be taken to better care for the environment. Unlike the performances discussed above, the whole *raison d'être* of this performance is to communicate environmental messages. This performance's history illustrates how its objectives relate to the context of Indonesia. *Wayang Kancil* performances started in the 1970's, when its creator, Ledjar Soebroto, decided to devise a series of performances based on *kancil*, the mouse deer. This figure is known throughout Indonesia and Malaysia as a

trickster. He is the protagonist of numerous stories in which he tricks his enemies to get out of whatever problem he finds himself in. In Java, several stories about Kancil are collected in the *Serat Kancil*, a 19th century rhymed Javanese literary work. This work was the original inspiration for Ledjar, a trained puppet maker who had worked as the assistant of the famous Ki Nartosabdho. Ledjar Soebroto decided to create his own version of the Kancil puppets, first as a puppet maker, then also as a *dalang*. Ledjar is also an advocate of environmental causes and he sees with anxiety how his hometown has become increasingly overwhelmed by waste in the seven decades he has spent in the city of Yogyakarta. Thus, in his version, Kancil's collection of tricks has an agenda. He tries to trick the polluters out of their environmentally detrimental ways, and concludes his adventures with pieces of advice, which are often very concrete in their form.

Ledjar has been recognized within and without the country. He has been awarded numerous prizes for his ecological and artistic achievements. In 2008 he visited The Netherlands for the first time, and he has been to Europe almost every subsequent year, visiting Germany and France as well. He firmly believes that local wisdom can help deal with global problems. With this idea in mind, his performances have moved away from the characters of the original *Serat Kancil* and now include a range of animals from diverse geographical origins, such as koalas, bears, tigers, elephants and whales. For the past few years, he has been performing together with his grandson (in fact, the grandson of his sister), Ananto Wicaksono, commonly known as Nanang 'Kancil.' They have tried numerous modes of working together. For the performance I recorded

for this dissertation, they used two contiguous performance spaces (for a fuller description, see Space). They took turns telling stories about Kancil, some of them new creations, and the show finished with a scene in which all the characters discuss issues that were brought up during the performance.

The story and characters might strike some observers as childish, or at least as aimed at children. But *Wayang Kancil* is directed at a broad audience. Jokes, such as sexual references, ensure that an adult audience remains interested in the performance. Even though the stories have a markedly pedagogic and 'child-friendly' character, this does not prevent people of different age groups from enjoying them. This should be taken into account when viewing the examples that follow.

The first story narrated by Ledjar corresponds broadly to a well-known Kancil story. A crocodile finds himself trapped by tree trunks that fall on top of him as the result of strong winds. He asks a buffalo to help him out of this trap. The buffalo agrees to help, and after he does so the crocodile asks the buffalo to accompany him to his house. Innocently, the buffalo agrees to this, only to find himself on the back of a hungry crocodile, halfway across a river. The buffalo cries for help and Kancil comes to the rescue. Kancil hears both sides but feigns stupidity. Claiming he does not understand what happened, he says he wants to see exactly how the crocodile was trapped at the beginning of the story and demands this part of the story to be reenacted. The crocodile, agreeing to this, finds himself trapped as he was at the beginning of the story. In Ledjar's version, there are some additions to this broad story line. When the buffalo is

asking for help in the midst of the river, he talks to several objects that were discarded by their owners and thrown into the river, among them a dress and a mat. The dress, after telling its own story, speaks directly to the spectators.

DRESS. Friends, you shouldn't throw trash away randomly. I can't solve any problems...it seems I only create more trouble. This river, for example, needs to be cleaned. I could be better buried or sold in a second-hand market. If I'm thrown away I will create problems for the people.

Other objects, such as disused mat, will speak in similar ways. But these anthropomorphic objects are not the only vessels of cautionary environmental tales. Kancil is, out of all the characters, the most adamant about pressing the environmental agenda upon the audience. As an example of this, consider the following dialogue. After Kancil rescues the buffalo, but before setting the crocodile free, he insists the latter should ask for forgiveness. He uses this opportunity to make sure that the lessons learned have an environmental edge to them.

KANCIL. He has already asked for forgiveness, so that's it. Now we should take care of this forest together. You take care of the water. Make sure you only eat inside the water. [...] You and me crocodile, we have to share responsibility. You will look after the river and I will take care of the

land. So that we can all live harmoniously and  
with enough food.

All the excerpts from *Wayang Kancil* quoted thus far correspond to the first story of the performance, which is an adaptation of the 19th century *Serat Kancil*. The environmental agenda has been appended to it and the didactic agenda is expressed through words rather than actions. The plot itself is not driven by the same goals. This is different for the third and second stories presented in the performances. These other stories were devised by Nanang Kancil with particular goals in mind. Unlike the *Serat Kancil*, these stories were made to be performed. They were also crafted especially to serve as metaphors for the environmental concerns of Ledjar and Nanang.

The plot of the stories might strike readers as simplistic parables. In one, for example, Kancil is informed that a whale is stranded in the forest. An incredulous Kancil rushes to the forest and interviews the whale, trying to make sense of its strange situation. The whale blames the excessive pollution in the sea for her unorthodox, desperate change of living quarters. But Kancil, always ready with a solution, convinces his fellow land animals to clean the sea. They accomplish this swiftly and painlessly in the beat of a song, allowing a relieved whale to return to more watery lodgings. But too simplistic a reading of this fable fails to account for the power of this performance in the cultural context in which it is presented.

Perhaps a more adequate interpretive lens for the analysis of this plots is that of zooësis, which Uma Chaudhuri defines as the intersection of animal studies,

cultural critique and activism (Chaudhuri 2007: 8). In *Wayang Kancil*, the zooësis challenges anthropocentric narratives of ecological peril and preservation. It is in this poetic shift of emphasis that the performance becomes a powerful echo of the 19th century literary works by which it is inspired, appealing to a more holistic understanding of the environment. Ledjar firmly believes that this way of addressing environmental concerns through *wayang* is helpful and necessary. This idea is shared by the spectators I talked to. It can also be said that zooësis is an appropriate strategy to be included here since it can be linked productively to the cosmology of *wayang*, where there is not only a holistic but also a holy view of the universal landscape and the creatures in it.

Although a different kind of study would be required in order to assess the actual impact of these performances on people's behavior, the present investigation highlights the mechanisms through which moral imperatives are expressed through the *kontemporer* performances. The need to act in ecologically-mindful ways is one such imperative, which, despite its relative novelty in Indonesian history, is gaining urgency and attention. Even though some performances only refer to this indirectly, the examples above attest to the emerging importance of environmental issues in the public discourse in Indonesia.

*Wayang* has always incorporated topical challenges in the form of tangential references and ethical commentary. Big crises in Indonesian and Javanese history have continuously been addressed in such a way; the struggle for

Independence and the financial crisis of the late 90s being only two examples in point. In a similar way, in a time where environmental catastrophes loom large in the public imagination, environmental concerns have become an important component of *wayang kontemporer's* discursive sphere. The performances discussed here tackle such concerns through fleeting references, parables and pedagogic fables.

The preeminence of environmental concerns is certainly unprecedented in *wayang*. In that sense, all of these performances constitute a departure from the thematic preoccupations of traditional *wayang*. However, environmentally-mindful attitudes are not incompatible with traditional Javanese teachings and cultural works, as can be confirmed by the usage of the *Serat Kancil* as the source material for one of the performances. Thematically, these performances are deeply grounded in traditional ideas which are mobilized to address distinctly topical concerns. The dual move in these performances, both to the past and to the present, is thus a single gesture.

### 3.4 FAMILIAL TIES: Destiny or Strategy?

Several of the *kontemporer* performances address issues related to the appropriate behavior of individuals within a family. We can distinguish between performances that adhere to conventional ethical expectations and those which challenge them. The first set of performances maintains traditional conceptions of the ideal family by exploring issues of responsibility, fate and allegiance. In these cases, the ethics of behavior are explained in relation to the social effects of particular choices, rather than in terms of universal maxims. Other performances within that same group explore the social consequences of unethical behavior, often in the case of infidelity. The offenders find themselves turned into stone, surrounded by arrows or shot to death in violent crimes. The performances that challenge conventional ethics offer alternative views on conventional wisdom and question the validity of continuing the feud of an ancestor as an ethical responsibility.

Observers have long claimed that the power structures within the family represent a miniature version of power relations in Javanese society at large; the family is often described as the centerpiece of Javanese society. It is here, so says the literature, that children are taught to respect the elders and to apprehend social harmony and other virtues valued among the Javanese: "The family has become a metaphor for the polity: the president became the benevolent *bapak* (father) who ruled over his Children" (Shiraishi 1997: 33).

It is perhaps no coincidence that the family was considered a fitting metaphor for the New Order by both the state and researchers. The trope of the nation



as family was promoted by the Suharto regime in a variety of different ways (Antlov 2005: 12). As Saya Shiraishi notes, this view of the family dates back to the 1920s, long before the establishment of the Indonesian Republic:

Historically, the concept of *keleuargaan*, or family-ism, was born and developed in Taman Siswa [literally "Student Garden", an educational movement started by Ki Hajar Dewantoro in 1922]. It then migrated to government offices as Taman Siswa teachers and graduates joined the government. Family-ism therefore manifests itself most clearly in modern, national, bureaucratic organizations (Shiraishi 1997: 93).

The long history and many uses of the family as trope make it an interesting site for exploring what *kontemporer* performances say about interpersonal relations. The following performance excerpts provide an interpretation of how the idea of the family and its inherent power structures are understood in contemporary Java.

The later section on Youth (3.8) addresses performances that sometimes challenge such structures. For the most part, though, the performances referenced here reproduce traditionally established ideas about the family. Several performances that deal with familial ties concentrate on the figures of Karna and Gatotkaca, so it is worth outlining their main characteristics in detail before describing the ways they are re-elaborated in the performances. Karna is Kunti's first son and the older brother of the Pandawa. However, he was born out of wedlock before Kunti married Pandu and was thus thrown away into a

river. He was raised in Astina by Radha and Adirata and then accepted by the Korawa as one of their own.

Tetuka is the name Gatotkaca received upon birth. He was the son of Bima (the second Pandawa brother) and the giant princess Arimbi. As a baby, his umbilical cord was so strong that no weapon could cut through it. The Gods offered Arimbi and Bima a special sword for cutting the cord, on the condition that the young child would single-handedly fight a giant which was attacking heaven.

In order to strengthen his body, Tetuka was thrown into the Candradimuka crater together with several special weapons from the Gods, and became practically invincible. Upon reemerging from the crater he was renamed Gatotkaca and he dutifully defeated Nalapracona, the giant attacking heaven, and became an important warrior for the Pandawa faction. During the war, however, Karna killed Gatotkaca and then died by the arrows of Arjuna, the third Pandawa brother.

The *kontemporer* performances use the stories of both Karna and Gatotkaca to raise issues about responsibility, fate and allegiance. An important notion explored by the performances is the acceptance of the roles within a family and, by extension, in society. A typical example of this can be found in Mirwan Suwarso's *Jabang Tetuka* where Semar urges Bima and Arimbi to accept both the fate that has been decided for their child and the promise they have made.

ARIMBI. This baby has not been with me for

long. And now the Gods wish to take him away?

SEMAR. Yes. That is what you promised them.

BIMA. *Kakang* Semar.

SEMAR. What is it, Bima?

BIMA. What if I fight the giants myself?

SEMAR. No, the Gods have not requested you,

Kresna or Arjuna. They have requested Jabang

Tetuka.

BIMA. Alright *kakang* Semar. Yes. I will give my

baby to you.

Nanang Hape's Sanditama Lagu Laga reproduces the same moment. But here, when Gatotkaca is selected to fight the giant, Bima protests and it is Kresna who admonishes him to remember his place and obligations.

KRESNA. Often, we must focus on our respective

roles. And we shouldn't ask too many questions.

What is demanded of him is not only acceptance, but unquestioning silence. This also conforms to normative expectations of what maturity means. As Saya Shiraishi notes, sometimes in Java “one proves his maturity when he learns not to make his own decisions and insightfully accepts the right answer without being told it” (Shiraishi 1997: 163). This certainly does not apply to everyone, but this idea of maturity is still a dominant one. The rest of this performance explores the acceptance of responsibility from the points of view of Gatotkaca and Karna. The former dutifully accepts his responsibilities all the way to his

death. The latter has to choose between his responsibilities to his real mother and to his adoptive family and the Korawa fraction.

Nanang Hape told me that the childhoods of these two characters epitomize the lack of childhood that many young Jakartans experience. The rich, according to Nanang, are like Gatotkaca. They are treated like little adults that receive additional tuition after school every day and they have no time to enjoy being kids. The poor, on the other hand, often have lives that are not entirely different from that of Karna: orphans who must find a way to earn their own money abound in the streets of Jakarta. As the *dalang* mentions in the performance:

DALANG. Every time you come to a 'Stop' light in  
the middle of the city and you see a young boy,  
ask for his name! Perhaps that beggar or that boy  
polishing your shoes is called Karna. Every street  
kid in Astina changed his name to Karna.

This is contrasted to the fate of Gatotkaca, who is depicted as a cold young man who embraces his responsibilities with perfect stoicism:

GATOTKACA. I am fortunate to have it all, mom.  
Wealth, your love...what else could I long for?  
ARIMBI. You should try something else,  
Gatotkaca, something else besides blood,  
weapons and competitions.

GATOTKACA. That has already become my  
responsibility, mother! And I enjoy doing that.

Gatotkaca embraces his responsibility, and so does Karna. However, Karna's responsibilities are not as clear-cut as those of Gatotkaca. In Karna's mind, Kunti failed to fulfill her role as his mother when she banished him to a foreign land as a baby. Before the war, Kunti apologizes for her mistakes and tries to convince him to fight for the Pandawa faction.

KUNTI. I will ask for forgiveness during the rest  
of my life, Karna. Your mother was wrong.

KARNA. Really wrong! There is nothing tying  
you to me.

Yet, she does not succeed. Accepted by the Korawa, Karna's loyalties in the war will lie with the enemies of the Pandawa. But Kunti is able to convince him to only fight Arjuna and not any of her other sons – since Arjuna is the only possible match for Karna's strength. Karna agrees and eventually dies in a fight with Arjuna, but he kills several of the supporters of the Pandawa, including Gatotkaca. Karna's story is an interesting source of ethical debate, since he decides to choose other allegiances over blood ties. However, as this performance argues, he was freed from complying with his familial obligations the moment his mother denied him care as a baby. A previous performance by Nanang Hape, *Lara Tanpa Liru*, depicts this conflict vividly, when Duryudana, the leader of the Korawa, proclaims that Karna (Basukarna) is to be taken in as a member of the family.

DURYUDANA. Today we have a new brother. Our  
brother the king of Awangga, Basukarna. Do you  
agree?

Another performance that also retells this story – Slamet Gundono's Jendral Karna – takes the point of view of Kunti. After she has given birth out of wedlock, her brother Basudewa arranges for the child to be removed from her and thrown into the river. In Slamet's version, Basudewa orders a policeman called Bakir to carry out this action. An inconsolable Kunti is reminded of her obligations by her brother through a phone conversation.

BASUDEWA. It must be that way, Kunti. *Pakdhe*  
Bakir and his friends were forced to do this. They  
had to come and take your baby away. Yes. It has  
happened already. Your baby has been taken  
away already. Don't cry. If you cry, then I will also  
be sad, *man*. Don't be sad! Enough! For the sake  
of Mandura! You must sacrifice yourself. What  
was the name of that baby, Karna? If word about  
him gets out, our country will collapse. Don't cry.  
If you cry, you'll make me cry as well. Enough!  
Don't cry!

The connection between the roles in the family and their political consequences are made explicit in this fragment. Kunti is of course part of the royal family, and a scandal would devastate the country more than if a similar

event were to happen within a common family. Nevertheless, keeping up appearances and striving for *kerukunan* or balance is important in every family in Java: “Javanese society is not so much interested in absolute moral principles, as in preserving peace and harmony” (Magnis-Suseno 1997: 177).

The social consequences of an action, such as a child born out of wedlock, are more important than the action itself. Magnis-Suseno's comments on the Javanese attitude to sexuality are pertinent here:

Javanese do not seem to harbor any complexes about sexual relations, or any other aspect of sexuality. [...] The sexual drive is considered as something completely natural. It is not expected of individuals that they practice self-discipline, nor that they renounce extra-marital sexual relations on the basis of fundamental moral considerations. Such a point of view would strike Javanese as surprising. [...] It is self-evident to them that once an individual has escaped social surveillance he will follow where his instincts lead and do what they command. It is precisely for this reason, that strict supervision of young people is practiced, as it is seen as the only effective way to forestall extra-marital sexual activity (Magnis-Suseno's 1997: 175).

The preeminence of the social effects over the actual actions is highlighted by a scene in Teater Koma's *Sie Jin Kwie*. Liukong believes his daughter Liukimhwa has had an affair with Sie Jin Kwie. Although eventually she will become his wife, at that point in the story, she had only helped Sie Jin Kwie by providing

him with a coat to keep him warm in the middle of the night. Everyone in the city recognizes the coat and reaches the same conclusion. The father, angered by this fact, wishes to kill his daughter to protect the family honor, instead of investigating the veracity of the claims. In order to protect Liukimhwa, her mother Wankun and her older sister Liutayhong decide the only option left is to fake the young woman's death.

WANKUN. Kim must leave this house and hide in a neighboring village. When our father has calmed down, we can bring her back.

LIUKIMHWA. Oh, mother and sister. I have never been out of the house. It will be impossible for me to be far from the family. For me, this will be worse than dying!

LIUTAYHONG. Calm down, my sister. Your friends will go with you and protect you.

LIUKIMHWA. Yes, *kakak*. I will always be with you. Wherever you go, I will follow.

LIUTAYHONG. When he [Liukong] realizes she's gone, he will certainly look for her till he finds her.

WANKUN. Here's another thought. We will cry as if she has killed herself by throwing herself into the well. That way, father will not look for her.



Following the moral logic outlined by Magnis-Suseno, Kunti's and Liukimwha's actions are based not on absolute moral principles, but on a careful weighing of the perceptions of society. This is also the case for the decisions taken by other characters explored above, such as Gatotkaca and Bima. The previous examples show how mature men and women are supposed to accept their destinies, and comply with what society expects of them. However, this also applies to children and the roles a character is to follow are often imposed even before birth. In Aneng Kiswantoro's *Sumpah Pralaya*, when Abimanyu hears that he will have a child, he wishes that his son follow in his own footsteps:

ABIMANYU. The Baratayuda war has already started. All the Pandawa sons are rushing to the battle field. They are ready to sacrifice their souls. They are not afraid to meet their armed enemies. I also wish to let my warrior's soul be seen, in order to defend my country and people. Because of that, I have volunteered. I ask for your permission to leave for the field.

UTARI. *Kangmas* Abimanyu, you should know, as of today, your soul has been entrusted to me. The seed I carry is already four months old.

ABIMANYU. What, *yayi*? Will I be a father?

UTARI. Yes, my prince.

ABIMANYU. Oh! My child! *Yayi* Utari. I believe...

UTARI. Yes, *kangmas*?

ABIMANYU. If this child is a boy, one day he will continue the sacrifice of his elders.

UTARI. Yes, *kangmas*.

ABIMANYU. I pray that this child become a respectable warrior! So that he can defend truth and justice and make himself useful for his country and people.

Abimanyu's son, Parikesit, will indeed grow up to follow in the footsteps of his forefathers, eventually becoming the king of Astina after the Baratayuda war is over. However, Abimanyu himself will die in the war, as punishment for the breach of his promises. Early in the performance, he pledges an oath to Utari, promising he will never love another woman or he will die.

UTARI. Is it true that you think only about Utari?

ABIMANYU. You are the only one I love, *nimas*. I swear by the earth and the sky there is no one else I love except for you.

UUTARI. But can I really trust your words, prince? Many say that men like telling lies.

ABIMANYU. *Yayi*! Listen to my pledge of faithfulness. If I ever share my love with another woman may death befall me in the Baratayuda war.

Despite the promise, Abimanyu marries another woman as well and, at the end of the performance, he dies on the Kurusetra field during the Baratayuda war. Those who do not follow their accepted roles are punished for it, and this idea is explored by other performances as well. In Enthus Susmono's *Sugriwa dan Subali*, Windradi has committed adultery with a God. Resi Gotama, her husband, turns her into a statue upon learning of the affair.

GOTAMA. My children, a worm that has already become a butterfly cannot be returned to the cocoon. The actions of your mother have been punished according to her karma. Set your hearts at ease, my children. Strengthen your souls. Your mother has brought this upon herself with her actions.

It is interesting to note that this supernatural punishment is the result of the husband finding out, and not of the action itself. This seems to corroborate Magnis-Suseno's observation that social consequences are the motivation for ethical choices rather than universal values. The punishment for infidelity is also explored in two performances by Eko Nugroho, *Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas* and *Perseteruan Getah Bening*. In both performances, men kill their wives because of the infidelities they committed. However, here the emphasis is different since these performances portray both the men and the women as being at fault: the women for the extra-marital affairs and the men for their violent acts.

Nonetheless, very few other performances question any of the accepted ethical values of how to raise a family. The exception might be *Sungsang Bawono Balik*. In Java, having children is seen as a duty and one of the most important things to accomplish in life, but Sukasman (who was himself childless out of personal choice) challenges this point in the performance. Kresna is trying to educate Saroja Kusuma, the son of Duryudana, and takes him on a tour to the future, where he explains how behavior should change to suit the times.

KRESNA. When the world was empty, having many children was a good suggestion. But now there are too many people. The world is too full. Earlier, many parties controlled the process before having sex, and there was freedom in giving birth. But now it's the other way around. The people are more inclined to give freedom to the relationships between men and women. However, when a pregnancy happens, then it can become a problem. There are many other things to consider about the uniqueness of this world. From the point of view of good and bad, right and wrong, profit and loss. The direction of the world is uncertain. This is the name of this story, everything is upside down! [*Sungsang Bawono Balik* means that everything is inverted].

There is freedom for intimate contact but after  
the rise of the AIDS catastrophe this freedom  
should be curtailed.

This comment, through tangentially developed, is more explicit about the relation between accepted ethical values and contemporary life. The performance advocates limiting the number of children, which can be seen as going against conventional wisdom. But the extent to which this is an oppositional view is debatable since successive Indonesian governments have tried to impose family planning messages on *wayang* for several decades. The last line of the dialogue quoted above also suggests curtailing freedom, which can hardly be reconciled with a progressive ethical attitude.

The only performance that can clearly be said to question accepted ethical views is Nanang Hape's *Kalimataya*. Parikesit (who has been discussed above) has inherited the crown of Astina but does not feel up to the job. He questions Kresna, who finally agrees to criticize the actions of his elders.

PARIKESIT. Please, tell me about the war,  
*eyang*. Is it true that our men killed each other  
for the crown that I have received?

KRESNA. The Gods were wrong, Parikesit. We  
were destined to be born earlier. Of course,  
your problems might not be all that different  
from ours. But nothing tells you that you should  
use our ways to handle them.

At the end of the performance, a new war takes place, this time between the sons of the Korawa and the heirs of the Pandawa. When the war is over, the *dalang* questions the point of the destruction and the ethics of war.

DALANG. There is only red now. A million  
weapons took a million souls away. Revenge  
and anger are as dust specks that pollute the  
air. Many bodies were buried in shallow graves.  
Many were scattered around. Are moans  
enough to regret this? Are tears enough to  
lament this? The rest of the questions cannot  
be answered.

It is worth noting that, conventionally, there are no *lakon carangan* that take place after the *Baratayuda* (Magnis-Suseno 1997: 162). By placing the action beyond the realm of the *Baratayuda*, Nanang Hape also places the question it addresses beyond the realm of traditional ethics. With its hint at unanswerable questions, this performance moves away from the ethical dictum about war as an ethical endeavor, metaphorical or not (see Spirituality).

Most performances that investigate ethical behavior within a family adhere to conventional expectations. Traditional conceptions of the ideal family, and values such as responsibility, fate and allegiance continue to inform the ethical perspectives of most performances analyzed here. Following Magnis-Suseno, I suggested that ethical choice is motivated by social consequences, not by universal values. In the performances, punishment always arises in such

consequences. Likewise, there is reward in conforming to the right ethical choices. The few performances that challenge conventional ethics do little more than hint at the possible existence of alternative ethical frameworks.

Eleven performances have been considered in this section, more than in any other of the thematic categories I have proposed in this dissertation. Unsurprisingly, they represent a range of positions which highlight continuities and departures from the way this theme is elaborated by traditional *wayang*. It should be noted that the family is not the exclusive obsession of *kontemporer* performances, but that the same theme would be extensively addressed in a sample of traditional performances. If anything, the continued relevance of this theme demonstrates a close link between traditional and *kontemporer* performances in terms of thematic preoccupations. But is this theme interpreted in a radically different way?

*Bungkusan Hati Di Dalam Kulkas* and *Perseteruan Getah Bening* depict decidedly urban family settings of recent manifestation in Indonesia. But for all the trendiness of their appearance and their markedly middle-class Jakartan inflections, the characters in these performances are concerned with age-old problems: conceiving children and punishing unfaithful spouses. Conservative ideas of the family had never found such a modern guise as the one they find in Eko Nugroho's two works discussed here. I don't say this dismissively, but I can't help but notice that the disruptive aesthetic energies of the performance are not channeled towards interrogating the validity of the most conservative familial values. This could also be said for other performances described above

and it is one of the reasons why considering aesthetic and thematic variations separately, as I have done in this dissertation, is a productive strategy. By doing this, I aim to highlight the fact that aesthetic innovation does not necessarily correlate with thematic innovation. In fact this dissociated character is a key feature of *wayang kontemporer* performances.

The *Bocor* performances are as conservative as *Sugriwa dan Subali*, *Sumpah Pralaya*, *Jabang Tetuka* and *Sie Jin Kwie*. *Sungsang Bawono Balik* advocates slightly different views when it advances an argument in favor of family planning. But this is hardly new or oppositional. As Clara van Groenendael indicates, during the 1960s numerous government programs tried to use *wayang* performances in order to encourage family planning (van Groenendael 973: 56).

Perhaps the most unusual stances in relation to family values to be found in this group of performances are the ones elaborated by Nanag Hape in *Lara Tanpa Liru*, *Sanditama Lagu Laga* and *Kalimataya*. All these performances bring into question the wisdom of the elders in the way they raise their children. In the first two, we witness two extremes. On the one hand, the excessive endowment of responsibility towards Gatotkaca, and on the other, the denial of motherly love to Karna. In *Kalimataya*, what is interrogated is the relevance of keeping inherited grudges alive, masked as axioms of ancient wisdom. The performances described here reflect the multiple, nuanced ways in which the age-old trope of the family is challenged, articulated and re-elaborated in the world of *kontemporer* performances.





### 3.5 POLITICS: Parables, Mockery and Activism

Honggo Utomo, who works as the manager of several well-known *dalang*, told me that he wants to distance himself from Enthus Susmono. “I am interested in art, not in politics,” he said, matter-of-factly, by way of explanation. And Enthus, the most highly-paid *dalang* in Java, is interested in both art and politics. In fact, the distinction so craved by Honggo might require an impossible elision in the life and work of Enthus, a high-profile man whose interests have taken him to jail and made him the *bupati* (regent) of Tegal.

Enthus has long been part of the political world of Indonesia in a variety of ways. Richard Curtis (2002: 136-152) reconstructs a detailed history of his ascent to a privileged position as one of the most coveted *dalang* of the late New Order government. In the early 1990s, Enthus was still a relatively minor performer making jokes about the government, and winning the hearts of the *wong cilik* (little people). But, as his career skyrocketed through the 1990s, he metamorphosed himself into a full supporter of the ruling party, Golkar. By the time the New Order was reaching its demise, his musicians even sported yellow clothes (the color of Golkar) as their regular uniform. Recently, a decade and a half later, he ran for the position of *bupati* of Tegal and was sworn in on January 8, 2014. His long disagreement with the previous *bupati* was the direct cause of the scheme that resulted in a three-month imprisonment in 2009. This sojourn behind the bars ended just in time to allow him to fly to Amsterdam and perform Dewa Ruci for the opening of an exhibition of his puppets at the Tropen Museum, appropriately called *Dalang Superstar*.

To the dismay of his opponents, this short imprisonment only strengthened the image of Enthuis as a man of strong convictions and garnered him even more popular support. When his political campaign was in full swing, in June-August 2013, he scaled down his shows of epic proportions to something that was barely more than a one-man show. *Wayang Santri*, the name of this creation, was a small performance that he paraded through every possible village in the *kecamatan* (district) that he now leads. For Honggo, this was too much. And he opted out.

The close link between art and politics should not surprise us if we consider the political climate in Indonesia. As Ariel Heryanto explains: "Given Indonesia's highly politicized environment, it barely needs explanation why it is not possible for arts and cultures to be exempted from political contestation in the society at large" (Heryanto 2008: 8). However, it *should* surprise us if we look at the history of cultural policies aimed at de-politicizing culture in Java/Indonesia. By some accounts, these de-politicizing efforts go back as far as the early 19th century, when the Dutch presence coerced the Javanese nobility into a withdrawal from worldly affairs such as politics into the world of culture. (For a fuller explanation of this argument, masterfully developed by John Pemberton, see *Language*).

After Independence, the Old and New Order governments were engaged in the definition of culture and of national identity. The almost clinical division between culture and politics was one of the main goals of these policies. As a result, many art practices in Indonesia are both political and apolitical. Or, to

put it differently, their apparent apolitical character is the result of a complex political history. This might begin to explain why *wayang* has always had an ambivalent relation to politics. As Ward Keeler suggests, this has probably allowed it to remain relevant and appealing and to avoid criminalization:

A puppeteer may have occasionally made a passing reference to political issues but always allusively and ambiguously. *Dalang* have noted that it was essential to phrase comments in such a way as to make it possible to defend oneself from any accusations of subversion by insisting that such accusations stemmed from misreadings of remarks that really referred only to the moment at hand in the play (Keeler 2002: 98).

The relation between *wayang* and political power can be analyzed in two ways. First, in terms of the funding structures and power networks that support the performances; and second, in terms of the messages, metaphors and jokes that *dalang* use in order to address political issues; this section will concentrate on the latter. What does it mean for a *wayang* show to talk about politics?

In this analysis, I will try to avoid defining too narrowly that which is political about these performances. Instead, I will analyze a variety of attitudes towards the political. I will consider, for example, the performances which directly mention a political figure or event. This is usually made in the form of jokes

that are not directly related to the central narrative. Political commentary can also take the form of a fleeting allegory, where the characters of a story are momentarily equated with real political figures. Another mode of political referencing is to be found in performances which have a direct political objective, which aim to effect a particular change in the world. In yet a different category, there are works that talk about the political in a broader way, which we could refer to as a more abstract or philosophical register. These performances interrogate what it is like to live together in a society and the role of everyday citizens in shaping the social destiny of a nation.

Based on the loosely drawn distinction above, I will analyze excerpts from different performances and explain how they deal with the political in instrumental, philosophical and direct terms.

I will start by considering a performance with a direct political objective. Perhaps the most politically explicit of all the shows considered for this dissertation is *Wayang Republik*, by Catur 'Benyek' Kuncoro. This performance explores the role of the city of Yogyakarta in the struggle for Independence from the Dutch in the mid-1940s. According to the story presented in this performance, the Sultan and the people of Yogyakarta played a heroic role in the fight for independence. In recognition of these efforts, Sukarno, the leader of the fight for independence and the first president of Indonesia, granted the province of Yogyakarta a special status, as a semi-independent province. In 2009, Jakarta started discussing plans to revoke this special designation, which would turn the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) into a normal province. In

the views of many people in Yogyakarta, the politicians in Jakarta were betraying the pact through which the Kraton of Yogyakarta had joined the Indonesian Republic. Many people organized political demonstrations in order to support the government of the Sultan.

In this context, *Wayang Republik* depicted the story of Yogyakarta's actions with passionate detail, suggesting that without its decisive participation, independence would have been impossible. Reminding the spectators of this historical episode had a distinct political agenda in 2010, a time when the political tension surrounding the status of Yogyakarta was at its highest point. Before one of the occasions on which I saw this performance live, religious leaders representing the major Indonesian religions led a public prayer, where they pleaded for the region's special status to remain unchanged. In order to appreciate how this political objective is articulated within the performance, consider the following passage, where the previous Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengku Buwana IX, protects the rebels who are hiding inside the kraton against the Dutch army, represented by General Van Langen.

VAN LANGEN. I came here to arrest the  
extremists who are inside the kraton.

Hamengku Buwana IX. Mr. Van Langen, there  
are no extremists in the kraton.

VAN LANGEN. That's impossible! I have seen  
them with my own eyes. I saw them entering  
your house, Sultan. You should allow me to

come inside, Sultan.

Hamengku Buwana IX. Mr. Van Langen, this is my house. It is my right to grant or deny entrance to the guests that visit my house.

VAN LANGEN. *God verdome!* In that case, if you wish to protect the extremists, I will enter your house by force!

Hamengku Buwana IX. Go ahead. Please go ahead and enter my house, but you must do so over my dead body. And before I change my mind, get out of my house now!

The heroism of the sultan is taken as a synecdoche for the valor of Yogyakarta's citizens. This theme continues through the performance and culminates in the final dialogue of the performance, an exchange between Sukarno and the Sultan. This exchange stresses the historical force of the Yogyakarta's status, and helps further the political objective of this narrative.

SUKARNO. *Tuan* Sultan.

Hamengku Buwana IX. Yes, Bung Karno. On behalf of the people of Yogyakarta, I apologize for any shortcomings or mistakes during the past four years.

SUKARNO. There is nothing that needs to be forgiven, Sultan. It is I who am extremely

grateful for the sincere gifts of the people of  
Yogya to Indonesia. Yogya has spread the seeds  
of nationalism, assertive enthusiasm and  
culture. Yogyakarta is now famous for its  
people's embrace of independence. Long live  
those people!

Hamengku Buwana IX. Thank you, Bung Karno.

SUKARNO. *Tuan* Sultan, after everything is  
ready, please allow me and my collaborators to  
return to our ongoing struggle in Jakarta.

Hamengku Buwana IX. Yes. I can only wish you a  
good journey and all the best for the fight, Bung  
Karno. Bung Karno, please receive this. The  
Kraton is already empty of resources. Even if  
this is not much, please accept this. [He gives  
him some money.] Hopefully it will support the  
beginning of a new chapter in our nation's  
history, Bung Karno.

SUKARNO. Thank you, *tuan* Sultan.

Sukarno is a hero in the minds of many Indonesians. A thankful Sukarno hugging the Sultan adds an emotional undertone to the sense of political gravity and historical responsibility furthered by this performance. This might be the only performance considered in this dissertation that has such a direct objective.



Let us now consider a different set of articulations of the political and look at performances which include allusions, in the form of humor, to topical political situations. An example of such a performance is *Sie Jin Kwie Kena Fitnah*. Early on in this performance, the king Lisibin has ordered a new palace for Sie Jin Kwie to be built. But the builders "accidentally" build another place, which is shown on the puppet screen as the recognizable image of a fancy Jakarta building.

DALANG. This is not the Sansi Palace!

BUILDER. Isn't it?

DALANG. This is the palace of the people's representatives. Right? This is the place where they nap after swimming!

BUILDER. *Om*, this is a new building! That was the previous one.

DALANG. Oh, yes. This is where the swimming pool will go.

BUILDER. Yes, over here. This is the spa.

DALANG. A spa, you say?

BUILDER. Yes.

Then, the builders make a new attempt, but this is also wrong.

BUILDER. This is the house of the unlucky corrupted officials.

DALANG. What about the lucky ones?

BUILDER. Those ones ran to Singapore. It is clearly written here. Here. Pondok Cipinang Indah.

DALANG. Yes, the economy class.

BUILDER. No, this is not the economy class!

This is the VVIP! It's clear, isn't it? Look at the menu, here. Look at it. This is very complete.

There is everything here. Fridge, AC, TV, DVD.

Complete!

DALANG. But this is not what I meant! I wanted the Sansi Palace!

BUILDER. Oh, Sansi!

Corruption and the diversion of funds that should have been used for official projects also provide an opportunity for Catur Kuncoro to make a joke in Wayang Mitologi. In this story, two blacksmiths are creating a new *keris* imbued with supernatural power. Making this sword has shifted the Earth off balance and the Gods, preoccupied with this, decide to move a piece of the Himalayas into Java. This mass of rock will close down their workshop and it will also restore the lost balance of the planet. The Gods are discussing this project:

NARADA. Yama!

YAMADIPATI. Yes, *wa* Narada.

NARADA. Please inform the secretary and the

treasurer of heaven to immediately write up a financial plan for the Mountain Transfer Project.

But, no corruption!

YAMADIPATI. At your command.

NARADA. [Aside] Stupid. Accepting a project without corruption, that is really stupid! [...]

NARADA. Everything related to the Wisma Atlet

- Sorry, sorry! - Everything related to the Mountain Transfer... I entrust fully to you.

NARENDRA. At your command.

The Gods are depicted as despotic rulers. Not only does Narada support corruption in his aside, there is also a direct reference to a high-profile graft case in Indonesia. The Wisma Atlet, referenced above, was one of biggest corruption scandals in recent years (it was exposed in 2012). This building in Palembang, Sumatra, was meant to be the seat of the XXVI SEA Games. Billions of rupiah were misplaced in the construction of such a building and Muhammad Nazaruddin, who was in charge of the project, was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Another instance of an explicit reference to politics is found in Enthuis Susmono's *Dewa Ruci*. In the comic interlude, Petruk and Gareng discuss the actions of Durna, Bima's teacher. Bima has been lied to by Durna, but he still fully believes in him and is willing to obey his orders, which send him on a

journey to find himself (a more detailed description of the performance is offered in Spirituality). This is what the *punokawan* have to say:

PETRUK. And I fiercely oppose Durna's actions.

As a political figure, how could he later fall under Sengkuni's influence? That stupid general. Here, religion is ruined. However, if religion is ruined that means society is ruined, and those are signs that the country and the culture are broken, right? [Imitating the voice of Gus Dur] "Therefore, dear brothers, we must uphold the Qolbu management. Isn't that true?" My favorite is Gus Dur [speaking of the Indonesian presidents]. Gus Dur was truly amazing.

GARENG. Why?

PETRUK. He survived four strokes while firing Muhaimin Iskandar.

GARENG. Yes.

PETRUK. Gus, Gus! What? Why did you fire your own nephew, Muhainin Iskandar? [imitating the voice of Gus Dur] "I am the only one who knows what he did. Muhaimin was only...hah..."

[aside] While swallowing snot, "Muhainin

Iskandar was only a puppet for SBY and JK.”

That was enough trouble.

The stupid general referred to at the beginning of this excerpt is probably not only Sengkuni but Suharto as well. Gus Dur is the nickname of Dr. Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), a religious scholar and the fourth president of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001. During his government, he promoted inter-religious tolerance and he was the first president after Suharto to allow Chinese cultural performances to be carried out in public. Although his government was short lived, he is credited with brave ways of fighting corruption, which include an open conflict with Muhaimin Iskandar, as referred to in the excerpt above. Muhaimin Iskandar (Cak Imin) is the nephew of Gus Dur and the head of the executive council of the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Indonesia – National Awakening Party). On 27 March 2008, Gus Dur (then no longer president) asked Muhaimin to step down. However, he refused and filed a lawsuit against Gus Dur, and his position was ratified by the trial.

Another allusion to politics is found in *Pertaruhan Drupadi*, which involves political figures beyond the borders of Indonesia. Drupadi, whose freedom has been wagered and lost by her husband Puntadewa, sets out on a trip around the world trying to find justice. Eventually she meets the then-president of the US George Bush (I quote this passage for a different purpose in *Women*). Hide dialogue excerpts

DALANG. So George Bush took a shower. He came out of the White House, looking arrogant and vain because he had just attacked Iraq and won the war against Saddam Hussein. Apparently his favorite music was not dance, disco or jazz, but Bendrong from Banyumas.

*Bush, represented by a sieve, covered in a slendang, enters dancing Bendrong.*

BUSH. Who was looking for me earlier? Who was making noise?

DRUPADI. I am the person looking for you.

BUSH. Who are you? I am busy.

DRUPADI. Are you truly George Bush?

BUSH. Yes. The President of America.

DRUPADI. I ask for your help, the Kurawa want to rape me.

BUSH. And you are asking for my help? Alright. What do I get in return?

DRUPADI. I ask for help and you immediately talk about payment. Is this really a president? I don't have anything.

BUSH. Then it's impossible. There must be something given in return, something that will benefit my country. We accept petrol, oil, we

would really like some oil, even if it's cooking oil.

DRUPADI. This can't be true, I am asking for help! You are supposed to look after the safety of the world, so you should be able to help anyone. I was sacrificed by my husband.

BUSH. Oh, that's a trivial problem. I am only interested in big events, such as the presidential elections in Indonesia. Thinks like... the war between Korea and China. Your problem is insignificant.

This excerpt shows the disconnection between the concerns of politicians and the real demands of the citizens. This disconnection is not only represented here. In *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, Sujiwo Tejo also takes a detour from his narrative to criticize the lack of commitment of the politicians. Bhisma has won Amba and her sisters in a contest, but he cannot marry them because he has vowed to lead a life of celibacy. Bhisma travels with Amba, trying to find her an appropriate husband, yet she won't accept any of them. The *dalang* suggests that she could marry one of the musicians present on stage, and then this becomes an opportunity to embark on a diatribe against Indonesian politicians.

DALANG. [...] She could just marry a musician.

They are happy although they don't make as

much as the KPK [Anti-Corruption Commission].

But they say they are happy. But I think that the

KPK people are also happy - with their money

they can go anywhere. They can go to Macau.

But what's the use of happiness when it only

depends on holiday leave? All the government

officials and all the employees are only count

the days, like Krisdayanti, waiting for their

holidays to come. This means they don't love

their jobs! That is a violation of the customary

laws of the Bhagavad Gita. Your life journey is

your life. If you become a teacher, dream of

dying in front of the class. If you become a

congressman you must dream of dying in the

middle of a session. If you become a soldier,

you must dream of dying in the battle field.

How can a soldier dream of dying while playing

with his grandchildren? This country faces huge

problems because not everyone loves their

jobs. If they loved their jobs, they would be

stressed during weekends because they were

not working. The musicians are better than

them. The big stars are stressed on weekends.

And even more during vacations because their



work is their action. Please think about this,  
*mas* Taruna. You shouldn't aim to die with your  
wife. You must die while playing *gendèr*. Why  
would people who love their work wait for a  
holiday? If the members of Congress loved their  
work, they would take no pauses. They would  
be stressed during their breaks. That is our  
problem.

Although the criticism encompasses many people, the *dalang* does emphasize how it relates to the lack of commitment with which politicians carry out their jobs. Despite the fact that these comments are unrelated to the rest of the story he is presenting, the *dalang* aims to make them resonate with his audience: "That is our problem", he says.

Another, albeit less direct reference to the betrayal of political ideals is found in one of the songs of Wayang Hip Hop called *Salin Srengat*, which literally means "a change of clothes" and, by extension, a change of attitude. The song imagines the Pandawa becoming corrupt after winning the Baratayuda war, equating them perhaps to New Order politicians who participated in the struggle for independence and then forgot the ideals of the fight. This is presented as a rapped conversation between two musicians, Tyno TNT and Inung Arhaen:

DALANG. There was a country called Astina.

After the Baratayuda war was over, the country

was prosperous but not fair. Safe but not peaceful. [...]

TYNO. Astina lost the war, the Baratayuda was over. The Pandawa lived in luxury. Drinking wine and eating bread. [...] The Kurawa lost and Astina was colonized. Shattered dreams, difficult life. Every little joy was taken from them. They could barely eat once a day. And couldn't afford their children's tuition. And yet, Astina used to be rich. [...] But now every defector is an outcast.

INUNG. Weren't the Pandawa noble and wise?

TYNO. Yes, but only before hitting the jackpot.

INUNG. Don't talk nonsense, the Pandawa are true warriors.

TYNO. That was before they became corrupt.

And now they do whatever they want and they have forgotten where they came from. Their dreams and struggles forgotten, they use democracy to gain wealth.

The prosecution of detractors, corruption and the betrayal of the political ideas upheld by people previously regarded as heroes alert us to the fact that Astina is probably Indonesia in this song. Like with the previous examples, this excerpt

is a reference to political figures that is not directly connected to the main plot of the performances where they take place.

The last performance to be considered here addresses political concerns in a very different manner, by moving away from specific references and thinking about the political by way of parable. The role of common people in politics is thus explored in Wayang Onthel. In this performance, when the teacher and leader of the Bicycle Lovers' Association dies, he passes along his possessions to his students: Paijo is the one who inherits the land on which the Association's building stands. Upon hearing the news, Darso offers him money, and Paijo, unknowingly signs a document where he agrees to lease the money against the property he has inherited. Drunk with the pleasures of his newly acquired wealth, Paijo forgets his previous friends and starts acting recklessly. Eventually, Darso comes to collect on his debt. Paijo has spent everything and cannot pay him back. Only then does he realize that he did not read the small print in the money loan contract and that he has actually borrowed the money against the land. He loses everything and is left with nothing except for bitter reflections of his role in this catastrophe:

PAIJO. I cannot accept this! This is what usually  
ruins the poor and stupid people like me.

DARSO. At least you accept you are stupid.

With his new economic power and assets, Darso violently imposes his will on the rest of the students, and finally uses the land to build a hotel. Darso symbolizes the powerful politicians and businessmen whose actions

contribute to an increase in poverty. But his actions are only possible due to the complicity of the little people:

DALANG. Paijo was consumed by temptation and anger. And his wealth disappeared. He was tricked by Darso's sweet words. And then he remembered his friends. But it was too late, they had already been chased away from the Bicycle Lovers' Association. He was consumed with regret. But now it was useless. Animosity breaks things apart; only working together brings peace.

Taking all of these performances together and reflecting on the nature of the political ethics expressed in them, we might conclude that the *wayang kontemporer* performances are less directly political than other forms of theatre in Indonesia. By way of comparison, we might consider the analysis suggested by Michael Bodden of the political resistance expressed in a handful of performances in the Late New Order government. According to his analysis, there are two ways in which theatre performers opened up avenues for political resistance:

On the one hand, they brought together new constituencies in creating theatre and protesting censorship, building a more complex social movement around issues of socio-economic

justice and freedom of artistic expression. On the other, they brought new themes and material to public attention (Bodden 2010: 5).

His nuanced analysis indicates that not all actors in these processes had shared ideas and that resistance is elaborated differently in each case. The political objectives and commentary offered by *kontemporer* performances might seem weak in comparison. Maybe the reason why these performances don't appear to be overtly political is that *wayang* has always been very adaptable. Ward Keeler is right in his observation that *wayang* has harnessed the power to conjure allusions in subtle ways that always grant the artists the privilege of deniability. This adaptability is part of the reason why the *wayang* tradition has remained alive through several waves of technological, political and religious influence.

In other words, tradition still weighs on how politics are referenced. The ideas might be contemporary but the mode of delivery – through humor, allusions and metaphors – is not always new. This section has explored the ethical questions that pertain to the realm of political actions. Through different modes of tackling the issues, all the performances focus on two central questions: How should politicians behave? What is the role of the common people in politics? These questions are mostly answered through passing comic references to real politicians and through fleeting allegories. Yet, in some notable cases, the political is articulated as the direct objective of a

performance, either through critical historical narratives or by invoking the philosophical examination of the politics of everyday life.

The political referents for these performances are necessarily different from those of the performances from previous decades. However, *wayang* has always included references, albeit veiled and indirect, to topical political developments. The preferred mode of reference has been the coded language of subtle allusion, metaphor and off-the-cuff jokes. But some of the *kontemporer* performances analyzed here are somewhat more explicit in their interpellation of topical political events than earlier decades would have allowed for. This dissertation considers performances created after the fall of Suharto's New Order and we can identify differences with performances from earlier decades. Certain insinuations would have been censored (or at least self-censored) before 1998. For example, in *Wayang Republik*, Suharto is presented as merely following the suggestions of the Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX rather than as the cunning military strategist that official histories would present him as. But even now, more than a decade after the end of the regime, no *wayang* performance criticizes Suharto by name. This is certainly different, as I have pointed out, in the case of *teater* productions. In my analysis, *Wayang Republik* also happens to be, of all the performances considered here, the one where we can identify the most directly pragmatic political agenda. And yet, this agenda is never mentioned, not even indirectly. Is it accurate to say that these *kontemporer* performances are politically conservative? Yes, but demanding more explicit treatment of political themes

in *wayang kontemporer* would require us to dismiss the place of these performances in contemporary Javanese society. These performances are participating in the present by negotiating layers of tradition in ways that are very different from contemporary theatre. An unjust but pertinent comparison with *teater* thus throws these differences into sharp relief, illustrating the particular qualities of political discourse in *wayang kontemporer*.

### 3.6 SPIRITUALITY: Controversies of Belief

"Miguel, could you lead the prayers?" A few years earlier, I would have panicked upon hearing this. But in 2012, I knew what needed to be done. "Let us all pray according to our own beliefs," I said and then waited for a full minute. "Enough," I appended, to conclude the prayer. The *wayang* troupe was then ready to start the show, which happened to be a very contemporary version of *wayang*.

Most *dalang*, whether engaged in the creation of *kontemporer* shows or not, pray and light incense sticks at their homes before going to hold a performance. In this section, I will argue that spirituality is an important feature of *wayang kontemporer*. I will not concentrate on the aspects of spiritual preparation undergone by *dalang*, since that would constitute an entirely different exploration. Rather, I will focus on thematic explorations of the role of spirituality. The performances in this sections pose the question: what does it mean to be spiritual? They offer different answers, but often suggest a contrast between genuine spirituality and organized religion, making direct allusions to religious practices in Indonesia. In other cases, the answer does not include such direct references, and the ethics of spirituality are merely presented as personal paths toward perfection that demand ascetic practice. One last answer to be offered by these performances equates war with a spiritual endeavor; either of these can be a metaphor for the other.

I will begin by looking at two performances which highlight the distinction between spirituality and organized religion. This exploration will start with the



the *Serat Centhini*, a strangely spiritual text compiled in 1814 in Surakarta. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it combines Islamic religiosity, Javanese spirituality and explicit sexual passages. This combination has shocked and amazed readers since its creation. A well-known segment of this literary work, which comprises four chapters, is Cebolang Minggat [The Exile of Cebolang], which was used as the starting point of Slamet Gundono and Elizabeth Inandiak's eponymous performance. In the first scene, Elizabeth narrates the origin of the performance, which was commissioned by Prince Mangkunegara, who was continuously criticized by his father for his hedonist lifestyle. His goal in commissioning the literary work was to convince the king that hedonism and spirituality need not be mutually exclusive (I have also referred to this excerpt, for a different reason, in Art).

ELIZABETH. To his father, Pakubuwono IV, who was learned in the arts of grammar and etiquette, he said: "I will demonstrate that my passions and desires one day will bring me to the science of perfection." We must get to know the temptations that linger at the doorstep of spirituality. [The Indonesian wording plays with the similarity in the sounds of the words: *kebatinan* – spirituality, and *kebatilan* - evil.] Unfortunately, after Pakubuwono IV passed away and shortly after Prince Anom inherited the crown, he was

carried away by the angels of syphilis. Had he achieved the perfection he was looking for? The annals of the Kraton are silent about his short reign. You cannot be both a king and a free man. Nonetheless, "The Exile of Cebolang" bears witness to his story.

*Cebolang Minggat* is the story of the son of a sheik who embarks who on a journey across Java after a disagreement with his father (which justifies considering Cebolang a representation of Prince Anom). The young Cebolang wanders around, visiting opium dens, places of spiritual retreat, palaces and brothels. Through his interactions with a wide array of characters, he gains sexual and spiritual knowledge before eventually returning home to his parents. In the performance, Cebolang's first lesson in spiritual matters will come from watching a *wayang*. This *wayang* within the play consists of a conversation between two religious experts or *kyai*, Partodewa and Durna. Partodewa, a young man, represents Javanist wisdom, whereas Durna, allied to the Kurawa, represents organized religion. Durna poses a riddle to the young man, who answers it with a Javanist explanation of spirituality:

PARTODEWA. The four riddles you posed,  
Durna, are the tongue, the eye, the ear and the  
sense of smell. Those are the gifts of Allah. You  
must use them wisely to become a good *kyai*.  
You must not speak nonsense or *bullshit*

[English in the original]. Do everything as said before. If you don't act according to these four things, you will bring on God's anger and this will wreak havoc everywhere.

DALANG. And then Cebolang smiled at the wit of the young *kyai*. He was different from the old and emotional Durna who had become a government official. Durna was angry.

This exchange suggests that spirituality is something to be explored in a personal way, and that striving for authenticity in mystic connection is more important than following empty rituals. This view sanctions the existence of many different approaches to spirituality, which will continue to be developed through the performance. At a later moment, Slamet uses music as an analogy for the place of the different voices in Islam.

DALANG. This music is similar to the Islamic chants of worship. There are different kinds of voices. It's the same as Islam itself. There are many voices within Islam. But their sounds should not be forced to become one.

This conversation serves to emphasize one of the performance's themes: the personal quest for spirituality should not conform to institutional definitions. Later on his journey, Cebolang meets an old opium addict who thinks himself an enlightened preacher. This man, called Gatoloco, discusses religious

matters with three old *kyai* and then explains his philosophy of life to Cebolang:

KYAI. We heard that you eat pork whenever you want to and there is an opportunity to do so.

Aren't you afraid of committing a sin?

GATOLOCO. What people say is true. I don't only eat pork, I also eat dogs. I look after them since they're little. I buy them small and then take care of them and when they are old I cut them up myself and then eat them. Pork, dog and monkey can be more halal than halal goods which are stolen. [...]

DALANG. When the *kyai* finally left the house, Cebolang approached the old addict.

CEBOLANG. I was surprised to see you discussing religion in an opium den. What is your religion, actually?

GATOLOCO. I have three religions: three *rasa*. Body, word and heart.

CEBOLANG. And what about praying?

GATOLOCO. My prayers? My breath is my prayer. Every time I breathe, I worship God. And that is how I show my respect to consciousness. Every time I breathe that is a sign of respect to

God. He is the one where the three *rasa* take shelter and dissolve into each other.

Gatoloco's attitude conforms to a Javanist view on the practice of mysticism.

As Neils Mulder notes:

In mysticism, the essence of reality is grasped by the *rasa* and revealed in the quiet *batin* (inner mind). By overcoming the fetters of everyday existence and the phenomenal world, man may free himself to really understand and achieve direct knowledge of the mystery of existence (2005: 34).

It is not hard to imagine why the *Cebolang Minggat* excerpt quoted above would be controversial in Indonesia. It advocates that people can choose for themselves how to lead a spiritual life. The discussion about halal food states that there is no intrinsically good action, but it depends on how it is carried out. These ideas express a Javanist approach to life and mysticism. Mulder's explanation of the difference between Javanism and religion is worth taking into account:

Javanism or Kejawèn is not a religious category but refers to an ethic and a style of life that is

inspired by Javanist thinking. So, while some people may express their Javanese-ness in religious practice, such as, for instance, in mysticism, it is in essence a characteristic culturally induced attitude toward life that transcends religious diversity (Mulder 2005: 15).

A conflict between Javanism and religion already existed when the *Serat Centhini* was written in the 19th century, and it has continued until today. During the New Order government, Javanism was denied recognition as an established religion. Currently, there are two main strands of Islam in Indonesia, and they see Javanism with different eyes. Muhammadiyah, founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, advocates a more strict religious practice and is heavily influenced by Middle-Eastern Islamist discourses. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), on the other hand, has traditionally been closer to Javanist thinking and practices. Slamet Gundono, a member of the latter, tacitly supports this strand in the excerpts quoted above.

Michel Piccard also believes that the religion/spirituality opposition has a long history and he points to the word *agama* as evidence, the most common translation of 'religion,' where he finds traces of conflicting philosophies. As he notes, religion "is neither a descriptive nor an analytical term, but a prescriptive and normative one" (Piccard 2011: 1). On the other hand, *agama* "covers a much narrower semantic field." This difference suggests that the word is the result of amalgamating different ideas of distinct cultural origin.

In truth, agama is the peculiar combination in Sanskrit guise of a Christian view of what counts as a world religion with an Islamic understanding of what defines a proper religion: divine revelation recorded by a prophet in a holy book, a system of law for the community of believers, congregational worship, and a belief in the One and Only God. In this respect, agama is a point of contention between different sets of actors. Moreover, far from being autonomous, agama is an initial part of a semantic field which it composes along with the categories adat ('tradition'), budaya ('culture'), hukum ('law'), and various signifiers involving political authority (Piccard 2011: 3).

Java's cultural history has been marked by the influences of different religions. This has led to the development of different attitudes toward spirituality, marked by conflict and hybridization. Mulder describes such hybridization as a quest for unity:

This delight in stirring all kinds of unconnected things together, of compounding them, is, on the one hand, related to rasa-thinking and, on the other, to the obsession with oneness. This drive toward unity always subsumes distinctions, striving upwards, away from facts and analytical hair-splitting. In that process, incompatibilities gradually disappear, and it is therefore different from just syncretizing. What it seeks to accomplish is synthesis, the quiet order of undifferentiated union (Mulder 2011: 148).

These forces – conflict and hybridization – have determined the practice of Javanism and mark the trajectory of Cebolang's travels. After his conversation with Gatoloco, Cebolang is both amazed and confused.

ELIZABETH. Cebolang was disturbed by the ugliness of Gatoloco; a type of ugliness which fascinated and disgusted him as a distorted mirror. In him, he saw a way of living which he had not fathomed before. And this fueled his travels, turning him into an eternal foreigner.

Trying to find a way of combining what he has learned from his experiences proves difficult and Cebolang is plunged into depression. Lost in solitude, he can only think of killing himself. At this point, however, he meets another old *kyai* in a hut in the mountains who advises him to watch a *wayang* in order to better understand his own existential questions.

OLD KYAI. If you want to understand your true identity, there is a village by the edge of the forest where they are playing *wayang*. The story is Dewa Ruci. Go there and perhaps you will learn something from watching that story.

DALANG. Cebolang went to that village where a *wayang* was being played. The *wayang* characters were already placed left and right and the *blencong* [oil lamp] was lit up. The screen was set with the banana trees in front. The *kotak* [wooden box] and *keprak* [wooden mallet to cue the *gamelan*] were ready. The



*dalang*, handsome and fat, was ready. The musicians were also handsome but not too much so. The *sinden* was beautiful but a bit too flirty.

Cebolang finds himself reflected in Bima's quest for the meaning of life. Advised by his teacher Durna, Bima sets out on a journey and eventually finds a miniature version of himself, called Dewa Ruci, in the middle of the ocean. Dewa Ruci instructs him in spiritual knowledge.

DEWA RUCI. That is called "unity."

BIMA. *Pukulun*. I want to know, what is unity?

DEWA RUCI. Understanding unity is difficult, Werkudara [Werkudara is another name for Bima]!

BIMA. *Pukulun*, please.

DEWA RUCI. The requirements to understand it are very heavy.

BIMA. What are they?

DEWA RUCI. You need to be able to love your enemy. Secondly, you must be able to forgive the people who hate you. And third: you must be honest to your friends and family. And you cannot go back from there.

DALANG. Werkudara cried.

BIMA. I do not want to go back to the real world, *pukulun*. I don't want to go home. I cannot stand the world. I see people destroying one another, *pukulun* [honofiric used for a god]. They kill in the name of religion, truth and love. And they destroy one another.

This will be the turning point in the travels of Cebolang. Eventually Bima gains understanding and goes back to the real world. And so does Cebolang. Seeing himself in Bima, Cebolang cries during the performance. After witnessing the *wayang*, he returns to his parental home. The choice of Dewa Ruci as the the story is not accidental, since it has often been considered as the epitome of Javanist mystical thinking:

Basically, the practice of mysticism is an individual endeavor. It is the lone search of man desiring reunification with his origin, aspiring to experience the revelation of the mystery of existence, or deliverance from all earthly attachments. Many of the stories of shadow play mythology have this lonely quest as their subject. For instance, in the well-known story Dewa Ruci, the quest of Bima ... to discover the essence of life, is vividly described. Similarly, the mystic is thought to tread a lone and dangerous

path that may take him to the understanding and revelation of *kasunyatan* (truth) (Mulder 2011: 44-5).

After his travels, Cebolang is forgiven and welcomed back in his parents' house. His father tells him about the science he should not forget. This perhaps is the central idea of the literary work (I quote this passage for a different purpose in Youth):

ELIZABETH. Cebolang went back to Sokayasa.

The nights and the days went very fast, as the end of the Ramadan approached. His father welcomed him with soft words. Cebolang, my child, your mother and father always thought about you after you left. This was our prayer: "Don't forget him, so that he does not forget you." Cebolang was silent and he approached the Mosque's veranda. Sheik Akhadiyah repeated these wise words to his son.

"Cebolang, I see from your four-colored clothes that you have already learned the spiritual teachings. Get rid of those clothes before they get stained with pride. Forget everything and concentrate on the most basic science of all. It will take you to everything else."

CEBOLANG [played by Elizabeth]. Father, what science is that?

SHEIK [played by Elizabeth]. Love.

Cebolang has been profoundly transformed by his journeys and he is now ready to be reinserted into society. His father's last piece of advice stresses yet again the idea that true spiritual knowledge is a personal quest that should not be confused with external markers (the clothes Cebolang wears and organized religious rituals).

A similar theme is explored by another performance, Enthus Susmono's version of Dewa Ruci in Bali. Here, though, the relevance of the story in contemporary Indonesia will be made explicit when the *dalang* connects Bima's conversation with Dewa Ruci to comments made by the *punokawan*. But before describing the comic scene, let us look at the conversation between Dewa Ruci and Bima as portrayed in this performance, which differs slightly from the same scene in *Cebolang Minggat*.

DEWA RUCI: In truth, the purity you look for is the courage to think and to pray. And then to act without anger. [...] Your spirit is your friend, and it will prepare your body and soul, both in pleasure and in pain. Then your body will be swallowed by Time. Your body will break and your soul will fall. Your spirit will leave with the angel of death. Leaving behind a broken body.

And then your spirit will be born again into a more noble body. That is the essence of the *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*. Bima, you are like a tree with fruits. And you can control your passions, with the fruits of virtue you have received. Pay your respects to the creator, because that is where you come from and that is where you will return to. I will wait within the cavities of your heart, Bima! Hey, Bima! Wake up, body! Wake up, soul! You must still work. Because true service is not meditation alone. It is certainly true that the only thing you need here is knowledge. Only wisdom. This is not yet the time for you to feel it completely. Return now to the real world.

Towards the end of his explanation, Dewa Ruci insists that “true service is not only meditation.” The meaning of this phrase is contextualized in the comic scene to which I will now turn. I would suggest that the objective of Enthus in this performance is to defend inter-religious tolerance hence the admonishment that true spirituality must spill into the real world, beyond the inner realm of meditation. This performance was presented in Bali in 2006, where this message had urgent importance, in the wake of increasing inter-religious violence and terrorist attacks. These ideas were made explicit in the comic interlude of the performance.

PETRUK: Muslim people will be surprised because the ones that will get into heaven are the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Christians. The Muslim are all self-righteous and they will all go to hell. Isn't that true?

GARENG: Astagfirullah al Azim.

PETRUK. I am afraid. So before we die, Reng, let us act to the best of our ability. And later I will say the people of Bali, Reng, the people of Bali really treasure their culture. But Indonesia does not value its own culture. This is also true of the Muslim people. Javanese Muslims are suffering from a case of "Arabism." Everything should seem Arabic. If your name is Darsono, you cannot go to Mecca. Your name should now be Mu'in.

GARENG. Yes.

PETRUK. And so on and so on. But religion should be about forgiveness. Wherever we stand, we can be religious, and we can be at peace with those of other religions. Muslim people can also marry Hindu women.

GARENG. Yes. Is that possible?

PETRUK. Yes. Why should you give priority only

to the women? If you can marry a Hindu woman, why wouldn't you extend your affection to other Hindu people? That's hypocrisy!

GARENG. That's true.

PETRUK. Therefore, when I go back [to Java] I'll write a suggestion. If we want Indonesia to have an identity, we should all imitate Bali. Now I really understand and admire Bima. Despite the number of obstacles he faced, he remained faithful to his teacher, even when Durna lied to him.

Through the Punokawan, Enthus (himself a devout Muslim) praises Bali and urges fellow Muslims to become more tolerant. Bali is primarily Hindu, and it was the target of terrorist attacks in 2002 and 2005 which were carried out by Islamic fundamentalists from Java. It is against this backdrop that the dialogue above is to be understood. There is also a direct criticism of the "Arabism" he identifies, which could be linked to the Muhammadiyah movement which is gaining supporters across Indonesia. As Piccard notes, "signs of the radicalization of Indonesian Islam are on the increase" (2011: 18). After *reformasi*, "debates shifted from the idea of Islam becoming the foundation of the state to the obligation of the government to implement sharia" (Piccard 2011: 18). However, as Robert Hefner notes, there are many competing ideas of how this should be done:

The more pervasive impact of the Islamic resurgence has been not a unitary and dominant radicalism, then, but the fact that Islamic issues feature prominently in public policy debates. This will likely remain the pattern for years to come (2011: 46).

He concludes that even though secularization will probably not be regained, “Indonesia is not about to descend into an Islamic maelstrom” (Hefner 2011: 46). This remains to be seen but, in any case, Enthos’ usage of the most respected Javanese *lakon* (presented in Indonesian and in Bali), represents a strong stance against radicalization and in favor of inter-religious tolerance. In other words, it advocates wisdom and spirituality at the expense of the interests of the main religious institutions.

Another performance, also by Enthos Susmono, tangentially explores how particular actions contribute to spirituality. In *Sugriwa dan Subali*, spirituality is presented as an unfinished quest that requires education and ascetic practice. The following conversation takes place between Resi Gotama and his children who have been turned into monkeys as punishment for playing with a forbidden container of wisdom, the *Cupu Manik Asthagina*.

GOTAMA. You can only beg forgiveness, Anjani, Guwarsa and Guwarsi, from God almighty. Only he can alter the fate of human beings. Only God controls the World. However, every creature is



given opportunities. Anjani, your opportunity will come from practising asceticism with Bengawan Yamuna. You should imitate the actions of a frog. Do not eat anything unless the water brings it directly into your mouth.

Guwarsa?

GUWARSA. At your command, father.

GOTAMA. You should go to Wana Sunya Pringga. You will practise asceticism as if you were a bat. You should only eat fruits and vegetables. In order to go unnoticed do not use the name Guwarsa, use the name Subali instead. Guwarsi?

GUWARSI. At your command father.

GOTAMA. You will follow the steps of your older brother. You will not practise asceticism like a bat but like an antelope. You will change your name from Guwarsi to Sugriwa.

GUWARSI. I will follow your commands.

GOTAMA. Do not eat anything except for grass and roots. Now go, my children. Anjani, Subali and Sugriwa, may your asceticism be successful so that God can hear you.

Asceticism as a vehicle for spiritual development is a common idea in Javanist thinking. As Sri Mulyono notes, “refraining from the desire to eat and sleep constitutes a spiritual and mental training towards self-perfection. This means that, even when eating, people are in the process of pursuing virtue, nobility and politeness” (1982: 27, my translation).

Besides asceticism, there is another activity which is articulated in *kontemporer* shows as a spiritual endeavor: war. Engaging in one’s predestined fights, regardless of the outcome, is seen as a spiritual obligation. The performance that explores this in greatest detail is Aneng Kiswantoro’s *Sumpah Pralaya*. The performance, whose English title would be “An Oath of Death,” tells the story of Abimanyu’s pledge to Utari. He promised her that he would die surrounded by arrows should he ever love another woman (see *Familial Ties*). However, Abimanyu does fall in love with another woman and knows he must die for this. In the following excerpt, Semar is instructing Abimanyu about the role of fate in peoples’ lives:

SEMAR. Before your Excellency was born, his  
fate was already known. Three things are to be  
found in life: fate, marriage and the third one is  
a gift from heaven [rhymed *purwakanthi* in the  
original.] People don’t know this, *ndara*  
[master]. And still, people will always strive for  
something better. Even though regret will  
always come in the end. However, you should

not dwell in that regret. I ask you to realize something. I beg you to remember, *ndara*, that you are a warrior. Don't let your tears reach the ground or they will curse the land. And don't let your expectations wear you down, *ndara*. So what does *ndara* want to do? You cannot walk away from the words of wisdom: "Good and evil will eventually be recognized. Those who betray will die. Those who sow will reap. Those who make something will use it in the end."

ABIMANYU. Yes, *kaki*. But what should I do?

SEMAR. Your problem is the oath you pledged to Dewi Utari. But that is your destiny, *ndara*.

Death is an event that no one can avoid. Death is for a warrior a form of honor, for warriors who have reached perfection. They must protect their country and people until their predestined hour of death. *Ndara* Abimanyu, don't you forget, tomorrow is the sixteenth anniversary of your life in Arcapada [world of mortals].

ABIMANYU. Oh! It's clear! My thoughts are clear now,, *kaki* it is as if I were walking at night, but surrounded by a thousand torches. After

listening to your words my heart feels as if it  
has been struck by a sharp weapon. My spirits  
have risen again, and my strength has returned.  
My will is now stronger. I will walk the path that  
has been chosen for me.

Complying with one's fate is fulfilling one's spiritual quests. Abimanyu is expected to comply with the Javanese maxim *sepi ing pamrih*, which means "to be unselfish, not to be driven by the desire for personal gain" and which "contains a key to kejawen wisdom [...] It stands for the conscious control of one's passions, because these stand in the way of achieving a quiet heart" (Mulder 2005: 59).

Abimanyu accepts the burden his fate has imposed upon him. Dutifully, he says his goodbyes to both of his wives and marches onto the battle field, where he displays great courage and wins an important battle for the Pandawa, before a cloud of arrows rains down on him, bringing him to his predestined death.

This conception of war is not exclusive to the purwa stories. In Raden Saleh, the Java War led by Diponegoro in 1825-1830 is also presented as a spiritual affair.

DIPENOGORO. Can my holy war defeat the  
enemies?

DIPONEGORO'S ADVISER. Diponegoro, this holy  
war should not be fought for victory or defeat.

The most important thing is that you have  
chosen the path of the Messenger of Justice.

As Evan Winet (2010: 9) explains, Diponegoro's popular support during the Java War stemmed from a perception of his war in spiritual rather than political terms:

Indonesians would later claim Diponegoro as a  
national hero on account of the unprecedented  
grassroots support his rebellion inspired.  
However, his popular legitimacy derived not  
from nascent ethnic nationalism, but from the  
perception that he led a jihad against the  
infidels.

A similar depiction of war is found in *Wayang Republik*, where the struggle for Independence is presented as a spiritual affair. Just as in *Raden Saleh*, here, winning or losing are not important.

HB IX. Lieutenant Suharto, this war is not about  
winning or fighting, but about the existence of  
the nation.

In this passage, the Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengku Buwana IX, is seen as representing the true spiritual character of the war, as he lectures a pragmatist Suharto, then lieutenant, on the right attitude with which to engage in battle. The previous performances have shown multiple articulations of spirituality, and have offered different answers to the ethical question of how to be

spiritual. The performances elaborate a distinction between authentic spirituality and organized religion, present spirituality as a path toward perfection that requires ascetic practices and describe war and acceptance of its outcome as a spiritual activity.

What does it mean, then, to be spiritual? What are the ethics of spiritual practice? The performances offer different, yet overlapping answers to these questions. In some controversial cases, true spirituality is explored as the opposite of organized religion. In a less direct fashion, other performances merely present the spiritual path as the personal, ascetic search for perfection, leaving any associations with real practices to the discretion of the spectators. Another answer suggests that real wars can be fought as spiritual endeavors, or that all true spiritual quests are, at least metaphorically, wars. Unlike traditional *wayang*, *kontemporer* performances do not have a spiritual function on their own. However, the interest in spirituality is still clearly relevant to thematic explorations of these performances.



### 3.7 WOMEN: Between Misogyny and Empowerment

Although many of the ethical ideas about the gendered representation of women in society are elaborated in the context of family values, this section devotes attention specifically to women. Women are notably absent from the world of *wayang*. There are very few women *dalang* (and none of the *dalang* whose work is considered for this dissertation is a woman), and female characters tend to be less numerous and speak less in both traditional and *kontemporer* performances.

However, many ideas about the gendered representation of women in society are articulated in the male-dominated world of *wayang kontemporer*. This section will consider the role of women from the point of view of the *kontemporer* performances, describing the ethical responsibilities that befit women. The range of positions the *dalang* take with respect to this issue is wide. Some present what is imagined to be the ideal role of women (often in relation to marriage) or through direct misogynous criticism. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find performances that question the normative expectation of women's behavior, or that reference public discourse on femininity.

Sungsang Bawono Balik is an example of a performance that makes a tangential comment about the role of women in marriage. This is uttered by Canggik to her daughter Limbuk in the *Limbukan* scene. This is the only performance considered for this dissertation that includes the *Limbukan*, which traditionally takes place after the *adegan jejeran* (first audience scene)



in the traditional sequence of *wayang* scenes (see Becker, 1995). In this comic interlude, Limbuk and Cangik often talk about marriage. Fittingly, this is what is said in *Sungsang Bawono Balik*:

CANGIK. A woman's duty is hard indeed, she  
should always be ready to please her husband.

And she should be like a stone if her husband  
passes. It has always been like that.

Marriage features prominently in this performance since its protagonist, Saroja Kusuma, is on a quest to improve his looks and find a wife. But the women are mostly absent from the storyline, except for the Limbukan scene just quoted. As mentioned above, all of the *dalang* in this dissertation are men, and very few of the performances include female performers or female writers. The voices of women are imagined and impersonated by men. Not surprisingly, female characters are mostly silent in the *kontemporer* performances.

An exception is Slamet Gundono's *Pertaruhan Drupadi*. In this performance, Puntadewa, Drupadi's husband, loses several things in a game of dice against Duryudana. Among other things, he places his kingdom and his wife's freedom as stakes. Although he will shortly regain his wife's freedom, this performance focuses on the rage experienced by Drupadi before this happens.

DALANG. Drupadi cried inconsolably.

DRUPADI. Why did you bet me away me  
without telling me, Puntadewa? Where have I

failed you? In the mornings, I heat up the water before you awake. I cook the food and clean the bed. I have been like a forest at night, like a forest during the day. Then why would you put me up as a stake? You are arrogant, Puntadewa. You are only interested in money.

DALANG. Drupadi cried.

DRUPADI. [English in the original] *Please*

*Puntadewa, I am angry with you, really, I am angry.* Bastard!

Afraid of the imminent threat of rape by the Kurawa, she sets out on a trip around the world, trying to find someone who can help her and protect her. And then she meets the then-president of the US, George Bush (I have quoted this exchange in Politics). Their conversation is depicted in a comical tone that highlights, rather than undermines, the gravity of Drupadi's problems:

DALANG. So George Bush took a shower. He came out of the White House, looking arrogant and vain because he had just attacked Iraq and won the war against Saddam Hussein. Apparently his favorite music was not dance, disco or jazz, but Bendrong from Banyumas.

*Bush, represented by a sieve, covered in a slendang, enters dancing Bendrong.*

BUSH. Who was looking for me earlier? Who was making noise?

DRUPADI. I am the person looking for you.

BUSH. Who are you? I am busy.

DRUPADI. Are you truly George Bush?

BUSH. Yes. The President of America.

DRUPADI. I ask for your help, the Kurawa want to rape me.

BUSH. And you are asking for my help? Alright. What do I get in return?

DRUPADI. I ask for help and you immediately talk about payment. Is this really a president? I don't have anything.

BUSH. Then it's impossible. There must be something given in return, something that will benefit my country. We accept petrol, oil, we would really like some oil, even if it's cooking oil.

DRUPADI. This can't be true, I am asking for help! You are supposed to look after the safety of the world, so you should be able to help anyone. I was sacrificed by my husband.

BUSH. Oh, that's a trivial problem. I am only interested in big events, such as the presidential

elections in Indonesia. Thinks like... the war  
between Korea and China. Your problem is  
insignificant.

Here, Drupadi is depicted as ultimately powerless. The only thing she can do is  
plead to the deaf ears of a world leader. But when she returns home she speaks  
to the *dalang*, who encourages her to take control of her own life.

DRUPADI. I will be raped by the Kurawa! Please  
change the story, *Pak Dalang Slamet*. Please  
change the story!

DALANG. I cannot change that. People the  
world over will be angry with me. This is part of  
the *wayang* rules. You should just leave the  
world of *wayang* and look for a lifestyle that  
befits you. You will finally be able to determine  
your own fate. You will not depend on the  
*dalang*, you will not depend on the people in  
power, or on your husband. Go away! Search  
for by-ways and back routes. It is time for  
women not to have to depend on anyone.

DRUPADI. Alright, *Pak Slamet*. I will go and look  
for that.

DALANG. I remember my mother and her  
disappointment. Could happiness arrive and

pain be left behind? [...] < br /> DALANG.

[Singing] Sometimes I wish to ask. What are humans in the world for? Is it only for pain? Drupadi, don't give up. When you are suffering like that, you remind me of my mother in the past. She looked after her children every day. Her twelve children were given food: tempe, tahu and sambal. And the kids were sent away to attend university and get degrees, so that they could escape suffering. My mother didn't ask for anything in return, she really did not ask for anything. She was just proud of her children's success. Sometimes misunderstandings happen. Many children forget their mothers and fathers. Drupadi, don't despair! Look at all the women in the villages, in the town and in the city suburbs. There are many strong and amazing women who did not kill themselves. They did not despair, but faced life. Go there! It is time that you don't depend on any man. And time for men not to depend on women. Life has got out of control. Strange times that began with our ancestors. [...]

[singing ]Listen to this story of pain; a painful

story from a bloody land. We have only prayers  
and hopes. Sometimes I want to ask you...and  
you... and *you*... [to the spectators] You. What is  
the point of living alone? If you have no friends,  
no brothers, no one, would you still dare to live  
in the world?

This is an unusual moment in the *kontemporer* performances for three reasons: the *dalang* tells a character to exit the *wayang* world, he talks about his own life, and he says women should take more control of their lives and not depend on men anymore. Women are presented as hardworking individuals whose efforts and suffering are not sufficiently acknowledged.

This is the only performance with such a progressive view. An almost contrasting perspective is articulated in Sujiwo Tejo's *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, which depicts women as manipulative, hypocritical and ultimately mysterious.

This performance tells the story of Bhisma, the sage and teacher of both the Kurawa and Pandawa, who, in his youth, made a pledge to remain celibate. Once, he won three women – Amba, Ambika and Ambalika – in a contest at the Kasi Kingdom, who were intended as wives for his younger brother. However, Amba fell in love with him and tried to seduce him. He rejected her and killed her accidentally. With her last breath, she placed a curse on him, saying that one day she would return to kill him. Then, in the Baratayuda war, Srikandi (the only woman to fight in the war) became temporarily possessed

by Amba's spirit and killed Bhisma. In *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, while introducing Amba, the *dalang* candidly describes women as hypocritical:

DALANG. Women are the only creatures in the world whom we love when in fact they laugh behind our backs.

A similar view is echoed in the words of the character Santanu, who is puzzled by his mistress' actions.

SANTANU. Typical woman! You give them your heart and they take all your insides. If you give them the Anti-Corruption Commission they go after the police. If you give them the police they go after the president. If you give them the president they go after the jury. Typical women! They have always been the same, from Greek times to the present. From the times when there was no ministry for the Empowerment of Women to a time where there will be a ministry for the Empowerment of Men.

It seems that this view of women is distributed through *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*. Not only does the *dalang* speak his views directly, he also has a wide range of characters echo similar opinions. We can consider one more example, Bhisma himself:

BHISMA. The mistresses of the powerful, the world over, are the same. Typical women! The poison of the world.

And even the voice of Amba seems to ratify this view of women. While trying to defend her own intelligence against the attacks of Santanu and Bhishma, she admits to the hypocritical character ascribed to her.

AMBA. If I were stupid, there would be no world leaders such as Sukarno, Mao or Washington. They were all created and supported by women laughing behind their backs.

Her description implies that women are more complex than Bhishma allows for, and that he himself knows nothing about them. However, as I will later show, this is hardly a defence of women.

AMBA. Maybe you think I am the same as other women, those who like to be overpowered by men, Bhishma. You can have your way in anything you want. But you know nothing about women.

Amba means this in self-defence. However, the *dalang's* comments would later suggest that Bhishma's lack of knowledge about women is not peculiar to him, but because women are intrinsically mysterious, and therefore any attempt to understand them is futile.



DALANG. I present this story to anyone who thinks that women can be figured out. I present this story to anyone who thinks that, actually, women can be figured out. I present this story to the husbands who at one point been chased away from the bedroom and who take it as hatred when in fact it was probably out of love. Women are more difficult than God. So far, I have not been able to understand women. Some women like speaking sweetly, with flowers. They act submissively but this might be a way of seeking revenge, a way of showing to God knows whom that they can control their husbands. I pity those husbands.

Sujiwo Tejo's unique perspective on the story of Bhishma and Amba adds to the essentially mysterious qualities with which women are portrayed. He suggests that, after dying on the battle field, Bhishma and Amba became lovers in the after-life.

DALANG. The soul of Bhishma flew away from him. In the distance it was greeted by his mother Dewi Gangga. And Dewi Amba immediately followed them. This will become our secret, a secret between you [the

spectators] and me, the two of us. Maybe the rest of the *dalang* don't know this. Not even Kresna. Call me a crazy *dalang* if you like. Call me a stupid *dalang* if you like. Let the Indonesian Association of Dalang force me into exile. I don't care, because I would rather follow the desires of my heart, of my soul. And please forgive me if this brings misery upon my family or my alma mater.

After all his rantings against women, Bhisma appears to be in love with Amba. Women are presented in this performance as double-faced, manipulative and impossible to know. And men are represented as the powerless victims of hidden female power, the victims who love them against their own best interest. *Kontemporer* performances, despite their innovative drive to find new aesthetics and interpretations, do not always uphold progressive views on social issues. The conservative and sexist view presented in this performance does however strike a chord with contemporary viewers. These ideas are perhaps not uncommon in a country where female equality is still a distant goal and where there has been a resurrection of violence against women, with a resurgence of practices such as Female Genital Mutilation in the 21st century (Vitchev 2012: 104).

As Sonja van Wichelen notes, following Marshall Clark (2004), "the Indonesian male is torn between outdated and archetypal images of the man (such as

illustrated in Javanese mythology) and new, alternative, images of the man that are more ambiguous and hybrid” (van Wichelen 2004: 91). The views expressed in *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda* conform to widely held notions in the early 21st century, a time when “confrontations to hegemonic understandings of the Indonesian family, gender relations and sexuality correlated with the collapse of the highly patriarchal Suharto regime” (Wichelen 2004: 91). However, these confrontations had mixed outcomes, sometimes strengthening gender inequality and sometimes opening up areas for debate. Sonja van Wichelen suggests that four key events triggered public discussions on gender in Post-Suharto Indonesia: the female presidency, new veiling practices, a pro-polygamy campaign, and contestations over public sexualities. These discussions matter because they marked important moments “through which cultural groups in society, or the nation as a whole, make an inventory of their own positions.”

The contrasting views expressed in the performances of Slamet Gundono and Sujiwo Tejo are part of this inventory of positions. However, direct comment on the four events identified by Wichelen is mostly absent from the *kontemporer* performances discussed in this dissertation. The exception is an appearance by Minul Darah Tinggi, a character who represents Inul Daratista, in the performance of Wayang Kampung Sebelah.

MINUL DARAH TINGGI. And we will shake it  
together and warm up the night. I am sorry if I  
speak like this, but this is my style.

Inul Daratista is Wichelen's prime example of contestations over public sexuality (Wichelen 2004: 92-99). A singer and dancer from East Java, Inul ignited a national controversy because of her sexy *dangdut* dance moves called *goyang* (shaking). In the early 2000s, she was banned from performing in different cities and became involved in a fierce public debate with Rhoma Irama, the creator of *dangdut* and an Islamic proselytizer who saw in her dance moves a perversion of the music which he invented. Inul responded directly to the criticism, in a style perfectly captured by the *wayang* puppet above, which helped fuel the debates and frame them within larger social discussions about the role of women in society.

The phenomenon of Inul and the discussion on pornography are symptomatic of a country in transition. In times of political change, 'morality talk' seems to induce a sense of stability or restored order and as such compensates anxieties of post-1998 chaotic and disorderly times. (Wichelen 2004: 92).

Ariel Heryanto identifies different moments in the controversy triggered by Inul Daratista:

1. In 2003 the issue caught fire when her performances were banned by the Indonesian Council of Ulama's.
2. In April 2003 she engaged in a controversy with the father of *dangdut*, Rhoma Irama.
3. 2004-6 were characterized by an anti-climax and disappearance of the debate from the public sphere.

4. In 2006 the debate re-emerged in the context of the controversy about the anti-porn bill.

This chronology leads Ariel Heryanto to believe that the controversy was also a matter of timing: earlier she would not have been that provocative. He hypothesizes that the controversy she triggered was not only due to the erotic character of her dance but also to her usage of an eastern Javanese idiom and etiquette, in speaking in *ngoko* to audiences (Heryanto 2008: 22). In *Wayang Kampung Sebelah*, she is presented as defiant and self-assured, which perhaps signals her importance as an alternative role model in the aftermath of the controversies just outlined.

The excerpts above correspond to a wide-ranging inventory of positions on the gendered representation of women in society. On one hand, their conventional representations are ratified either through praise or criticism. On the other hand, such conventional images are challenged, with narrative twists or by referencing topical discourses on women in Indonesia.

*Pertaruhan Drupadi* is the most progressive of the performances considered in this section, and *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda* is the most conservative. Yet, both serve to illustrate the tensions of contemporary figurations of femininity in Indonesia, as they represent the opposite ends of a continuum along which we can place the other performances, despite the fact that their positions towards women are less explicitly articulated.

The whole gamut of aesthetic innovations I analyze in Chapter 2 is present in this section on women, with no single omission or dominant tendency. Once

again, as has been the case in the previous sections, we encounter an sharp distinction between aesthetic and ethic innovations, casting them as separate artistic adventures. The most progressive performances in one realm can be conservative in the other. But ultimately, what this also shows is a wide array of positions, as well as inner diversity within those positions. The performances that address the role of women show one of the greatest degrees of divergence in the perspectives they articulate. They are equally heterogeneous in their usage of aesthetic possibilities for inventiveness. Yet, these two areas for exploration don't map onto one another through simple equations of meaning. And it is perhaps in that lack of direct correlations that these performances are truly contemporary. Java is undergoing rapid sociocultural change, but that change is not uniform nor is it directed in a single line. A universe of competing and internally disjointed perspectives is the cultural reality of Java. These works of *wayang kontemporer* help represent, create and problematize this variety.

### 3.8 YOUTH: The Obedient Rebels

Clifford Geertz' *The Religion of Java* has a section entitled "Youth Culture," where he defines the youth as "a group of restless, educated, urban young men and women possessed of a sharp dissatisfaction with traditional custom and a deeply ambivalent attitude toward the West, which they see both as the source of their humiliation and 'backwardness' and as the possessor of the kind of life they feel they want for themselves (minus, of course, the gangsters, the kissing, and the materialism)" (Geertz 1960: 307).

In the 21st century *kontemporer* performances the youth are often presented as rebels, ready to engage in conflicts with the previous generation. However, as this analysis will show, their rebellious spirits are always either 'tamed' or criticized. My first two examples deal with performances where the rebellious spirits of young people are eventually subsumed in the world of knowing "adults." This does not mean that the oppositional strength of their positions is completely lost. Through the performances they challenge accepted ideas in words and actions. However, in both cases, the young eventually "come to their senses", usually via the mediation of older people. The first of these examples is *Cebolang Minggat*, which was created by Slamet Gundono in collaboration with Elizabeth Inandiak, the writer of the novelized version of the *Serat Centhini* which inspired the performance.

When I met Elizabeth to ask her about this collaboration, she described *Cebolang Minggat* as a parable of adolescence: Cebolang has a disagreement and leaves the parental home to seek knowledge and experience, eventually

to be reintegrated into the family he had left. During his travels, Cebolang challenges established rules, and has sexual relations with women and men. He also talks to a variety of wise men who instruct him in unconventional spiritual perspectives (see Spirituality). But in the end, he feels lost, recognizes his mistakes and becomes enlightened in the true meaning of life. He then returns to his parental home (I have quoted this passage, for a different purpose in Spirituality).

ELIZABETH. Cebolang went back to Sokayasa.

The nights and the days went very fast. As the end of the Ramadan approached. His father welcomed him with soft words. Cebolang, my child, your mother and father always thought about you after you left. We remembered you with this prayer: "Don't forget him, so that he does not forget you". Cebolang was silent and he approached the Mosque's veranda. Sheik Akhadiyah repeated this wise words to his son. Cebolang, I see from your four-colored clothes that you have already learned the Spiritual teachings. Get rid of those clothes before they get stained by pride. Forget everything and concentrate on the most basic science of all. It will take you to everything else.

CEBOLANG [played by Elizabeth]. Father, what



science is that?

SHEIK [played by Elizabeth]. Love.

With his final comment, Cebolang's father is rendered as a wise figure who knew all along that Cebolang would eventually come back to his senses. The final fatherly piece of advice frames the travels of the young man as a temporary insanity, which Cebolang outgrows at the end of the performance. It is interesting to notice that Wayang Hip Hop follows a similar pattern. Let us first consider how an inter-generational conflict is presented in the opening scene, where there is a dialogue between Werkudara (Bima) and his son Gatotkaca (both played by the rappers). Werkudara felt his son had been neglecting his duties and did not want to speak to him.

GATOTKACA. Father. Up till now I have done my tasks as well as possible. However in your eyes I am always wrong. Why father? Don't tell me I'm adopted! That's not so, right? You behave like a child. *Please*, my father, the handsome

Werkudara, I, Gatotkaca, ask you to show me my mistakes. [...]Father! I see. You are angry because you feel threatened by your own son. Is that so? *Please*, father... don't behave like a child. Be a good sport. Father...

WERKUDARA. Don't talk to me. [He moves away.]

GATOTKACA. What is this? He walks away when

I only want to talk. [To the audience] Ladies and

gentleman, these are the signs of those who are

becoming old. They need more distance when

they read and less distance when they pee.

Where earlier, they would sleep facing their

wives, now they both sleep with their backs to

each other. Where before, they would use

perfume before leaving, now they would only

use medicinal ointments. And this last is the

worst of all: Earlier, they would reproach the

old. They would call them old fashioned...

villagers... old. And now, they reproach the

young. They say: "You don't follow the rules.

You don't know the traditions. You are ignoring

the *wayang* rules." Ladies and gentlemen, that's

him. And if they have no arguments they resort

to violence like this.

WERKUDARA. Tot! [short for Gatotkaca] Shut

up!

This excerpt perfectly captures the inter-generational conflict which is a topical issue in Java. *Wayang Hip Hop* is itself caught up in this conflict, as the self-reflexive joke about the *wayang* rules indicates. The conflict between Werkudara and Gatotkaca then escalates to the point of physical violence,

where father and son fight each other. The conflict will eventually be resolved by Arimbi, Gatotkaca's mother, who makes them aware of their foolishness and forces them to make amends.

ARIMBI. Now listen up! Violence will never end  
problems. It will actually create more problems!  
So now you get it. No need to fight anymore.

Although there is a moment of confrontation, the principle of harmony so important for family life eventually prevails. *Wayang Hip Hop* is constructed as a sequence of loosely related scenes, and this is not the only scene that thematically explores the behavior of the youth. Later in the performance, Gareng speaks about his views on education.

GARENG. According to Ki Hajar Dewantoro  
education depends on a triad. One is the family,  
the second is the school and the third is the  
social environment.

MBILUNG. So are all three needed?

GARENG. Yes, they need to work in synergy.

As explained in *Familial Ties* the concept of family-ism originated in Ki Hajar Dewantoro's Taman Siswa school system. Even a performance that uses hip hop music and aggressively promotes youth views recuperates the dominant ideas about the role of the family in education. In the last story to be developed by the *Wayang Hip Hop* show, Bagong is lured into drug abuse and trafficking

by his uncle Bilung. Eventually Petruk and Gareng find out and capture Bagong. Confused about what to do, they bring him to his father, Semar.

PETRUK. Bagong is your son and our brother. So  
what shall we do?

SEMAR. This is the thing, kid. Those who have  
broken the law need to be punished in a way  
that is proportional to their crimes. It doesn't  
matter whether they are our friends, children or  
brothers. They need to face justice. [...] I will  
not protect Bagong from the fact that he made  
a mistake [...] Uphold the law in as fair a way as  
possible. That is my message for you.

In a way that evokes more traditional shows, Semar offers his bit of father-knows-best advice. Semar often advises both his sons and the Pandawa heroes of the Mahabharata in traditional *lakon*. Bagong's youthful mistakes are an opportunity for learning, before he can eventually be readmitted into the world of the family. Albeit in different ways, both *Cebolang Minggat* and *Wayang Hip Hop* provide examples of youthful rebellion which is then re-inserted into the established social order.

Besides this perspective, there are two other performances that articulate a view of the youth as ignorant. In both cases, this is presented through tangential comments. The first one is Sujiwo Tejo's *Kasmaran Tak Bertanda*, where the *dalang* accuses young people of not knowing enough about

*wayang*. When introducing Amba, he jokes about the fact that she could be confused with well-known western figures.

DALANG. She will be confused with Michael Jackson, won't she? The problem is that children these days know nothing about *wayang*. They will think she is Madonna. Now, this is the giant. I have already made this as a PowerPoint presentation.

A similar comment can be found in Catur Kuncoro's *Wayang Republik*. Here, an old man admonishes a younger one for his lack of knowledge of the history of Indonesia and for his lazy attitude.

YOUNG MAN. Why do we play this song today, *mbah*? It's old!

OLD MAN. Watch your mouth! Your grandma is walking backwards! [Expression of anger] This is a battle song, which was used to inspire the fighters in the past. Not like you. You only sleep every day. You wear a red cap and white glasses. Your clothes are a mess. This is how today's youth looks like! Horrible!

YOUNG MAN. *Mbah*, you don't know what you are saying. I am part of the next generation.

OLD MAN. How come the next generation looks  
that awful?

Despite the aggressive creativity with which *kontemporer* performances engage in aesthetic explorations and embrace elements from youth culture, their attitude towards the young is still rather conservative. Dissidence and rebellion are expressed, but then they are reinserted into established systems through repentance, punishment and fierce criticism. Or the young are caricatured as ignorant and ridiculous. The ethical question of how the youth should behave is something that is left for older people to decide.

This is perhaps surprising since the *kontemporer* performances are often aimed at young sectors of the population who would not watch traditional *wayang*. The performances abound in references to youth culture, in terms of the music used, the language spoken and topical references in the dialogues and monologues. Strangely, though, the performances that speak about the youth are not necessarily the most artistically daring. For example, even though some of them combine new music and *gamelan*, none of the performances considered here use non-conventional music. This is a telling fact since music is one of the most obvious examples of youth interventions in the contemporary culture of Indonesia. This absence supports the thesis I advance in this section; namely, that the picture of the youth presented in these performances is inconclusive at best and conservative at worst.

Innovation is certainly present in all other aspects of these performances and we can also note that none of the performances above use traditional stories.

Yet, for all the innovative thrust developed in these aesthetic incorporations, the performances remain deeply ambiguous in their depiction of the youth. As this section has shown, the most ambitious of these performances, *Wayang Hip Hop* and *Cebolang Minggat* flirt with the power of youthful rebellion but stop short of exploring and articulating their full potential. In the end, the rebellious spirits are dutifully tamed and reinserted into conventional social frameworks, thanks to the mediation of older people.

## CONCLUSION

In traditional *wayang* performances, most people skip the ending. It is perhaps the least often witnessed segment of the show and I know a handful of *wayang* aficionados who have never seen a performance all the way through to the end. It is not necessarily unimportant, perhaps, that the ending of a show hardly ever harbors a surprise. There might be unusual, creative departures from expectations earlier in the show, but never during the last scene. The things which were known in advance are to be resolved as expected.

This feature seems to be kept in *kontemporer* shows as well. The only exception is perhaps Slamet Gundono's *Pertaruhan Drupadi*, where the main character provocatively detaches herself from the *wayang* world to find answers for her own life. In my entire *kontemporer* corpus, this is the only instance of a performance where the ending includes an unexpected act. In all other performances, no matter how unusual or creative the treatment of the material, there is no surprise left for the ending. This is even true for performances that do not use the stories of the *purwa* cycle, such as *Cebolang Minggat* or *Wayang Republik*. In one case the plot is derived from a well known Javanese literary work, in the other, from a historical account. In both instances, though, the story is well known in advance.

Similarly, in this conclusion to my dissertation there will be no unforeseen revelations. The ideas that I wish to convey through this dissertation have been developed through the chapters in a way not dissimilar to the manner in which ideas are interwoven in a *wayang* show. However, I will elaborate once more



two themes that run continuously through this dissertation. The first one is that *wayang* performances explore a variety of aesthetic and thematic possibilities. I believe that the most remarkable characteristic of this group of performances is their internal diversity. The best way to study and communicate this multifarious character is through a comparative approach, which highlights the texture of this diversity through different attempts to classify and analyze their variety. Throughout the dissertation I highlight a dislocation of ethical and aesthetic explorations as a productive analytical strategy. Sometimes the most contemporary performance in terms of aesthetic innovation can have a conservative message to deliver. This is certainly the case for the technologically complex work of Aneng Kiswantoro, *Sumpah Pralaya*, which ultimately insists on the importance of fate, family allegiance and war as a spiritual endeavor. The opposite situation is to be found in performances such as *Dewa Ruci*, by Enthus Susmono. This relatively conservative performance in terms of its aesthetics encourages an unconventional criticism of Islam.

An inappropriate insistence on tying form to content would overlook this telling characteristic of the works. In the Introduction I argued that the reluctance to dissociate form from content is a legacy of modernism and that it has affected theatre scholarship. In many areas, this approach is certainly insightful and useful. But there are other cases where it constitutes a prejudice, as it does for the analysis of performances in Indonesia. Sometimes, this tyranny of modernism (and its aftermath) blinds us to that which is interesting from other traditions. We tend to study aesthetic innovations that are also

politically informed and, even better, controversial. Academic attention is given to performances that are liminal, provocative, and daring. Or, when more conservative aspects are studied, they are usually analyzed within the framework of purely traditional performances. I think this blindness often leaves out many things that are interesting to the people and places where they happen.

When I write "interesting" in English, I am often thinking about the Indonesian word *menarik*. In Indonesian, this word comes from the root *tarik*, "to pull" and thus something which is *menarik* is something that exerts an almost gravitational force, something that pulls you into its realm. Therefore it grants the object of attention a more active role than the passivity assigned to it by the word "interesting". Therefore, I am thinking of things that pull people in, in their own contexts. The most relevant things to study are not necessarily compelling by the same standards, inherited from modernism, that inform many a theatre researcher's preferences. Perhaps we would be wise to follow the suggestions of Alfred Gell, who in the early 1990s argued that an anthropology of art would need to be guided by a "methodological philistinism" in the way that the anthropology of religion is grounded on a "methodological atheism" (Gell 1992: 41). However, adopting this principle does not mean succumbing to the detached arrogance of scientific objectivity. In temporarily bracketing off one's own assumptions about what theatre must be lies the possibility of true intercultural dialogue, of encountering a deeper meaning of what art is for artists from other cultural contexts. In other words, it is possible to reconcile Gell's call for a methodological philistinism with

Dwight Conquergood's appeal for *dialogical performances*, which strive for a real conversation with artists from different cultural backgrounds. Instead of starting our inquiries by searching for something "interesting" (according to preconceived notions) and analyzing those practices, could one analyze a representative set of practices and then ask "why are they interesting (*menarik*) in their contexts?" How do they exert a gravitational pull in these contexts that renders them compelling to create, to watch or to criticize?

The other theme that runs through this dissertation, which is exemplified by its website format, is the usage of digital technologies for the study of theatre. There is certainly more than one connection between the issues being studied and the approach I have chosen to undertake. For example, some of the performances also make extensive use of digital technologies. However, this does not apply to all of them. I am confident that a similar digital approach could be used for the study of a wide range of performance practices. In fact, I think that what this dissertation and the performances have in common is a desire to experiment with tradition. In one case, this is an artistic tradition. In the other, it is a research tradition in the humanities. Some aspects of my dissertation could certainly be considered conservative and closely aligned to this tradition. Some others, like the insistence on presenting them through a website, are uncommon.

In the development of this dissertation, I used software programming in two ways: to develop an ontology, and to create an interactive interface. Both usages were justified by the characteristics of the performances: disjoint

explorations of ethics and aesthetics, wide-ranging internal variety and intermediality. These characteristics required a multimedia presentation and a systematic comparative approach. Hence the ontology and the interface. I would suggest that programming has much to offer theatre studies. In further research would include statistical analysis of these texts and data mining of the social networks in which these performances participate.

I believe that my dissertation, as much as the performances I analyze, stem from from a hands-on, creative tinkering. I don't dare make predictions for the future of research or for the future of *wayang*. However, if anything, that future lies in the outcomes of that reflexive, creative tinkering.



## APPENDIX 1 Foreign Terms Used in The Dissertation

**Adirata:** The adoptive father of Karna.

**Amba:** The princess of the Kasi Kingdom and sister of Ambika and Ambalika. Bhisma won her and her sisters in a marriage contest. Bhisma had sworn celibacy and thus could not marry her. She tried seducing him and he accidentally killed her. Before dying she swore vengeance. During the Baratayuda war, she takes temporary possession of Srikandi to kill Bhisma and fulfill the ancient vow of revenge she had pledged.

**Anjani:** The mother of Hanoman. She was turned into a monkey for playing with the forbidden cup of knowledge.

**Arimbi:** Giant princess. The wife of Bima and the mother of Gatotkaca.

**Arjuna:** The third of the Pandawa. An excellent archer and reputed lady-killer.

**Batara Guru:** One of the Gods in the *wayang* world with four arms. He is the Javanese version of Shiva.

**Bhisma:** The son of Prabu Santanu and Dewi Gangga. He was the teacher of both the Pandawa and the Kurawa.

**Bima:** The second of the Pandawa brothers. A man of extraordinary strength, he possesses a nail called *pancanaka* which can cut through almost anything.

**blencong:** The oil lamp which was previously used to to cast shadows on the *wayang* screen. Nowadays, it has been replaced by electric light bulbs.

**carangan:** A "branch" story, not originally part of the purwa stories, but that still refers to the situations and characters of the purwa stories.

**dalem:** The inner quarters of a traditional Javanese house.

**dangdut:** A contemporary music genre dating from the 1970s. It was first created by Rhoma Irama.

**gara-gara:** Literally, "the big upheaval", this is the comic interlude which usually takes place. This is the comic part of a traditional performance, which usually takes place around midnight and lasts for one hour.

**dalang:** The master-puppeteer. In a traditional performance, only one dalang controls all the puppets, cues the musicians and gives voice to all the characters.

**Durna:** He was the teacher of both the Pandawa and the Kurawa but served as an adviser to the Kurawa faction.

**Gatotkaca:** The son of Arimbi and Bima. He is one of the few characters who can fly, and he has extraordinary strength. He fought the giant Nalaprana as a small child and was killed in the Baratayuda by Karna.

**gedebog:** A banana tree trunk. In a traditional *wayang* performance, two *gedebog* are horizontally laid out in front of the *wayang* screen. For dialogue

scenes the puppets' central control stick (*gapit*) is inserted into the *gedbog* for stability. The relative social status of the puppets is indicated by the trunk in which they are placed, with the characters of higher status occupying the upper trunk.

**Gotama:** The father of Guwarsa, Guwarsi and Anjani.

**Hamengkubuwana IX:** (1912-1988)The sultan of Yogyakarta during the struggle for Independence. A promoter of wayang. His favorite character was Gatotkaca.

**Indradi:** The wife of Resi Gotama and mother of Anjani, Guwarso and Guwarsi.

**Inul:** Inul Daratista, a famous singer and dancer from East Java who became the center of a controversy in the early 2000s due to her provocative dance movements.

**joglo:** A traditional Javanese house.

**kayon:** A leaf-shaped puppet that has different symbolic and narrative functions. Pictorially, it can represent spiritual paths or the world. In a performance it can represent natural or spiritual forces, or any entity for which there is no puppet available.

**Kalapracana:** A giant that threatened to destroy heaven so he could marry the nymph Supraba.

**kabupaten:** District.



**karawitan:** the art of playing gamelan instruments.

**Kawi:** a poetic register of the Javanese language that has fallen into disuse.

**keris:** a short mystical dagger. The dalang always wear a keris for a performance, often one that is believed to mesmerize the audience or channel divine inspiration toward the dalang. Traditional puppets representing male characters are depicted as carrying a keris.

**kelir:** A traditional cotton fabric used as a screen.

**Kresna:** The uncle of both the Pandawa and the Kurawa. He offered his advice to one of the sides and his army to the other. The Kurawa chose his army and the Pandawa, his advice.

**Kurawa:** The antagonists of the Mahabharata.

**lakon:** The plot of a wayang performance.

**Mahabharata:** A story that narrates the struggles between the Pandawa and the Kurawa. The story originated in India, but Javanese wayang uses an adaptation of this epic narrative.

**marcapada:** The world of the mortals.

**Mbilung:** One of the punokawan that accompanies the antagonist side, together with Togog.

**Nartosabdho:** A famous dalang from Banyumas.

**pathet:** A traditional performance is divided into three pathet, which correspond both to musical modes and to the main divisions of the narrative.

**pendopo:** An open pavilion-like structure that constitutes the outermost structure of a traditional Javanese house. It serves as the traditional stage for dance and wayang performances.

**potehi:** A glove puppet tradition of Chinese origin common in the northern coast of Java, especially Surabaya and Semarang. Performances were forbidden during the New Order period and were kept alive by a reduced number of performer families that .

**Pandawa:** The protagonists of the Mahabharata.

**punokawan:** The clown-servants of divine origin that accompany the heroes in wayang stories. They are Semar and his sons

**purwa:** A story from the classical stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

**purwakanthi:** A rhymed saying that conveys philosophical interpretations or moral maxims.

**Radha:** The adoptive mother of Karna.

**Ramayana:** A story that narrates the capture of Sita by Rahwana and her eventual release by Rama and an army led by Hanoman.

**rasa:** Feeling and/or experience.

**suluk:** A mystical poem and a form of singing that corresponds to the traditional way of delivering such poems.

**Rhoma Irama:** A musician and the creator of dangdut music. He has also starred in numerous films. He has opposed the dances of Inul Daratista. In 2013, he announced his candidacy for the Indonesian presidential election in 2014.

**Ronggowarsito:** A 19th century poet from Surakarta.

**Santanu:** The father of Bhishma.

**Satiawati:** First wife of Santanu, to whom he promised her son would inherit his crown. For this reason, Bhishma (Gotama's other son) chooses to lead a life of celibacy.

**Seroja Kesuma:** The son of Duryudhana, reputed for his horrible shape.

**sinden:** A sinden or warangana is a female singer.

**Sukarno:** The leader of the Indonesian independence struggle and first president, from 1945 to 1965.

**Supraba:** A heavenly nymph.

**Surakarta:** A city in Central Java, 90 kilometers northeast of Yogyakarta, which is also famous for traditional Javanese arts.

**teater:** "Theatre", it refers to Western-style, proscenium theatre performances.

**tembang:** A traditional type of singing.

**Togog:** A half brother of Semar and Batara Guru. He accompanies the antagonist side as a servant in wayang performances.

**tradisi:** "Tradition". In the context of this study, tradisi refers to conventional wayang performances.

**wayang golek:** A performance tradition that shares many elements with wayang kulit but that uses tridimensional wooden puppets. It is more popular in West Java.

**Yogyakarta:** Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, the capital city of the Special Administrative Region of Yogyakarta (DIY - Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta). It was founded in 1754. It is one of the cultural centers of Java.

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