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SILENCES IN SOLONESE DANCE PRODUCTION

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At Parangritis, south of Yogya, there is a nicely crafted new *pendopo* on the limestone cliffs at the eastern end of the beach. As the hills ringing this sacred beach were once marked with spirit shrines my first guess on seeing this pavilion was that it was a New Order Javanist monument. There are many conspicuous examples of that genre, including new sites such as Suharto's grave, at Mangateg east of Solo, and reconstructions of old temples like Candi Ceto, on the northern slopes of Lawu.¹ However this complex turned out to be a hotel; it invoked only the spirits which come in tourist bodies; it spoke to the market rather than the land and even its creator was foreign, a Dutchman. Along the road that winds toward Gua Langsih, a cave still spiritually charged enough to draw meditators with assorted (usually material) purposes, two other new *pendopos* appear. The first, at the peak of the highest cliffs, turns out to be a rest pavilion for the Yogya hang-gliding club; the second, by the side of the road, was described by locals as a performance site catering to tourists. Recent inscriptions on the once sacred landscapes of Java clearly require new paradigms--old codes scarcely inform us of current meanings.²

Radical though recent reshaping may be, current cultural creativity does not necessarily arise from secular world views. Interpreters easily conflate 'spirituality' with 'tradition' and position both as belonging to an imaginary past we can never engage directly.³ When traditional arts are ostensibly central we now tend to read them first as icons of 'nativism', as so thoroughly reworked by advertising that even locals are repositioned as tourists in relation to their own traditions. Focus on contemporary popular practices, on urban contexts and new electronic media, is a welcome corrective to

¹ For comments on such constructions see Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power* (Ithaca NY, 1990) pp 152-193 and James Siegel, *Solo in the New Order* (Princeton NJ, 1986) pp 281-84. Candi Ceto is one of the most powerful and significant of such reconstructions. Though many old temples, sites such as Borobudur, Prambanan and Gedung Sanga, have been substantially reconstructed, usually this has been only for the tourist market. Candi Ceto's reconstruction is impressive because its stone foundations have not only been rebuilt, but topped with wooden pavilions which make it usable for pilgrims; the site is indeed prominent among those focussing on *danhyang*, guardian spirits such as Semar, contrasting markedly with current uses of Borobudur.

² There have always been conjunctions between spirit shrines and the sources of material prosperity. In the past sources of wealth were primarily agricultural, now tourism is a new source, but perhaps the underlying grammar of human/spirit/nature conjunctions is consistent.

³ For my extended probing of related theorisations see "Deconstruction as Disempowerment: New 'Orientalisms' of Java", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* V 23 N 3 (1991). Niels Mulder, *Individual and Society in Java* (Yogya, Gadjah Mada UP 1989) stresses the extent to which *kebatinan* oriented people, those enthused about mysticism around 1970, had a decade later often lost that interest, having moved toward pragmatic interests. There is no doubt about a change in atmosphere during the decades Mulder refers to. However we might also note that Dick Hartoko registers disagreement, in his introduction to Mulder's book, by referring to a revival of traditional mysticism around the time of the Sultan HB IX's death in 1978.

emphasis on 'classical' styles, as those have been the possession of court elites even when present in village practices. But if it leads to suggestion that spirituality, in any event hardly imaginable in recently idioms, has merely fading and residual relevance, then we may be misguided.

In this context my aim is simple and limited: to highlight the presence of local spiritual concerns even within creative, experimental and clearly modern artistic practices.⁴ My suggestions will come mainly through notes on the careers of Sardono Kusuma and Suprpto Suryodarma, both Solonese dancers.⁵ Both experience movement as outward expression of impulses arising through inner feelings which are a window to the spirit; each self consciously frames practice in these terms. I will also comment on a multicultural meeting which aimed to coordinate the production of what was to be an 'Indonesian' theatrical event. In this instance we notice that in working toward production, as well as in performance, intuitive consciousness is prominent.⁶ Each illustration shows the prominence of spirituality within performance, implicates wider Indonesian and international spheres and contains threads which run to the animistic roots of local culture.

The diverse and highly evolved dance traditions of the Javanese express all of the influences which have shaped the culture generally.⁷ In villages trance dancing remains widespread. These dances, performed by troupes organised as clubs and associated with the use of a plaited bamboo horse (*kuda kepang*), are widely dispersed through the archipelago. Legends of the transition from Hinduism to Islam are ostensibly the frame for most such performances but they clearly grow from earlier practices of spirit possession; parallels with the ritual dancing of the Sakuddei of the Mentawi islands or the fire dances of Bali are self-evident.⁸ Possession may be through animal spirits, of horses, birds, tigers

⁴ When I mentioned this objective to Marcel Robert (in Solo 12/92), the Swiss dramatist who has since 1975 bridged actively between Java, Bali and Geneva based productions in France, his response was that this point was self-evident. While pleased at the confirmation he implied, my point nevertheless appears to deserve emphasis, especially when directed at audiences of academic Indonesianists.

⁵ The term 'dance' (*tari*) is problematic in Prapto's case. He was never a performer of classical styles and other Solonese performers object to the suggestion that he is a 'dancer'. Hendra Cokrodipo, the custodian of dalam Joyokusuman in Gajahan (where Prapto's students have stayed) and also a painter, commented that a series of meeting among local performers addressed what Prapto's practice should be called. Prapto has separate concern for sensitivity about terminology. He terms his practice 'healing movement' (*gerak penyembuhan*) or 'movement meditation'. Nevertheless performance is involved and non-technical observers would, on first reflex, term it 'dance'.

⁶ I will not linger on the connections which link consciousness of *rasa*, the intuitive, to spiritual disciplines. I address that in "The Logic of Rasa in Java" *Indonesia* no 38 (1984).

⁷ I have no technical expertise relating to dance or theatre, being only an enthusiastic and regular spectator. General introduction to the major dance traditions can be found in Mantle Hood, "Music and Theater in Java and Bali" in Ruth McVey ed. *Indonesia* (New Haven 1963) and in Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia* (Ithaca NY 1967).

⁸ Claire Holt, in *Art in Indonesia* (Ithaca NY 1967) pp 103-4, affirms the ancient roots of these traditions. The most informative study of this variant is Margaret Kartomi's "Performance, Music and Meaning in Reok Ponorogo" (*Indonesia* No 21, 1976). The Hartley's film, "Sacred Trances of Java and Bali" (Hartley Productions 1975) and a film on "The Sakkudei" (in a series on 'Disappearing Worlds'),

or bulls, but in any event the spiritual significance of the dance is explicit through ritual context.

When a Ponorogo troupe came to Perth in 1991, to cement exchange agreements between Western Australia and its East Javanese sister province, efforts were made to contact local shaman. Apparently when the same group had visited Brisbane they found that local spirits caused trouble and that the leader of the troupe could not control them in the absence of local expertise. In any event in this instance performance was not viewed as mechanical even when displaced radically from its roots and when presented as a government sponsored tourist event. Their subsequent performance, in the open air of Murdoch University's Bush Court, demonstrated a power with considerable tangible impact on the students who witnessed it.

Central Javanese dance is most associated by outsiders with the court (*kraton*) cultures of Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta (Yogya). These dance traditions express senses of self, especially of refinement and meditative balance, such as also still glimmer beneath the surfaces of everyday life on the streets. In these contexts the spiritual resonances of performance have been explicit. Meditative disciplines underpinned dancing, which also carried within it resonances of local martial arts (*pencak silat*). The framing of presentation through stories from the Indian epics always also brought religious overtones close to the surface within each performance.⁹

Traditional court dances, such as the renowned *bedoyo ketawang*, are even more directly magical, as they are framed by ritual invocation of the connections between Solonese rulers and the goddess of the South Sea.¹⁰ The most charged dances were originally performed only for royalty, but gradually distinguished visitors to the courts gained access and now some tourists are admitted even during ceremonial performances. Ritual functions have thus been both reformed and subverted, but even in the attenuated form these rituals now take, a sense of the sacred is still consistently affirmed within the world of *kraton* practices.¹¹

demonstrate resonances between the *jaranan/ jatilan/ reok* family and other archipelago traditions. MG Nasuruddin's "Dancing to Ecstasy on the Hobby Horse" in WJ Karim ed, *The Emotions of Culture* (Singapore 1990), documents Malay versions of the dance, but makes clear it originated in Java. Sal Murgiyanto, Deputy Rector of the Jakarta Arts Centre (Taman Ismael Marzuki), confirmed (through a guest lecture at Murdoch, 2/3/1992) that Dayak dances invoked totemic animals in a ritual context to protect rice crops and that related trance dances connect generally to spirit propitiation.

⁹ Dr Murgiyanto (2/3/92) admitted that there is a connection between the *kris* and Javanese dance movement, as the basic posture underpinning movement is to facilitate attack, but generally argues that connections to martial arts are remote, even if implicit in the refined (*halus*) notion of stressing minimal and 'slight' movements. He notes that dance traditions absorbed Islam most clearly in West Java, but that even there the structure of earlier dance practices remains relevant. In contrast he notes that in Sumatra dances are typically more closely related to the martial arts.

¹⁰ See Nancy Florida, "The Badhaya Katawang: A Translation of the Song of Kangjeng Ratu Kidul" (*Indonesia* No 53, 1992).

¹¹ My sense of the extent to which this remains so comes partly through Marlene Heins (conversation in Amsterdam 26/1/92), who in the 1980s spent several years studying dance at both Solonese courts. According to her it appeared as a radical breakthrough when Humardani, the founding director of ASKI

When Sriwedari was founded in Solo in the 1920s, under Sunan Pakubuwana X's sponsorship, it represented a reformulation of court arts for popular consumption, taking what had been court arts into public view. These performances of dance drama (*wayang wong*) invoke an age of magical Indic kingdoms. Evocative painted backdrops, influenced by the painting style of the 19th century romantic landscape painter Raden Saleh, depict forest scenes on the periphery of ancient courts as they are now imagined to have been. Splendid costumes and staging suggest the drama is as ancient as the epics and there is a strong sense that even these plays, like most newer *ketoprak* stories, tell local history. However in their current form these dramatic structures are recent, essentially a product of the past century.¹²

In both Yogya and Solo court dances have been reaching out to the wider society and the interplay between court and village traditions has always been an active two-way exchange. Rough village versions of court dances exist and refined productions, associated with court ritual, often have roots in earlier folk, as well as imported Indic, aesthetic codes. At the same time spiritual concerns, if configured differently in each context, were focal within both elite and popular conceptions of the arts. Such concerns remain present in new ways within modern practices, even intersecting self consciously with the work of contemporary Yogyanese batik artists who cater mainly to a tourist market.¹³ While many recent interpreters consistently qualify the term 'tradition' with quotation marks, indicating their sense that in current forms it constitutes a construction of modern political culture, in this context my aim is to suggest that there are also continuities which genuinely tie current reformulations to earlier sensibilities.¹⁴ The wide range of actively cultivated dance forms is far from being the possession of the courts. Now that range includes experimental modern dance.

(*Akademi Seni Kerawitan Indonesia*), was able to place two female students in the *kraton* to study this dance. This appeared especially radical as Humardani was apparently committed to a formalisation of dance, to emphasis on technique and notation, rather than its ritual and spiritual aspects. Ironically students of STSI (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*), successor to ASKI, speak of Humardani's spirit as a 'founding ancestral presence' within the new and beautiful (but cement) *pendopo* which houses its performances. Thus a modernizer's spirit may be appropriated within traditional frames.

During conversations in March 1993, Helene Berman, whose socio-linguistic research is concentrated within the Yogyakarta *kraton*, confirmed that even in the modern court of Hamengku Buwono X the court attendants (*abdi dalam*) uniformly attest to the presence of spiritual power in the environs of the *kraton*. For an informative discussion of the ambiguities of 'tradition' and spirituality in this new context see Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "A Throne for the People: Observations on the *Jumenengen* of Sultan Hamangku Buwono X" (*Indonesia* No 51, 1991).

¹² The appearance of age is deceptive; in important respects modern *wayang wong* is a creation of the 1920s. Soedarsono stresses continuities and deep roots in his survey of its history, in *Wayang Wong* (Gadjah Mada UP, Yogya 1984, pp 1-39), but Jennifer Lindsay, in *Klasik Kitsch or Contemporary* (PhD thesis, Sydney U, pp 83-101) puts the accent on twentieth century development of the art within a colonial context stimulated especially by ethnic Chinese patronage.

¹³ See Astri Wright, "Javanese Mysticism and Art: a Case of Iconography and Healing" (*Indonesia* No 52, 1991).

¹⁴ John Pemberton, in his thesis, *The Appearance of Order* (Cornell U PhD thesis 1989), insistently qualifies 'tradition' in this sense. Claims to 'authenticity' are problematic. It is beyond the scope of this essay to pursue that issue, but relevant to acknowledge the issue as one.

transitional dramas

In Siegel's treatment of theatre, within his excursion into recent Solonese culture, he began with mention of *wayang kulit*, the shadow theatre, and acknowledged its centrality within tradition. He then went on to suggest that Srimulat, a low-brow drama akin to *ludruk*, was more popular and in tune with this era of Solonese urban culture.¹⁵ It may have been prominent around 1980, when Siegel's research took place, but it is not now. During five months in Solo in late 1991 Srimulat was absent, though *wayang wong* and *ketoprak* remained present and popular. The latter performed to respectable crowds, at the southern square (*alun-alun*), nightly for about ten weeks during my residence nearby. The sound of *wayang kulit* still echoes through the night air, if not as pervasively as it did in Solo in the early 1970s, when I lived there longest. The radio is one modern instrument, like loudspeakers on mosques, which amplifies sounds we associate with the past. Now we hear *gamelan* on compact disk. However Siegel is no doubt correct in suggesting that *wayang* is not the central focus of culture it has been.¹⁶ Instead the now cemented *kampung* laneways are filled with the sound of TVs and the liveliest night spots are movie theatres presenting American fare.¹⁷

Recent Sriwedari productions of *wayang wong*, the dance drama, are depressing to viewers who know what it once was. Audiences are now sparse, despite the fact that tickets remain cheap. Until very recently the troupe still included performers, notably Rusman and Darsi, who were famous in the 1960s. Now performers are demoralized by low pay and presentations are attenuated. In the early 1970s I went to Sriwedari weekly for two years. Then weekday productions were actively supported and Saturdays were sell out nights. The seats were poor and the walls of wire mesh, but the mesh allowed non-paying spectators to listen while clinging to the outside and the seats did not bother a boisterous audience. When Rusman sang the atmosphere was electric and the power of his feet produced moments of sharp suspension matching those of court dancers.

Prior to the 1971 election *wayang wong* was sufficiently prominent so that Surono, the actor playing Petruk, was arrested after a production of '*Petruk dadi Ratu*'. Petruk, one of the *punakawan*, or clown like servant figures, becomes king in that story, and the plot suggested that all is not right when a servant forgets himself and behaves like a ruler. In the performance there were comments to the effect that the banyan (*bringin*) tree might crush rather than shelter Petruk. In context this read as statement that Suharto might find that Golkar, the government functional group, not incidentally symbolised by the *bringin*,

¹⁵ Siegel, *Solo in the New Order* (Princeton 1986 pp 87-116) and also on *ludruk* see James Peacock, *Rites of Modernization* (Chicago 1969).

¹⁶ At the same time its continuing relevance, as a framework interpenetrating with popular social practices, that is not only as a focal reference for the arts, is attested to by Ward Keeler, in *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton, 1987).

¹⁷ American films, and to a lesser extent Hong Kong cinema, are dominant now in a way they were not two decades ago. Then an active Indonesian film industry provided local fare which was often also inspired by *wayang* idiom.

could backfire on him. Nothing like this resonance attaches to *wayang wong* performances now, though the same impulse may have transferred to other dramatic forms.¹⁸

'Traditional' theatre still draws crowds in the right context. At Ki Timbul Hadi Prayitno's performance of the *lakon* 'Duryodono Gugur', on August 10th 1991 at the Sasono Hinggil in Yogya, there must have been well over three thousand spectators. Many were young and all thoroughly enjoyed what was obviously a good RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) performance.¹⁹ Timbul, one of the most popular *dalang* in Yogya, is known to be continually studying despite advanced age and standing. His *ontowacana*, the depth of difference in the voices he deployed, did seem remarkable. In the *gara gara*, the humourous interlude, his jokes and commentary centred on Petruk's journeys to Jakarta and brought especially raucous response, suggesting that in some minds Suharto may still, as in 1971, be seen as Petruk. At the same time the *gara gara* was not tied to the *lakon*, and my distinct impression, comparing half a dozen performances in 1991 to several dozen in the early 1970s, is that jokes, including political commentary, and plot stand apart in ways they never used to.

Related disjunction became most obvious in a *wayang kulit* performance by Subono, at the Taman Budaya Jateng (Central Javanese Cultural Centre) in December 1991 in Solo. The story (*lakon*) treated dispute between Sutejo, Krishna's son, and Bima's son Ontorejo (standing in for Gatotcaca) as to who would be Senopati, war chief of the Pandawas. Subono, also a *dalang* of standing, nevertheless introduced a huge range of weird, newly created, '*punakawan*' in the *gara gara* and without any effort to connect them to the plot or other characters.²⁰ Drift toward emphasis on extravagant and humorous episodes clearly counterpoints a distinct decline in emphasis on the philosophical depths of *wayang*.²¹

¹⁸ Political circumstances have changed in the interim as well, so in part this difference would be explained by the increased sense of security underpinning the regime's power. The same reading, that is use of drama as a foil for wider events, still applies at least for older members of audiences now. On the role of *ketoprak*, in the current context as one of resistance to state idiom as well as popular entertainment, see Barbara Hatley, "Theatre as Cultural Resistance in Contemporary Indonesia" in Arief Budiman ed. *State and Civil Society in Indonesia* (Monash Papers on Southeast Asia No 22, Clayton, Victoria, 1990).

¹⁹ Every Saturday night a full live *wayang kulit* is sponsored by RRI and broadcast. At the same time these performances, which rotate each week among the major cities, are well attended. Even in Malang, on the margins of the traditional Javanist region in East Java, where I have worked from August 1992 to the present (May 1993) *wayang* performances sponsored by local government and RRI are well attended. *Wayang* has lost more ground in urban contexts than in villages.

²⁰ Triyono, a Solonese *kris* maker and Javanese teacher, explained (12/1991) that this was a new practice initiated by the *dalang* Mantep, that other *dalang* had felt compelled to follow suit, though none seemed to know how they could integrate these rather wild new elements smoothly into performance. I am speaking impressionistically about this shift toward emphasis on technique and joking, but have a strong sense that earlier constraints required the *gara gara* to bridge more actively between *lakon* and social context.

²¹ Ben Anderson already noted this trend three decades ago, in his monograph *On the Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (CMIP, Ithaca, NY 1965).

Similar extravagant and disjunctive innovation are also apparent in the 'Ramayana Ballet' at Prambanan--Ceclie B DeMille would have been proud. Many more dancers are involved now, but only a few are of genuine quality.²² Performance are far more elaborate than they used to be. The staging is beautiful and the new format works well as a tourist event, but the drama has moved a long way from its origins through repackaging with tourists as prime audience. The reconfiguring of local culture as tourist object, directed toward foreign exchange earnings, is profound. By 1983 Borobudur fell under the jurisdiction of the departments of archaeology and tourism and had been declared off limits for routine Buddhist rituals. A Javanese Buddhist leader commented to me at that time, with wry humour, that this was unlikely to happen to the Demak mosque.

Tourism clearly overshadowed local ritual during the celebration of Kasada in December 1992. In that annual ritual the still (mainly) Hindu Tengger people of East Java make offerings to Mount Bromo. But initial ceremonial was dominated by new national government rituals and within those provincial tourism officers virtually complained at the fact that Tenggerese priests continue to control the timing of the event. They implied this made it harder to orchestrate the event for tourist consumption and in other respects their speeches stressed development infrastructure, roads and tourist facilities, rather than the religious nature of the event. Local tourists, mainly young people from lowland cities, were far more evident than Tenggerese in the large crowd which gathered for the offerings. Even the tent city, of stalls which catered to the crowd on the sand sea at the foot of the volcano, were imports to the region, mainly Muslim sellers from Probolinggo. The most dramatic moments of the evening centred on efforts to keep photographers, who crowded onto the temple platform, from blocking the view other tourists had of the small group of priests who theoretically were at the core of the ceremony.

Among the forces working to reframe even the ostensibly traditional theatres we would count not only the twists on performance context that come with tourism, but also the rationalizing process which relates to new art schools. Music, dance and shadow theatre have all been affected by new schools, structures of transmission which have been replacing the personalized apprenticeships which predominated until the recent past.²³ Humardani, the founding director of ASKI (now STSI, or Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia) in Solo, emphasized technique of dance even to the extent of aiming to eliminate its spiritual resonances. In this he had little support from dancers, but the styles he advanced looked to attainment of what he saw as 'perfect form', to qualities which can be graded by a jury as Olympic events are.²⁴

²² A comment less dependent on my rough judgement than on the more informed remarks of Carol Block, a musician and teacher long resident in Solo and Yogya, and her husband Widjiyono, who has been a dancer in Solo. We were all impressed that a mutual friend, Suwito, was still performing at least twenty years after he began.

²³ This institutionalization is touched in Lindsay (*op cit*) and in Laurie Sears, *Text and Performance in Javanese Shadow Theatre* (PhD thesis, U Wisconsin, 1986)

²⁴ Interview with Marlene Heins (27/1/92). In my conversations with Humardani in the early 1970s he professed an actively spiritual interest within the arts. This would have been consistent with the fact he was the younger brother of Sudjono Humardani, then ASPRI (special adviser) to the President. That connection was not incidental to the financing and founding of ASKI and the elder brother is especially noted for the

There can be no doubt that in recent changes there are powerful forces at work which undermine and refigure earlier priority on ritual and spiritual aspects of Javanese performance. In this context practices such as those of Sardono and Prapto, which I focus on here, may have to be viewed as splinters, as movements of resistance in a context of secular and capitalistic impulses. Yet the forms of artistic expression they advance are significant and do indeed illustrate that among the thrusts of 'modernizing art' in the Indonesian context there are still attempts to recoup and reform underlying spiritual concerns, clearly related to past practices.

globalizing Javanese dance

Connections between European and Asian performance traditions are also expanding in every context and these currents are felt directly, even in places like Solo which are associated with 'classical' arts. Theatre students speak of movements of 'East-West' fusion. So Peter Brook's production of the *Mahabharata*, for example, represents an instance of cross fertilization. Delightful as Brook's staging may have been, his claims to originality were offensive. They illustrate one aspect of the change which occurs with modernity, a claim to copyright such as also became an issue in the incident I will turn to shortly. The playbill loudly touted Brook's authorship to 'comprehensive' performance of the *Mahabharata* in an international context. Implicitly this suggested that the absence of private claims to authorship in Asian productions made them non events.²⁵ South and Southeast Asian performers have for centuries been presenting night long fragments, running in some Indian contexts for several weeks in a row and every bit as complex as Brook's production. Even packagings such as Brook's have been presented before.

In October 1971 I attended the UNESCO sponsored International Ramayana Festival, held at Pandaan in East Java, and was treated to an illustration of how Asia wide epic performance traditions were being repackaged then. In that context each tradition of performance was reduced to a synoptic plot summary of the epic, in the same way that Brook's (longer) synopsis repackaged the *Mahabharata*. As early as the 1930s a similar repackaging took place in Bali, where the German artist Walter Spies helped create the *kecak* performance, within which the *Ramayana* is presented in synoptic form.²⁶ Appropriation and claims to authorship constitute cultural imperialism, insofar as individual European 'initiators' in music, dance and theatre, claim private and individual credit for what they learn from and represent of usually anonymous Asian performers.

In September 1991 the 'One Extra Company' presented a finely blended synthesis, 'Dancing Demons (Sinta Disitu)' at the STSI *pendopo* in Solo. The performers, of Balinese and Australian origin and Sydney based, beautifully recontextualized the *Ramayana* to evoke movement across time zones and cultures--between ancient forest and modern

centrality of his concern with spiritual aspects of Javanist tradition. For notes on that connection see my "Interpreting Javanist Millennial Imagery" in Paul Alexander ed, *Creating Indonesian Culture* (Oceania Pub, Sydney, 1989).

²⁵ I attended one of the all night performances in Perth and did enjoy it.

²⁶ See Adrian Vickers, *Bali: a Paradise Created* (Ringwood, Victoria, 1989).

electronic ecosystems. A full audience, comprised mainly of arts students in Solo, received it happily and with interest. Counterpointing synthesis based on Asian plots, Shakespeare has been presented in Bali at least twice in the past several years. David George took an innovative Murdoch student production of 'The Tempest' to perform for bemused Balinese villagers. Similarly Marcel Robert, from Geneva, and *dalang* Sija, from Bona in Bali, collaborated to present 'Macbeth'. The initiative in fusion projects comes from both east and west. Within this process of reforming dramas Asian initiatives are active and often spiritually motivated even when becoming commercial.

In the Solonese context the career of Sardono Kusuma is particularly illustrative. Sardono is a leading dancer, impresario and choreographer of the Jakarta Arts Centre, where he has worked since the early 1970s. He has often been called to organize international exhibitions of Indonesian dance. In 1986, for example, he led his national troupe at the Vancouver Expo, staying there for several months before also performing in Montreal, New York and Paris. He has been entrusted with similar tasks repeatedly in part because it is known in Indonesia that his interests extend beyond Javanese traditional styles. This has meant that he could be counted on, by government sponsors, to work toward genuinely 'national' rather than narrowly regional performance events.

Sardono began his career as an especially powerful traditional Solonese dancer but moved beyond that frame early. He began dancing very young, as his mother ran a dance school in Solo and most of her children learned to dance within it. Many of the teachers within her school were from the *kraton* and worked at her school on the side. While Sardono was still in junior high school (SMP) in the early 1960s he began performing in the *Ramayana* dance group at Prambanan, so he was among the founding members of that tourist oriented tradition. He began by dancing as Hanuman, the white monkey ally of Rama, but become increasingly prominent, moving to more refined and powerful roles as his skill developed.

Sardono began a degree in economics, first at Gadjah Mada University in Yogya and then, in 1966 and briefly, at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. When he dropped out of those studies it caused a severe rupture with his grandmother, who believed strongly in modern education. Sardono then went, on his own initiative, to New York, where he studied at the Martha Graham dance school.²⁷ However this bold move into the modern art world of the West did not mark the end of his interest in traditional dance.

The power of Sardono's dancing caught even my untutored eye instantly. I first saw him perform in Madison Wisconsin in 1969. He went to the US then as part of a tour organized by Suryabrata, the Dutch-Indonesian student of *gamelan* who was dean of the Arts Faculty at the Universitas Nasional in Jakarta. The second time I saw him, before we

²⁷ Bits of his personal history have been gleaned through conversation with one of Sardono's nieces, in Solo (December 1991). I met him in the mid-1970s, through mutual friends in Jakarta, then in Solo, as his uncle Suwondo, is friend and teacher through Sumarah.

met or I connected the two performances, I was even more impressed. Sardono danced the part of Laksmana, Rama's brother, in the Solonese performance at the Ramayana Festival at Pandaan in 1971. In that context, of superb dancing from across South and Southeast Asia, his evocative power, especially in creating a magical circle around Sintia, stood out so strongly that I still recall the moment clearly.²⁸ In those movements controlled refinement, especially his capacity to go from flowing movement into a totality of suspension, produced moments of 'absence of movement', a depth of silence, such as especially characterizes the best of Solonese dance.

The next time I saw him, a year later, he was by contrast performing his version of French mime on a Yogyanese stage, but also brilliantly. The same powerful moments of suspension, of 'silence of movement', came through in his French styled performance. His interests continue to bridge between traditional Solonese dance, wider Indonesian practices and *avante garde* European styles. Recently he arranged a performance called '*Lima Minut di Borobudur*' (five minutes at Borobudur) at STSI in Solo. This was described as verging on human sculpture--gold painted bodies were presented, modelled on the figures present in stone sculpted relief at Borobudur. He has also been inspired, through the experience of travelling with Asmat and Dani dancers to Western venues, to create Irian styled modern dress, going so far as to organize a fashion show of 'modern' Irian styled clothing. In 1991 Sardono danced in another fusion project, the 'Maha Buta', commissioned by Americans but performed in Java.²⁹

This latter production was linked to his work with Marcel Robert, a Geneva based theatre director and a long associate. They workshopped together at Parangtritis in 1975 and have been involved in joint productions periodically since. Marcel referred to his own work as aiming to connect voice to different parts of the body. He related this conjunction to the elements (water, air, earth, wood and metal) and to the symbolism in the *Mahabharata*. He spoke of how his, often Bali based, work involved fusion of music, sound and movement. For him the activation of centres in the body could take place 'without reference'. Insofar as I grasped his point, this meant without being embedded in formal codings, as they are within the traditions related to Hindu *tantra*. Marcel's collaborative work thus aims to activate what esoteric traditions had mapped as *cakras*, but without the overlay of interpretation and culturally embedded coding associated with them in traditional contexts.

During Sardono's brief visit to Perth in February 1990 I was able to spend a day exploring how spirituality connected with his performance work. His primary interest in our time together was to taste the atmosphere of aboriginal Australian sacred sites and our

²⁸ I was not yet, at that time, resident in Solo nor trained to its aesthetics. Its pull may have been foreshadowed, as the Solonese performance struck deepest in an array which included Kathakali, Punjabi, Burmese, Thai, Khmer, Malay, Balinese, Sundanese, Yogyanese and East Javanese troupes.

²⁹ A video of which was presented by Dr Murgiyanto during his visit to Murdoch in 1992. Murgiyanto showed another related video, of Ed Herbst writhing in mud and sound in a Geneva performance. This illustrated what Marcel Robert had described, in conversation in Solo (12/92), as the direction of his work. Marcel studied *karogo*, automatic movement, with Sri Sampoeno, then leader of the Solo branch of Sumarah after 1975.

conversation thus took place on sacred rocks in the forested hills above Perth. He placed emphasis on what he has been learning, not just of performance but of nature. Through 'walking', which he described as a high art, in the forests of Kalimantan with the Dayak and through the totemic dancing of the Asmat he had learned deep respect for traditions which most Javanese view as crude and 'primitive'. As an organizer he was led to especially engage those traditions, among the many in the archipelago, but his interests as well as his experience are global.

Now he views bodily movement as connecting internal consciousness to the natural realms in a way that is consistent with ancient Indic notions that there is a correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. He did not 'discover' these connections through traditional teachings, although these notions are present within his family environment. His uncle, Suwondo, has long been a leading guide within Sumarah, a modern meditation movement in Solo, and in that context these relationships are foundational. He explicitly connects his work to development of an ecological consciousness, to his sense of the urgency of preserving primal forests, to the necessity of countering the destructive thrust of contemporary developmentalism. Animistic consciousness of nature, even more perhaps than court philosophies, have become increasingly prominent in his consciousness as he bridges between tribal Indonesian, elite Javanese and postmodern European performances.

(non)performance of healing movement

Sardono began with a strong base in Solonese classical dance and has looked both to the west and to varied cultures within Indonesia for inspiration. Suprpto Suryodarmo's movement practice, which he does not call 'dance', is connected to Europe as well. In his case the connection is through his European following. His orientation emerged from a variety of spiritually directed Solonese practices, not so much from traditional dance. His lifestyle and aims are more localized than Sardono's, as is his public profile, but there are many points of resonance between the two.

Prapto was born in February 1945 and describes his family as having traditional interests. His father took him regularly to the countryside outside Solo, to visit healers (*dukun*) and he had preliminary training in local martial arts (*pencak silat*). Though his family did have status and wealth, elite ties are distant for him, as his ties with his parents weakened in the 1960s. He lived very modestly indeed during the 1970s, when I came to know him. In the late 1960s he was already involved with local experimental theatre but his strongest ties to theatre came later, through work as secretary-treasurer to Humardani at ASKI during the 1970s. Prapto stresses that he himself was not trained in classical dance, though he did enjoy it as a spectator.

Prapto provided an eloquent exposition of his grounding orientations when introducing his work to my students from Malang in March 1993. The session opened with a performance by English and Javanese students, one which nature literally greeted with a thundercap. In the following discussion Prapto acknowledged that there were spiritual aspects of *kraton* dance he appreciated and saw as related to his practice. However he views the refined styles of the courts as having only the beauty of birds in gilded cages and aims himself rather to learn from the wildness of nature on its own terms. As a modern

shaman he takes lessons directly from the elements, prioritizing those sources rather than the way natural forces have been articulated, formalized and constrained within dances of the courts. He declared that his knowledge came from nature and through a commitment to openness and spontaneity he had learned from Sudarno, his meditation teacher, rather than through any formal performance practices.

I met Prapto in December 1971, while staying in Baluwarti, the *kraton* neighborhood where Sasana Mulyo, then ASKI's home, was also located. In early meetings I recall exploring theories of how local experience of *wayang kulit* was changing, as mental theorization overtook intuitive experience. At first we met through common pleasure at the performances sponsored by ASKI, but soon Prapto joined in the same meditation sessions, with the Buddhist Sumarah guide Sudarno Ong, with whom I also practiced what Pak Darno called simply 'relaxed meditation'. Prapto's already formed Buddhist orientation meant that he felt at home in meditation with Sudarno more easily than with the Muslim oriented Sumarah mainstream. But eventually he also practiced automatic movement (*karogo*), not only under Sudarno's guidance, but also through contact with Sri Samporno, then the leader of Sumarah in Solo. In the 1980s, especially after Sudarno's death in 1982, he began to attend sessions with Suwondo, Sardono's uncle, another prominent guide (*pamong*).

Connection to Sumarah meditation, especially through *karogo* and Sudarno,³⁰ were never exclusive activities for Prapto. He grew especially close to Pak Kemi Darmasaputra, an active Theravada Buddhist priest (not a *bhikkhu*) in Solo. In 1974 he attended a *vipassana* retreat, though in doing so he risked his job, as he did it without Humardani's approval for leave from ASKI. Around the same time he practiced *kungfu* under the guidance of Pak Tan, now called Wahyudi, an accupuncturist who teaches *tai chi*. Tan, an activist and leader within the Tridharma form of 'Buddhism' (as it is nationally registered that way), considered Prapto his disciple for some time. But insofar as Prapto adopted anyone as his *guru* it was Sudarno.

In 1975 he created and performed in what he called *wayang buda*, which he presented first during Waisak, the annual Buddhist celebration commemorating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing at Candi Mendut, near Borobudur. I saw it performed at Sasana Mulyo, the *pendopo* of ASKI, in July 1976. Pak Kemi burned incense and chanted Buddhist prayers while Prapto performed free movement dance, wearing flowing white, in front of a moving screen. Elements of traditional dance resonate within his movements, but his style was and remains spontaneous and individual.³¹ Shadows from a wildly burning torch created swirling movement, enlivened images, through the *pendopo*.

³⁰ It is important to note, from the Sumarah perspective, that neither of these faces typify the organization, within which in general *karogo* has long been dropped and within which Islamic, rather than Buddhist, terminology predominates.

³¹ Prior to Prapto's creation, in late 1973, we had both witnessed a performance of Rendra's, then Yogya based, drama group. Rendra borrowing then from Balinese styles, also used living fire and shadow within a modern syncretic drama.

In conversation during 1987 Prapto mentioned having revived and presented the *wayang buda*, in his view even more successfully, in Koeln Germany in 1985.

During the early 1980s Prapto bought a dry hilltop property near Wonogiri, thirty kilometers south of Solo, overlooking the large and beautiful lake which resulted from the damming of the Solo River there. He planted trees, including a cutting descended from the original Bodhi tree of Bodgaya, established a small shrine and built a rudimentary bamboo and tile hut. During 1983, to facilitate relations with the spirits of that place, he sponsored a *ruwatan*, an especially Javanized and exorcistic *wayang* performance.³² Later, after European pupils began coming in numbers, he was able to begin developing a property at Mojosoongo, on the northern outskirts of Solo, where he now lives and also holds his workshop/courses. In late 1982, through Marcel Robert, who he has worked with since the mid 1970s, he was invited to give demonstrations in Geneva. This invitation opened a distinct new phase of his career, as afterwards he was immediately sought after by European, especially German, students.

Christian Bohringer and Christina Stelzer were among his first students. They were already established professionals in Germany, involved with work which bridged therapy, theatre and dance. Thus with their enthusiastic interest the network Prapto stepped into produced rapid response. They had finished their degrees in the late 1970s, he in medicine she in psychology, then gravitated through alternative communities into movement therapy and theatre. After they came into contact with Prapto, during his 1982 trip to Geneva, both went to Solo in 1984. Initially they intended to stay only for a two month course; they stayed over a year.³³ For the next several years Prapto went annually to run workshops in Germany. Since 1984 he has received groups of about a dozen pupils several times each year for two and three month courses in Solo, where his practice continues to centre.

In late 1986, then again in late 1991, I was able to observe sessions. In 1986 the sessions I joined were held in the large *pendopo* at Joyokusuman, the guest house in the city where most of Prapto's pupils stay. Since then the seminars have been based at Prapto's Mojosoongo property. It is bordered by a stream and contains: a rough *pendopo*, earthmounds, a walkway, a Catholic grotto, a Buddhist shrine, a bamboo rest hut, a Balinese styled tower, an octagonal paved performance platform and a grassy square.³⁴ Prapto sees each part of this physical mosaic as activating different specific energies. The students work at different times in different places. Sessions generally begin at 8 am and end in the mid afternoon. Students work individually, in pairs, with Prapto or as a group at different times and talks and discussions punctuate the day sessions.

³² *Ruwatan* texts and performances are described in Ward Keeler, "Release from Kala's Grip: Ritual Uses of Shadow Plays in Java and Bali" (*Indonesia* No 54, 1992).

³³ Interview with Christian and Christine in Solo (5/1/87)

³⁴ Hidden only just across the stream from Prapto's property I found a substantial limestone cave. In context that seemed significant, as caves of that sort are so often used for spiritual purposes. To my surprise, as I found it by myself on my first visit, his student's of 1991 were unaware of it.

In addition to workshopping at Mojosoongo groups are taken to other sites for periods of several days. Usually the sites include: Parangtritis, Candi Suku (a 14th century *tantric* Hindu temple on Mount Lawu, east of Solo), Prapto's Wonogiri property, and more recently also Borobudur. In each context movement meditation is practiced so that individuals learn to respond to the energies of nature, as received in their bodies after being refracted through the sacred structures Javanese have inscribed on the land. Usually each student follows a different rhythm, 'listening' to the powers they feel within their body in the places they move through.

It is not easy to discursively characterize the guidance which takes place in these environments. Prapto calls his method, both of guidance and movement, 'reading'. He directs people to attune to the 'inner movement' in the body and to distinguish it from 'thought'. One student described Prapto as functioning like a mirror, one in which students see themselves more clearly. In the four day workshop I witnessed at Candi Suku the focus of his guidance was especially on awakening what he called the sense of 'bowing', of humility and deference to nature.³⁵

Generally he takes students through sequences of walking, stopping, crawling and lying, testing and aiming to extend ability to relax in different positions. In Prapto's terms "...it is simple, the simple is the best... if it is more simple, we can see what the tension is or how much tension there is in our body and then just let go.... the problem is how we can have a good condition in being... we practice with life energy, not with emotional energy."³⁶ Practice is meant to lead to a 'stripping away' and repetitive exercise of simple tasks brings emotions, including reluctance, frustration, and overeagerness to the surface of consciousness.

Quotations from students suggest the direction of effort and something of what they find they have gained through the effort. Helen Poynor described Prapto's framework in these terms:

The body is seen as the central point where the verticle and horizontal planes meet. The verticle axis represents spirituality, our relationship to God, the cosmos and the underworld. The horizontal axis represents daily life and communication....we are reminded to keep connection with this central point, with our body on the earth in the here and now....This work has no form in the sense that Tai chi, ballet or the highly stylised classical Javanese dance has form. How you do something, the quality of your presence and authenticity in a movement is more important than the form of the movement.³⁷

Christina Stelzer found that the movement is

³⁵ This synopsis is based on the description given by Christa Stempel-Thul, "Suprapto Suryodarmo: Portrait of a Javanese Movement Teacher" (Murdoch Univ, independent study paper 1992).

³⁶ interview (June 29th 1987) with Jose & Christina, in C Stelzer ed. *Talking to You* (Solo 1987).

³⁷ Helen Poynor, "The Walk of Life", *Human Potential* (Autumn 1986 p3-4).

...a medium for growth... in attitude. It means to move towards relaxed position and expression under any condition in life...this movement method does not focus on one center (in the body). Instead it is a method of self-regulation of the whole human organism, so that balance and centering are a constant shifting in relation to the inside process and outside necessities.

and through the practice that:

Stillness is the capacity to be receptive to impulses from the inside being, from the outside world; movement is the capacity to express impulses arising from inside, to respond to outside impulse. Stillness is then not boredom or collapsing, movement not automatic or exhausting. We are studying and teaching this process of balance, finding our own rhythm and feeling the pulse of motion.³⁸

His students often position Prapto as an esoteric *guru*. Amongst themselves they pass on stories, built on tidbits of information through conversations with him, of the way he acquired his sensitivity and skills, especially through guidance by Sudarno. In doing so they do generate a wall of mystification, one which accentuates distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Han Thalgoot, a longtime student from Hamburg described Prapto as feeling that, just prior to Darno's death, he had received the latter's validation. For years Prapto had always been told by Sudarno that what he did was 'not quite right', but in this final instance, not long before Sudarno's death, he was affirmed. Pupils tend to read this affirmation as representing a 'passing of the mantle', though in the context of Sudarno's guidance as I experienced it, confirmation of this sort did not have that implication.

Prapto does refer comfortably to Sudarno as having been his *guru*, using that term in a way that is not standard within Sumarah. However he does not make spiritual claims of the sort critics have levelled at him. He was intrigued when I mentioned that Sudarno had said he was an incarnation of Empu Bharada, the legendary East Javanese sage of the eleventh century. Prapto said he independently felt an affinity for the ancient sage since 1968, when he had used his name as an acronym for the theatre group he was involved with then. If attitudes toward Prapto within Solonese spiritual and artistic circles are mixed, they are usually in response to Prapto's following and the income he gets through it, due to the normal conjunction of jealousies and suspicions which surround many spiritual practices. While this aspect of the development of his practice is intrinsically interesting, it is a marginal issue in this context.

Connections periodically redevelop between Prapto's group and Sumarah practice. His followers often also attend guided meditation sessions with Suwondo and Laura Romano and Prapto himself joins them periodically. Prapto certainly makes clear that he views many others as spiritually senior and does not put on airs, call himself a spiritual teacher or depreciate others who do. Though his work is spiritually charged, it is perhaps

³⁸ Christina Stelzer ed. *Talking to You* (Solo 1987) p5.

best viewed as therapy and he is not the centre of a 'spiritual cult' as that term is normally understood. From my perspective Prapto's movement practice is analogous to teaching work. Each is a context for what Sumarah calls 'daily meditation'. One expression is primarily physical and the other mental in focus, but meditative consciousness may pervade either, in Sumarah terms, when consciousness is open to other forces present in the same moment.

In the stories Prapto shares with his pupils, on the margins of the movement practice, he passes on wider interests and insights. When I arrived at Candi Sukuh, to observe the workshop in September 1991, the group had already settled in and Prapto was in the midst of a lengthy evening discourse. Having just told the group the Dewaruci story, a famous and especially mystical Javanese tale from the *wayang*, he explained its significance along the lines Sudarno had to both of us³⁹. Then he continued working on mythic themes, relating the story of Siva and Uma, of how she became Durga while his sperm fell into the ocean to produce Kala.⁴⁰ He went on to characterise Javanism, from its megalithic base through *tantra*, as a spirituality of the body, one linking landscapes to sacred sites and *cakras*.

It is interesting to note that while he consistently introduces students to Candi Sukuh, he does not offer them a formal discursive decoding of it. Students were surprised when I outlined the correspondence of Candi Sukuh's design to the *cakra* system. In this he appears to have the same preference Marcel Robert expressed, in relation to conscious body work without 'reference'. Prapto does explicitly clarify that as he sees it the power practices of earlier Java related especially to the body and automatic movement. He also holds that the feeling centres, associated with the heart, are usually more important in Java than the upper centers associated with the head.⁴¹

Toward the end of my 1991 visit a further dimension of artistic and spiritual conjunction surfaced. The Katsura-Kan group of Butoh performers from Kyoto visited and workshopped with Prapto's group. This was described on the formal invitations as a collaborative session with the '*padhepokan lemah putih seminar*', the formal name of Prapto's centre, and led up to a Butoh performance, at the Taman Budaya Jateng Solo, called 'Amaracordo' (*Kenangan Saya*) on November 18th. The Butoh group presents itself as the 'water associates', within a thirty year old style of performance. At the end of the Butoh performance a joint session was presented with Prapto's group, a collaboration which was by no means as smooth as it might have been, but which produced powerful effects nevertheless.

³⁹ I have referred to Sudarno's interpretations in "Mystical Symbolism in the Javanese Wayang Mythology" *The South East Asian Review* (V1 N2 1977).

⁴⁰ See Keeler, *Op Cit*.

⁴¹ His interpretation on this point would be disputed vigorously by the Solonese Hindu teacher, Hardjanta, who associates Semar, in his divine form as Ismaya, with the *kuncung*, the center he believes is emphasised in Javanese yoga and located in between the *ajna cakra* (third eye) and the crown center.

In the question and answer session after the performance Katsuro Kan, the leader of the Butoh group, spoke of how his practice traced to a gymnastics theorist and teacher in Japan who spoke of the human body as fundamentally composed of 'water with skin that is mobilized to movement by the will'. Katsuro Kan's own body was a marvellous anatomy lesson, a wonderful demonstration of the philosophy he alluded to--especially when, for instance, he performed as a foetus. He spoke of links between his practice and Tai Chi and self-consciously looked for connections to deeply rooted spiritual traditions he sees as especially vibrant in Korea, Japan and Java. Notwithstanding the overlays, and he used these terms, of a modernity which he described as thin, in those contexts he considers that local traditions provide 'a rainbow of hope' for the future.

Commenting on the history of Butoh, he explained that they had been looking since World War II to reconnect to roots which were neither classical, linked to China, nor European, but nevertheless modern. In an early visit to Java in 1983 he registered very strong links with Prapto's practice and that is why his group came for a working session with Prapto in 1991. He saw links between Japan and Java as embodied in their respective work and as related to deep common origins via the Pacific. When asked about symbolic meanings within performance, by a Solonese art student who expected formal interpretive codes such as apply in classical Indian dance, he responded as a perfect postmodernist, saying that 'meaning is constructed by the viewer' and not hidden in the patterns of performance by self consciously formed codes. In elaborating he suggested that his purpose was to find a deeper creative meaning than even the actor knows, a 'beauty pointing beyond the known'.

(mis)readings of silence

Living encounters, such as ethnography may bring to light, can highlight the unseen, tacit levels of communication. So far I have alluded in generalized terms to performance movements and careers. At this stage I want to turn to probing of concrete incidents. These illustrate that commitment to spiritual attunement, one which resonates in the efforts of Sardono and Prapto, operates also as a more general underpinning to the performance culture they operate within. The incident especially highlights how the logic of interaction, even in the process of collaborating to generate a 'modern' performance, follows channels embedded within local spiritualized culture. Not incidentally, the case also provides a commentary on contrasts between European and Javanese modes of operation.

The incident I refer to illustrates the workings of principles rooted in animism and their persistent relevance in contemporary praxis. It demonstrated the significance of (mis)readings of silence, showing how Indonesians and Westerners are habituated to construe silences differently. Distinct cultures do far more than shape mental images, they also predispose people to attend to different levels or dimensions of social transaction. Within this incident there was also revelation of difference amongst regional Indonesian cultures, but those surfaced as modulations within a common perception of social process, one which generally directs attention to the feeling domain (*rasa*) of transaction.

The incident occurred in December 1988. This summary is based on journal notes, taken the following day, supplemented by conversations with participants during subsequent visits to Solo, especially during 1991. The meeting which provoked these reflections was an evening session attended by roughly thirty artists, patrons, and organisers. They met with the intention of workshopping a multicultural event with the theme of 'awakening' (*kebangkitan*). I was drawn into the event inadvertently, through visiting the Berkeley musicologist Jody Diamond, then resident in Solo. Her neighbor Sulistiyo,⁴² a noted classical dancer based in Jakarta, spontaneously invited us to attend what he called 'a rehearsal' at the home of Suprpto. As Prapto happened to be an old friend of mine I joined without hesitation, though uninvited, and not realising the relative formality, or as it transpired explosiveness, of the event.

The Indonesians present were for the most part at once deeply immersed in traditional arts and cosmopolitan in experience and orientation. Most were Javanese from Solo, but there were Acehnese, Balinese, Javanese and Jakartans present of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religious orientations. If combined presence implied diversity, focus was on generating 'modern Indonesian culture'. For those there this implied neither preserving discrete traditions nor putting together a pastiche of fragments. Apart from those mentioned already, notable participants included the Lukmans, an Acehnese business couple from Jakarta, the patrons of the proposed production; Setia Rahardjo, then coordinator of Indonesian Subud (an international spiritual association); Ariefin, a German trained Sumatran architect, with a business in Jakarta and a home in Solo; Manuel Lutgenhorst, a German with connections in New York; and a distinguished assembly of musicians, dancers, and artists. Solonese artists, including luminaries of STSI, the academy of the arts, predominated but there were notable Jakartan and Balinese representatives.

After guests had collected and chatted over tea we walked across the road to open with a Buddhist prayer and an essentially 'non-denominational' meditation on a performance platform Prapto had constructed. Apart from the host few were Buddhists, but all joined in naturally, as most Indonesians will on formal occasions. In this case Prapto's spiritual interests meant that meditation was significant rather than perfunctory, as would often be the case. After the ceremony everyone walked through light drizzle along the torch lit path to the house, where we settled on mats for informal ritualized sharing of food, in other words a Javanese *slametan*. Afterwards the meeting began with what were supposed to be brief preliminaries prior to work-shopping toward the production. Serious problems arose as soon as formalities were initiated.

I learned later, through Jody and Sulistiyo, that Manuel had initiated the project and had apparently previously produced parallel events in Korea, Thailand and India, each celebrating 'emergent cultures' as this was supposed to. He had laid groundwork during several years in which, among other things, he explored Indonesian arts, met artists and studied their works. After conceiving a theme and general design he, I guessed through Ariefin, obtained the sponsorship of the Lukmans and mobilized interested artists. This

⁴² According to Marlene Heins (27/1/92) Sulistiyo is from the *kraton* and was raised in it and trained by the same teachers who taught at the dance school run by Sardono's mother.

was their second general meeting, the first having taken place at Bona in Bali several months previously, at the home of I Made Sija, the renown Balinese mask (*topeng*) dancer and *dalang* who was a vital presence in this instance as well.

The original three day workshop in Bona, with Sija as host, was a Friday through Sunday session in early October.⁴³ According to Mark Parlett, a witness, there was a great deal of talking. The group tried improvisation, but did not cohere successfully. He reported that Sija could not relate easily to Prapto's style of performance. To Sija it involved concentrating so heavily on the 'inside', on internal space, that it did not work for audiences. In his view Prapto sacrificed consciousness of the collective to private preoccupation. When they worked together Sija felt he could 'only walk' and never 'truly dance'. Conversely Mark commented that Prapto seemed to be disturbed by the way Sija walked. Despite differing, Sija apparently acknowledged the charged space he felt around Prapto's work; some others failed to tune in, just chatting while Prapto moved. Differences in approach to performance were clearly problematic even amongst the Indonesian artists involved.

Manuel Lutgenhorst, originally from Munich, had been based in New York for some time. Though he had produced sketches, a script and plans for the event there were tensions between Lukman, the producer, and Manuel, even at the first workshop. Lukman had stayed in Sanur and once Mark had gone with Manuel to meet him there but was not received. As Mark explained, near the end of the workshop there was a meeting at which everyone had a chance to speak before Sija summarized its conclusions. Sija opened by stating 'this is what I feel' (*saya rasa begitu*) and then there was a long silence after he had finished his wrap up. Most nodded their heads at the end and Mark felt there was a general sense of 'let us start there', that most participants felt 'okay', even if problems may have been apparent to all. At the time Mark noticed that Manuel remained noncommittal and silent, not saying anything either way.

Wayan Sadra, a Balinese musician/composer who teaches at STSI in Solo, was present in both sessions. His sense of the first event was that there was no leader who could hold it together. According to him even in new styles of performance there is the need to connect, to know each other before trying to perform together. To illustrate he commented that in Boston he had once joined an odd collection of performers he had never met and found it unsatisfying. But on his report Sija is an extremely innovative performer who has not hesitated to experiment. When Wayan and Sija were in Korea, they gave a demonstration without a *gamelan*--Wayan had a soap crate for a drum. He credited Sija with producing *Macbeth* in Bali, I deduce through collaboration with Marcel Robert.

⁴³ Mark Parlett became involved in Indonesian arts through the 1986 Expo in Vancouver. Sardono and Sija were both leaders within the contingent representing Indonesia. After contact with them he arranged to tour with his performance group, then to study in Bali. We met in Solo in August 1991 and I have been able to fill in details of the Bona meeting through him. Wayan Sadra, originally a pupil of Sija's and a lecturer at STSI in Solo, was at the Solo meeting I describe below and also joined in discussion with Mark Parlett and I.

Wayan said that Sija puts his trust in the process of creativity which is awakened when people simply 'connect in their feeling' and, even at the performance level, this connection had been missing in the Bona workshop.

In the Solo followup meeting I attended, severe disagreement became apparent in the context of reviewing what had presumably been agreed at Bona. Dispute erupted after Prapto's welcome, when he summarized the formalization of roles agreed at the earlier meeting. There was minor dispute even when it was noted that Lukman was to be head, Ariefin secretary, another (not present) treasurer, and Prapto, Sija, and Sulistiyo respectively coordinators of the Solonese, Balinese, and Jakartan contributing groups. Lukman spoke, agreeing that he was the 'patron' and that formal organization was crucial to the project, but to clarify that while he was designated 'head' (*ketua*) he was not the artistic 'producer'. Prapto was also corrected by the group when, in typical Javanese deference to the seniority of other Solonese present, he sidestep his own designation as organizer of this session by terming himself 'spokesperson' (*penyambung lidah*).

Then Sija immediately questioned Manuel's role, saying he understood that Manuel was there as an 'adviser' (*penasehat*). Manuel responded that he had never agreed to that. He said he wanted only to continue as an 'observer', and to aid artistic production, but could not function as part of the organization. The explicit exposure of this difference of perspective meant that the meeting proceeded in an intensely charged and awkward debate for hours, until one in the morning. There were many significant, revealing and even crosscutting undercurrents, but most are incidental here and there is no reason to attempt exhaustive recapitulation of the incident.

Notwithstanding the risks of oversimplification, I will concentrate on clarifying the perspectives of central protagonists, especially of Sija and Manuel. Prapto and Ariefin played less critical but active roles, while most others were attentively engaged, in fact amazed, observers. Manuel pressed me into an interpreting role, one which was made awkward by the emotive intensity of the exchange, by my ignorance of the background and context of discussion, and especially by the offense this implied to Ariefin, whose English and German is fluent. For me dependence on English with a German and Indonesian with a Balinese, neither entirely at home in those languages, compounded difficulty marginally, but their respective perspectives became quite clear.

Sija, though chewing betel and self-composed, was overtly expressing angered distress at Manuel's unwillingness to concur with his understanding of the previously agreed basis for proceeding. Sija dogedly expressed certainty that they had reached a compact (*kesepakatan*) which involved Manuel's concurrence (*kesanggupan*) while at Bona, in Sija's house and with Sija himself articulating the consensus. Consequently he said, explicitly and repeatedly, that it was as though Manuel was 'hitting him' and 'insulting his house' by seeming, from Sija's perspective at this point, to change his position. Sija obviously felt strongly that his own honour was on the line and the success of the whole project at stake. The depth of his feeling was reflected not only in the intensity of his expression, which floored most of the Javanese present, but also in the fact that failure to

resolve the issue left Sija's close associate, who was quietly at Sija's side throughout the evening, seriously ill for the next several days.

For his part Manuel appeared subdued and restrained. But he stood his ground with insistence that he had never agreed to what the Indonesians present saw as his role. Manuel emphasized that at Bona only a few had spoken against either his authorship of the play or his projected role as artistic director. In his view most people had said nothing, no vote had been taken, and he had never verbalized assent. He also indicated that, as there were different people at the two meetings, he saw little reason to take the outcome of the first session as binding on the second. It appeared, though he did not say this explicitly, that he felt a copyright claim to the concept of the production, that he saw himself as 'author' of the script, and that he had imagined he would be 'artistic director' of the production. Once the Bona meeting had upturned those claims, he adopted the view, one he did express, that the group was breaking away to do 'something different'. He said, putting this forward as the position he had maintained at Bona, that he could thus not be part of it in formal terms. There was no overt malintent in his expression; there was stubborn resistance to compliance with the understanding which guided his Indonesian associates.

Obviously many factors played in to explain the intensity of the situation and it cannot be explained only by alternative readings of the significant silences. Sulistiyo indicated later that he had supported Prpto, in questioning Manuel's script at Bona, because they both felt the scenario ought to be presented more as a collective and 'Indonesian' enterprise. They knew little of Manuel's credentials; conversely the latter appeared unaware he was dealing with internationally established artists. Though grateful for Manuel's stimulus, they felt he should not have 'author/director' status. In their eyes he had basically assembled their ideas and put his name to them.

At the same time the local artists were generally inclined toward creative dance and music arrived at through freeform workshoping. Manuel's script emphasised drama within the constraints of a narrative he wanted to control. Focus on this difference converged with, and became a convenient way of sidestepping, Indonesian inability to even allude directly (in this another 'silence') to sensitive political issues which were apparently touched objectionably in Manuel's script. The Indonesians tried to take emphasis off the script without mentioning their objections to its contents. Rahardjo commented in an aside to me that the Indonesians understood this issue without need for verbalization. But at no point was this made explicit to Manuel, who probably remained unaware of his context, especially in this political respect.

The impasse centered on intractable commitments to opposite readings of the silences at Bona. Those miscommunications stood out sharply as producing 'felt difference'. There was no doubt that Sija deeply felt he had articulated a consensus which those present experienced and were bound to. Nothing explains his emotion or persistence except that the dispute struck deeply at his perception of a palpable reality. For Manuel the Bona meeting was a non-event. What seemed to him key issues had not been canvassed or resolved, something he identified as a silence in the group. From his perspective his own

silence, at the point of compact, meant withholding rather than affirmation of assent. The silence Sija read as 'felt assent', one indeed registered by his Indonesian associates, was for Manuel a 'failure to address the issue'.

Sija's basis for reading events was a direct expression of the sense of reality and guide for action characteristic within the substratum of archipelago animism. It relates directly to local idioms of consensual decision making, *musyawarah mufakat*. This idiom is not only enshrined in national political philosophy, not only an idiom subject to abuse, but also a generally held notion of social process. To speak of local efforts to maintain peace with the 'spirit realms' is not to say people are relating to a distant, other, unknowable or imagined domain. The spirit realm is seen as co-present in moments of social intercourse, as a dimension of transactions between people within their social and natural environment. Other Indonesians recognised and acted in terms of this logic, both in their readings of Bona and as suggested by their approach to the *slametan* as an opener to the meeting at Prapto's house.

Sija's position was particularly blunt, reflecting both his status--he is termed 'master' (*empuh*)-- and his 'Balineseness'. Recognising a felt compact which had been witnessed ceremonially, he saw it as self evident and was sincerely shocked by Manuel's suggestion that it did not exist. Though Sija's position was extreme, he also being more directly implicated as host for the first meeting, other Indonesians present were at least conscious of if not tuned to the same level of discourse he took as primary. The 'bands' of Manuel's 'radio', of his personal reception system, apparently did not register those waves; he 'saw' only a different plane of the exchange and the result was like two ships passing at night with no-one on watch.

reflections

This incident highlights gaps between the distinct planes of communication which *are* the human and spirit planes referred to within animistic cosmologies. Alternative readings of transaction are certainly possible and endorsement of the possibility that a plurality of perspectives intersect in such social moments confirms my point. In my terms Sija's reference was to the 'spiritual' and Manuel's to the 'material' dimensions of transaction. Sija's approach was framed by assumption that all were engaged in a collective process. Implicitly he assumed that social cohesion and harmony are dependent on a spiritual attunement which is not just rhetorically invoked, but also effected, brought into experiential reality, through the mechanisms of *slametan*. Manuel's inability or unwillingness to enter the ritual space his Indonesian counterparts invoked meant ritual failure. To Sija this constituted spiritual violence and the ripples of this event were still deeply felt by some participants one year after.

This exchange serves my purposes in several ways. First I believe it illustrates the 'spaces' referred to by animistic cosmologies. Rituals oriented toward 'placation of spirits' are also mechanisms of cooperative social interaction; they are not just pale reflections of dubious, dated and 'constructed' cosmologies. The substratum of local transactive process

may be framed by, but does not necessarily depend on the overlay of labeling which intervenes to characterize it. Contextualizing beliefs in social discourses re-positions 'animism' as reference to systems of practice rather than ideology. The self-conscious commitment Marcel Robert professes in embodiment 'without reference', a commitment Prapto tacitly maintains as well, is implicitly convergent with my argument that 'spirits' are present even without 'reference' to them.

The constellation of elements present in the incident combined with its intensity to make it especially illustrative. Diverse and cosmopolitan Indonesians, focussing on a contemporary cultural project, nevertheless clearly approached their enterprise with a sensibility rooted in what are indeed common local patterns of interaction. They expressed values and demonstrated senses of what constitutes reality which are linked to a substratum which unites them. Ironically the failure of the production produced, in this respect, demonstration of the validity of an intent all shared, including Manuel, to affirm presence within the Indonesian arts of particular 'national' qualities.

In opening the careers and incidents I have alluded to, my aims have been limited. I have referred to orientations and practices amongst a small but prominent elite of artists and performers. While those mentioned have a high profile, being notable in themselves within their context, this does not imply that the aspects of performance I allude to are either predominant or representative. I have not attempted to present a globalized description, not even of performance cultures within Solo. I aim only to draw attention to and affirm the relevance of one, often now underestimated, aspect of local practices. Even performers who are especially cosmopolitan, on the cutting edge of experimentation, see spiritual concerns as prominent cornerstones of their work. At the same time a wider spiritual gestalt shapes the ground upon which they tacitly move while gearing toward production. 'Modernity' within the arts should not reflexively be imagined as a departure from the spirituality which informed earlier performance traditions.