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## **Transforming wayang for contemporary audiences: dramatic expression in Purbo Asmoro's style, 1989-2015.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Java and wayang are two topics of discussion that surely have become quite tiresome by now. According to the annotated bibliography put together by Clara van Groenendael [in 1987], the number of works on wayang has reached more than 1,000. Can we not conclude that all issues concerning Java and wayang have been explored to a finish?

I must state here that I am forced to answer this question in the negative. As long as these two entities are still with us, Java and wayang will always be in a state of change and flux and therefore will never have been explored to a close.

Could we then at least say that, although they have not come to a close, the topics of wayang and Java are no longer of any importance except to wayang and Java themselves? Even in this case, I am forced to answer this statement in the negative.

From an economic, political, social, and cultural perspective, Java remains a strong presence in the constellation that makes up life in Indonesia. Because of that, it holds importance as a constellation for the region as well as globally. And the reality remains that the Javanese art form of wayang continues to live for, be kept alive by, and enliven the Javanese identity to this day.<sup>1</sup>

(Kayam 2001, 1)

Umar Kayam's *Kelir Tanpa Batas (A Screen without Limits)* examines the now infamous 1990s decade of wayang performance practice, dominated by superstar dhalang who were developing primarily only one aspect of wayang—wayang as entertainment. Wayang has historically held multiple functions simultaneously in Javanese life: as a ritual to forge harmony between humankind and greater forces

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<sup>1</sup> All passages quoted from works originally in Indonesian or Javanese, and all quotes from informants in Java in a variety of situations, have been translated into English by Kathryn Emerson.

(other-worldly or natural); as a ceremony through which to mark rites of passage; as a medium through which to explore mysticism and spirituality, or even communicate with the spiritual world; as a complex aesthetic experience embedded with deep meaning (“high-brow”); as “low-brow” comedy filled with slapstick and bodily function jokes; as a medium to deliver messages, values, philosophy, history, teachings; and as entertainment, either in conjunction with or disconnected from any other functions.

In his critical look at two years in Central Javanese performance practice, 1993–1995, sociologist, novelist, and essayist Kayam describes the near “anarchy” that wayang reached during the 1990s, with the exclusive focus on wayang as entertainment. Many of the traditional practices regarding structure, storyline, and content were abandoned to offer the crowds instant gratification through popular attractions. The accepted “limits” of the world framed by the wayang screen were being pushed to the extreme in the name of entertainment. Moreover, an influential, high profile, and deliriously popular segment of the dhalang profession was responsible for exploring this direction, with the results increasingly broadcast on television.

In *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre* (2005) Jan Mrázek also discusses at length the dominance, expansion, and breaking of limits in the comic interludes of Solonese wayang in the 1990s. He offers extensive examples of how these entertainment scenes not only lengthened in duration, but also broadened in scope to encompass rock bands, *campursari* groups, comedians, on-stage interviews with local figures, singers and dancers standing on stage, and much more; and how, in some cases, the aesthetic of comedic attractions came to dominate the entire seven-hour performance.

In casual conversation, this era is commonly referred to by both dhalang and wayang critics as the era of *wayang hura-hura* (cheap, meaningless entertainment), *wayang néka-néka* (smorgasbord of unrelated and questionable attractions), or *wayang pantap* (“pantap” being made into an adjective, from the name of a committee, PANTAP, that sponsored many such wayang, see pages 127–134). Yet as evidenced in interviews with a myriad of dhalang across numerous affiliations and stylistic tendencies, the era is now referred to in the past tense. Whether speaking to the

middle-generation classicist Tomo Pandoyo, the elder classicist Sutino Hardokocarito, the radical classical innovator Purbo Asmoro,<sup>2</sup> the even more radical non-classical innovator Enthus Susmono, the young talents Sigid Ariyanto and Cahyo Kuntadi, the kings of “wayang as entertainment” Warseno “Slenk” and Djoko “Edan” Hadiwidjoyo, or the twin giants reigning over the entire wayang world Manteb Soedharsono and Anom Soeroto, the dominance of *hura-hura* performances in wayang is considered primarily over. What has taken its place? In his final words of conclusion Kayam ponders precisely this question: what direction will wayang take in the years after the publication of his book (2001, 282):

Is this the moment for dhalang and the art of wayang to return to classicism and tradition—like that moment of transformation in so many lakon [when the mysterious, satanic imposter sheds his disguise and reveals himself to be the original, familiar main character he always was]? Or is what is normal and familiar from this point on going to be defined by the current situation, which has gone so far beyond the limits for so long that the imposter is now more familiar, and the original character would be the foreign entity?

In fact, by the time *Kelir Tanpa Batas* was published, a number of factors led to a turning back of the direction wayang had been taking in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Some dhalang returned to more classical practice, some simply softened the frenzy and extremity of their *hura-hura*-ness, and some, Purbo Asmoro in particular, began developing in other directions entirely.

### Yet Another Work on Wayang?

Purbo Asmoro, a popular, albeit half-hearted, practitioner of *wayang hura-hura* in the 1990s, also devoted a significant portion of his artistic energy during that decade to developing an alternative. Throughout the 1990s he experimented with a new way to present wayang to mass audiences, and by 2000, his new style, referred to in intellectual circles as *pakeliran garap sedalu* (all-night contemporary-interpretive style or all-night *garapan*)<sup>4</sup> was not only the trademark of his performances, but also

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between innovation in the classical vein versus an innovator outside of the classical vein, was first discussed, as it relates to *pedhalangan*, in the writings of Sugeng Nugroho (instructor of *pedhalangan* at ISI) and is addressed more fully in Chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup> The *hura-hura* era is examined in Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this work both phrases are used interchangeably: all-night contemporary-interpretive style and all-night *garapan* style.

beginning to spread among young, aspiring dhalang from the ISI-graduate pool. Founded upon the *padat*<sup>5</sup> movement initiated at ASKI in the 1970s, all-night contemporary-interpretive style was born in deliberate contrast to the direction the era of *hura-hura* was taking wayang. By 2010 all-night *garapan*, or rather some approximation of or reference to it, had become the style of choice among most popular dhalang.<sup>6</sup>

Not only will the topic of wayang performance-practice never “be explored to a finish” but also, as Kayam remarks, the art of Javanese wayang is in a continual state of change and flux that guarantees its remaining a topic always open for examination. Barely had his book been published when the all-night contemporary-interpretive style was born, in answer to the question Kayam posed. Did the satanic imposter (*wayang hura-hura*) win out in the end, or did wayang return to the “original, familiar character” (classical style)? Neither, it turns out. Instead, the original, familiar character was transformed in a way that, in most cases, rivaled and won out over the satanic imposter, retaining some of his classical characteristics, taking on some of the imposter’s elements, but ultimately transformed.

Although Purbo Asmoro’s all-night *garapan* was not the only reaction to the *wayang hura-hura* days (see Chapter 9 for other reactions) it turned out to be the most influential and most significant innovation in wayang for 25 years and counting, getting its start somewhat parallel to and then progressing well beyond the “wayang as entertainment” era. Hence, sure enough and as Kayam could have predicted, here before us lies yet another piece of writing on Javanese wayang: a work focused on all-night *garapan* style.

This work outlines the history of contemporary-interpretive style, its essential elements and identifying characteristics, Purbo Asmoro’s creative processes in developing and working within this style, and the effect contemporary-interpretive style has had on other dhalang in the greater Solo area since its inception. It also explores Purbo Asmoro’s musings, decisions, motives, strategies, and some of the deeper recesses of his thinking as an artist. Most importantly, this work analyzes

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<sup>5</sup> *Padat* refers to a movement at ASKI in the 1970s to condense a wayang performance down to its essential elements. Chapter 3 explores the creation of this style in depth.

<sup>6</sup> This statement is based on the author’s 14 years of observations at performances throughout Central Java, East Java, and Jakarta, 2001–2015. See p. 23 for more detail on the nature of these observations.

how all-night contemporary-interpretive style, in Purbo Asmoro's hands, has evolved into an entirely new system of performance practice rather than simply being stylistically innovative in a few characteristic ways.

Much of the material used to illustrate how Purbo Asmoro's all-night contemporary-interpretive style differs from what came before it comes from a project designed and conducted by Purbo Asmoro, involving six live performances over a one year period, 2007–2008. He performed two different lakon three times each: in all-night classical style, all-night contemporary-interpretive style, and condensed style. I then transcribed all the performances, translated them into English, constructed subtitles for the DVDs, and, in consultation with Purbo Asmoro, wrote extensive footnotes, appendices, and introductory material. The resulting body of work, published by the Lontar Foundation in 2013, is used here as a set of case studies to define and analyze the all-night contemporary-interpretive style, its origins in the *padat* style of the 1970s, and its predecessor in the various elements of classical style wayang.

This next section contextualizes my perspective and background as a researcher, providing an outline of how I came to the study of wayang and specifically the work of Purbo Asmoro. This is followed by a look at where this dissertation fits into the existing literature about wayang performance practice, and more about the methodology of this work.

### **One Student's Journey in the Early 1990s**

When I arrived in Java in late 1991, I embarked on a two-year intensive journey as a *gendèr* player for a number of dhalang in the greater Wonogiri area, as well as one in Solo. The wayang in which I took part confirmed everything I had read about this art form and preceded precisely as I had been taught to expect in my private lessons in both New York City and Berkeley. As a *gendèr* player for Sutino Hardokocarito, Gita Kesowo Brayut, Warsino Gunosukasno, Suyati, Kasno Mudhocarito, Eko Sunarso, Marsono, Lukito, and Ragil Pujono, I faced significant technical, artistic and stamina-related challenges, to be sure. But the performances never presented anything foreign to the centuries-old classical tradition I had learned about before departing for Java. This would not be the case today for the vast majority of students

## Ch 1: Introduction

arriving in Solo for the first time from overseas. Assuming their preparation, like mine, was based on reading the available scholarly materials and rehearsing with their local gamelan group, most students would be in for quite a surprise upon arriving in Java.

Even back in 1991, it turned out that Wonogiri was in fact a pocket of traditionalism, as a trend had already swept across much of Central Java starting around 1990, which by 1994 hit Wonogiri as well—the trend described earlier, now referred to as the era of *wayang hura-hura*. In these various types of crowd-pleaser spectacles, a typical interlude (*Limbukan*, starting at about 11:00 PM and *Gara-gara*, starting at about 2:00 AM) lasted two hours or more, rather than the more standard 30 to 60 minutes. Stand-up comedians were invited to do long routines on stage, female singers were encouraged to stand up and dance tantalizingly before the audience, pop bands were set up to alternate with the gamelan, and various prominent guests were asked to come on stage and take turns singing or playing, regardless of talent. During battle scenes (which expanded from the typical 20 minutes to an hour or more) flashing lights, electronic sound effects, fiery sparks and other sensational devices were employed. A character losing a battle might be flung irreverently by the dhalang for effect, landing somewhere in the gamelan or even in the audience.

Although at this point I had branched out beyond my Wonogiri upbringing, I was not frequenting the fringe extremes of experimentalism, but rather still the most classically based dhalang. Yet, I once witnessed a dhalang lifting his leg up onto the banana log to smash a character with his foot. In one performance I attended, the *Gara-gara* interlude started at 1:00 AM and went to 4:00 AM, with the dhalang—a highly respected and internationally famous figure—never returning to the story. Even the 25 percent of performances that were not battle or entertainment scenes seemed vapid, and the gamelan accompaniment nothing but rough and abrasive. I took a break from wayang at this point, and turned to other gamelan studies, continuing to learn more about *gendèr* playing, and dedicating two to three years each to the study of *kendhang*, *rebab*, and *sindhènan*.

## Exposure to Purbo Asmoro's Styles

A decade later, in 2004, a friend<sup>7</sup> gave me a recording of Purbo Asmoro performing *Banjaran Karna (The Life Story of Karna)*<sup>8</sup> from an event in Klaten the previous month. Although in fact I had recently decided to return to wayang, this time to study it through the language, poetry and story-lines, my superficial first impression was that this recording had no more potential than anything else I had been hearing around me. First of all, it did not start with the typical palace-classical opening pieces *Ayak-ayak* to *Kabor*, *Kawit*, or *Krawitan*, which I simplistically interpreted as a bad sign. *Limbukan* took up more than one entire disc, as did *Gara-gara*, another very bad sign in my mind. I had also, without really knowing a thing about it, rashly judged the condensed wayang style coming out of ISI (known as *padat*) as jolting and rushed. Many random moments I fast-forwarded to in the recording reminded me of this style. "Hmm..." I thought, and put the recording away.

Yet something did cause me to take a second look. As I listened more critically from the beginning and began to study the riveting dialogue, highly dramatic action, and meaningful structural innovations of this dhalang's performance, I came to realize that something very special was happening. This most certainly was not *wayang hura-hura*, and yet it was definitely not traditional, classical wayang either. It was also much more expansive and relaxed, not only in length but also in feel, than the condensed ISI style. I decided I needed to meet this dhalang and start attending his performances. What I was to realize much later was that although his performances were not *hura-hura*, not completely classical, and not quintessential ISI, Purbo Asmoro had in fact been all of these at one point or another. He had embarked on his professional career during the *hura-hura* era, learning to compromise his way through the quagmire of sponsor requests and audience demands challenging his principles and aesthetics. Yet he had experienced a completely classical upbringing in a long family lineage of dhalang, and had gone through his formal training during the height of *padat* exploration at ASKI.

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<sup>7</sup> Credit is due to Suraji, Karawitan Department at ISI Surakarta and founding member of Purbo Asmoro's troupe, Mayangkara, for his tireless attempts to attract my attention to Purbo Asmoro's performances during the period 2002–2004. This was not the first time he had tried to convince me that my studies should focus on Purbo Asmoro, but it was the only time he had enticed me with actual material.

<sup>8</sup> Usually, both the Javanese title and my English translation of it will be provided the first time a lakon is mentioned. Thereafter, sometimes only one or the other will be used, depending on context. A list of the title-translation equivalencies can be found in Appendix 3.

Not long after this initial exposure, in June 2004, I heard that Purbo Asmoro was performing in Lojiwetan, Solo, so I made a special trip to his house, introduced myself, and officially asked to record his upcoming performance for study purposes. To my surprise, the performance in Lojiwetan (lakon *Bima Suci* or *Bima As Sage*) turned out to be completely and utterly classical, at the request of the sponsor. It included the rarely played *Ayak-ayak Anjangmas* and *Damarkèli*, as well as extensive narration and palace *sulukan* (poems sung by the dhalang). A few nights later, I went to another performance of Purbo Asmoro's in Purwodadi (lakon *Bima Kembar* or *Twin Bimas*) and this time was able to witness the innovative structural crafting of scenes that I had noticed in *The Life Story of Karna* recording. A month later, I attended a 30-minute *padat* performance of his at ISI (lakon *Ramayana*), and was captivated by the integrity and dramatic power of his performance in yet a different format. I started to realize that this dhalang had an impressive flexibility of style.

Over the next two years, I recorded and studied over 70 of Purbo Asmoro's performances, some 50 or so in the newer style, which still mystified me, some 15 performances in classical style, and a handful in condensed style. In the weeks following each performance, I communicated at length with Purbo Asmoro about his methods, his preparation, his philosophy, and his outlook. I attended more and more performances in general and discovered that many younger dhalang were adopting his innovative techniques. I also came to understand the process by which all-night *garapan* was deliberately being taught at ISI, by Purbo Asmoro and others. This was clearly a crucial new development in wayang that needed documentation. By 2010, if one went to a month of performances in the Solo area by a random sample of dhalang, probably 90 percent would include a significant portion of the elements from the newer all-night *garapan* style and perhaps only 10 percent would be in classical, traditional style. Yet, virtually all written and audio-visual scholarly and educational materials on wayang reflected traditional, classical performance practice. Thus, as mentioned earlier, students arriving in Solo around 2010—unlike my experience back in 1991—would find wayang performances very different from what they had read and studied about in their home country. Conversely, if students had not done much reading about wayang prior to arriving and had jumped right into attending high-profile dhalang performances, they might never come to know

anything different from the all-night *garapan* style so prevalent by 2010. At this point I had also begun work as Purbo Asmoro's translator when he conducted tours overseas or performed for foreign audiences in Java. I started to feel frustrated and also took on a sense of responsibility. Although I could translate the words in his performances, I had no materials with which to help facilitate an understanding of his new style and how it diverges from what is broadly known as classical style.

### A Project Takes Shape

By early 2007 I developed a plan: to record Purbo Asmoro performing a single wayang episode in classical, contemporary-interpretive, and condensed styles and then to repeat that exercise with a different lakon, and to offer up the resulting six performances (with English and Indonesian text, subtitles on the films, endnotes, and analysis) to those interested in understanding current performance practice in Solonese wayang. The Lontar Foundation in Jakarta (a publisher specializing in the translation of Indonesian works into English) took up the challenge financially and began supporting the project. It was planned like a scientific experiment: performances by the same dhalang, with the same musicians, presenting the same lakon to the same audience base (the two contemporary-interpretive wayang in Pacitan, the classical ones in Solo and the condensed performances in Jakarta),<sup>9</sup> so that examination of each style in isolation would be possible. Now it was up to Purbo Asmoro to choose the two lakon. After much contemplation he settled on *Makutharama* (*Rama's Crown*) and *Sesaji Raja Suya* (*The Grand Offering of the Kings*). The recordings were conducted over one year, so as to ensure comparisons could be made among performances from the same era of Purbo Asmoro's artistic development. It is these recordings that form much of the material used in Chapters 5–7 of this work.

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<sup>9</sup> Consideration of the audience base was a crucial factor for allowing Purbo Asmoro artistic freedom. The two classical performances had to be conducted in rather elite and protected communities in Solo (at ISI and at the home of Rahayu Supanggah, a world-renowned composer) so that the dhalang could settle in to the esoteric and slow-paced artistry without fear of audience disgruntlement or even rebellion. The two condensed stories were performed for the foreign diplomatic and Indonesian business communities in Jakarta, as is the typical venue for *padat* performances these days. The sprawling, open field of Pacitan's town square, where over 3,000 could gather to watch their superstar idol Purbo Asmoro perform in the style of "today," was perfect for the two all-night *garapan* performances.

In the chapters that follow I briefly outline the structure of a typical classical performance, even though much has already been written on this topic. Then I present the history of the condensed style that was developed at ASKI in the 1970s. Chapter 4 outlines what led Purbo Asmoro to create his all-night contemporary-interpretive style, born from the concepts of *padat*. In Chapters 5–7, I take the reader on a walk through all-night *garapan* performances and how they compare to the experience of watching a classical or *padat* version of the same lakon.

Chapter 8 explores multi-episode (multi-lakon) constructions. There are a number of different categories in Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* repertory: single lakon like those used as case studies in Chapters 3–7; two or three consecutive lakon melded together over one night; or, one of his trademark specialties, examining the life of a single character by creating a new lakon from fragments of many existing episodes or lakon. This form is known as *lakon banjaran*. In Chapter 8, I address these other categories of lakon structure in all-night *garapan* style. Finally, I offer some context in Chapter 9, by briefly describing a number of other all-night *garapan* practitioners, how they differ from Purbo Asmoro, and their background or views. This chapter includes information on how ISI educates dhalang in the classical, *padat*, and all-night contemporary-interpretive styles.

### **The Work in Context: A Literature Review**

This work takes its place next to well over a thousand writings on wayang written over the past two centuries, one of the earliest being Raffles's brief description of wayang performances in his *History of Java* (1811–1816). Since the 1800s, scholars and interested observers have examined the art of Javanese wayang from varying perspectives. Foreigners, whether as explorers, colonialists, tourists, or scholars, have offered their comments and observations on wayang through diaries, memoirs, historical and anthropological accounts, annotated lakon translations, and in-depth analyses of the art form during their era. Not surprisingly, due to their access, the Dutch dominated the field of published works on wayang for about a century (1845–1945), after which the topic opened up to a more international pool including other European researchers, as well as Americans, Japanese, and Australians.

While most of the non-Indonesian works were by scholars, most of the Javanese writings on wayang, up until the 1990s, came not from scholars but from practicing dhalang, pedagogues, writers, and storytellers. Since the mid-1990s, studies have increasingly been conducted by Indonesian graduate students and professors. The most notable of these works on Javanese *wayang kulit purwa* by Indonesians, have come out of ISI Surakarta's Pedalangan Department, Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta's Graduate Studies in Performance and Visual Arts Department, and UNS-Sebelas Maret's Javanese Studies Department.<sup>10</sup>

Writings exist on almost every topic imaginable in the field of Javanese *wayang kulit purwa*. For over 150 years, scholars have speculated on the origin of wayang (Hazeu 1897, Rassers 1922, Kats 1923, Ras 1976, Supanggah 2007). For equally as long, writers have engaged in discourse concerning the Indian versions of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* versus the Javanese retellings (Cohen 1860, Sears 1996, Perlman 1991/2003), as well as the parameters that define the term *lakon carangan* (Mechelen 1879, Feinstein 1986). Researchers have examined the place wayang holds in society (Hazeu 1897, Anderson 1969, Holt 1967, Keeler 1987, Kayam 2001), as well as its religious and spiritual elements (Mangkunegara VII 1933, Sastroamidjojo 1964, Matsumoto 1975, Sears 1996, and works by the prolific pop-mystic Purwadi, 1995 to the present). They have looked into the language of wayang (Roorda 1869, Soetrisno 1976, Nugroho 1991, Harpawati 1999, Asmoro 2008), the gamelan accompaniment for wayang (Nojowirongko 1958, Plantema 1992, Brinner 1995, Mrázek 2005, Weiss 2007, Supanggah 2011), the movement techniques used by dhalang (Long 1982, Asmoro 2002), and the artistry and symbolism in the wayang figures themselves (Poensen 1872, Serrurier 1896, Mellema 1954, Mrázek 2005, Angst 2007, Katz-Harris 2010, Suwarno 2014). Authors have compiled numerous lakon outlines and synopses, from the early Dutch collections in the 1800s, to the collections by Tristuti (1980–2000), and those by Manteb Soedharsono's grassroots fan club (PSMS 2011). This particular work, however, examines specifically the creative processes and innovations of one dhalang, Purbo Asmoro. It therefore builds specifically on the work of researchers from the past 150 years who have

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<sup>10</sup> The official name of this neighbor of ISI's, also located in the northeast corner of Solo, is Universitas Negeri Surakarta, abbreviated UNS. The university was founded on 11 (*sebelas* in Indonesian) March 1976, and so is popularly known as "Universitas Sebelas Maret." In this work it will be cited as "UNS-Sebelas Maret."

either discussed stylistics, traced the development of a particular innovation, or examined the working habits and processes of a particular dhalang. Literature from these three categories is examined in the section below.

### *Writings That Address Stylistics*

This work discusses the stylistic differences between classical, condensed, and contemporary-interpretive performance practice, and hence stands on the shoulders of previous authors who have written about either classical, condensed, or more recent styles.

### **Performance-Practice Manuals**

Some of the first writings to delineate classical style, were manuals meant to educate dhalang in the performance practice of the palaces. Kusumadilaga's extensive *Serat Sastramiruda* from the 1870s and Nojowirongko's *Serat Tuntunan Pedhalangan* from the 1950s are both still widely referenced among practicing dhalang today. Often a respected pedagogue would create a suggested script, which would then for generations become a kind of text and guide: *Jaladara Rabi* by Reditanaya, *Irawan Rabi* by Nojowirongko, and *Makutharama* by Wignyosoetarno are some examples from the 1930–1950s. Modern examples are the proliferation of manuals put out regularly by the ISI Pedalangan Department, such as *Buku Ajar Pakeliran Gaya Pokok V* (Sunardi, 2003) and *Buku Petunjuk Praktikum Pakeliran Gaya Surakarta* (Asmoro et al., 2006), the latter of which has the additional feature of a series of practice videos, that are now accessible on YouTube.

### **Lakon Translations of Study Texts**

Lakon translations into Dutch, German, Japanese, and English have served a similar purpose to performance-practice manuals, but are created to communicate information about classical wayang performance-practice to a foreign audience. Such translations present examples of full performances by respected, authoritative dhalang and usually include explanatory material. The first translation of a lakon dates back some 170 years ago, when in 1846 the Dutch researcher J.A. Wilkens published a complete transcript of the lakon *Pregiwa* in the journal *Tijdschrift voor*

*Nederlandsch-Indie*. *Pregiwa* was reportedly recited directly to Wilkens by the dhalang Redisuto of the Karaton Kasunanan Surakarta (the main palace in Solo, referred to in this work as Kraton Solo). Wilkens then translated the transcript into Dutch and in his introduction to wayang entitled *Wajangvoorstelling*, provided commentary, information on characters, and notes on various Javanese phrases and expressions.<sup>11</sup>

In the 26-year period between 1872 and 1898, four more Javanese-to-Dutch translations were published, all with extensive notes and annotations: Poensen's translation of the lakon *Palasara* (1872), Humme's translation of the lakon *Abiyasa* (1878), Vliet's translation of *Pandhoe* (1879), and Hazeu's translation of *Arimba* (1898).<sup>12</sup> Tjan Tjoe Siem's PhD dissertation (1938) included a translation of an 1884 transcription of *Kurupati Rabi* (*The Marriage of Kurupati*), and in 1976 J.J. Ras translated the 1968 study text *Sembadra Larung* (*De schending van Soebadra* or *Sembadra Floats Off*) by the pedagogue Kodiron.

Only some 50 years ago were the first complete translations of lakon into English published. James Brandon's *On Thrones of Gold* (1970 and 1993) gives an introduction to the various technical, stylistic, and structural aspects of a traditional Central Javanese wayang performance. He includes three all-night wayang "plays" in English: *The Reincarnation of Rama* (from a study text by Siswoharsoyo), *The Marriage of Irawan* (from Nojowirongko's 1976 study text), and *The Death of Karna* (created by Brandon and his colleagues from a synopsis). In 1994, Helen Pausacker also contributed to the literature with her richly annotated English translation of Wignyosoetarno's PDMN<sup>13</sup> study text, *Makutharama*.

None of the lakon translations above arose from actual live performances, but rather from study texts written by pedagogues. They are meant to stand as ideal examples of the art rather than as genuine representations of what was actually presented during a live performance. Their discussions of classical style differ significantly from the section on classical style in this work, which is based entirely

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<sup>11</sup> Much of the information here on writings about wayang in the 1800s comes from Clara van Groenendael (1987). I relied heavily on her descriptions of these works. However, I did have the opportunity in March 2013, in a series of visits to the KITLV library in Leiden, to access the works and see what format they took. As for Wilkens' transcription and translation appearing in the 1846 TNI journal, I am indebted to Marc Perlman of Brown University for sending me a scan of the complete copy.

<sup>12</sup> All four of these titles—*Palasara*, *Abiyasa*, *Pandhoe*, and *Arimba*—are names of characters.

<sup>13</sup> PDMN stands for Pasinaon Dhalang ing Mangkunegaran, a court *pedhalangan* school in Solo described further on page 30.

on live performances and reflects "classical" as it is interpreted more recently, post-1985.

### Lakon Translations of Live Performances

It was only some 35 years ago that the first translation was published of an actual live performance rather than of a theoretical script, allowing the foreign reader access to stylistics as they actually occurred on stage. In 1977 the German researcher Peter Wilhelm Pink translated a performance by dhalang Soetrisno (senior ASKI instructor in the Pedalangan Department) of *Gathutkaca Nagih Janji* (*Gathutkaca Insists a Promise Be Kept*), conducted in Jakarta for a circumcision. Pink's German translation, *Gathutkaca fordert die Einlösung eines Versprechens*, is accompanied by a complete Javanese transcription, notes on the question of Javanese versus Indian retellings, and comments on the idea of improvisation versus preset and memorized material.

The first English translations created from transcripts of live wayang performances emerged only in the late 1990s. In 1998–1999, the Lontar Foundation published a five-book series of live performance translations, one of which was by a Solo-style dhalang: Klaten performer Gaib Widopandoyo's *Gathutkaca on Trial* (*Gathutkaca Dakwa*), translated in 1999 by Gloria Soepomo Poedjosoedarmo. As Suyenaga comments in the Editor's Note to the translations: "This series reflects wayang as it is actually performed, not as a pristine script. These performances are complete with interruptions, mistakes, and casual banter between performers."

In 2007, Jennifer Lindsay and Amrih Widodo completed a translation of *Mayat Miring*, based on a transcript by Roger Long of a 1967 live performance by Panut Darmoko of Nganjuk, East Java. The thoughtful and unique translation focuses on language stylistics. Lindsay accessed a wide variety of English language prototypes in an attempt to replicate the wayang experience of mixing archaic, modern-literary, and modern-everyday language. This work was not published. In 1991 Daniel McGuire and Lukman Aris worked on a translation of *Kilatbuwana* from a 1984 live performance by Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra, but this was never published.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The titles *Mayat Miring* and *Kilatbuwana* are names of characters.

Studies meant to document stylistics were made ever more effective with audio documentation, and later on visual as well. In 1995, a three-CD set came out of sections from Anom Soeroto's 1987 performance of *Déwa Ruci* in Amsterdam, which was the first published audio documentation of wayang with extensive notes. The three-and-a-half hours of audio footage are accompanied by a 30-page booklet of introductory information and synopsis by Bernard Arps. In *Tall Tree, Nest of the Wind* (2016), Arps provides a complete translation of the performance in English, with extension annotation through a philological lens.<sup>15</sup>

### Discussions of *Pakeliran Padat* Stylistics

A number of works have briefly mentioned the evolution of *pakeliran padat* (condensed style) at ASKI in the 1970s. The ultimate authority on this style is considered to be Sudarko's *Pakeliran Padat: Pembentukan dan Penyebaran* (2003), as Sudarko was a student during the creation of the *padat* form in the mid-1970s. Arps offers a history of stylistic developments in his article "Volkstradities en instituties in het middenjavaanse wayangtheater" (1985), with a large section on *pakeliran padat* and the way it differs from classical wayang performance practice. Brinner describes differences in interaction between musicians and dhalang in *pakeliran padat* in his article "Performer Interaction in a New Form of Javanese Wayang" (1992). In 2000, the first audio-visual documentation of wayang with English subtitles was made available, when Gelar-Senawangi published a *padat* version of *Déwa Ruci* by Manteb Soedharsono. This recording does not have any supplemental materials however, and does not include a transcription, or any commentary or analysis.

### The Lontar Project: A Precursor to This Dissertation

Purbo Asmoro and Kathryn Emerson's seven-volume and 21-DVD (33 hours of live footage) *Wayang Educational Package*, published by Lontar in 2013–2014, is the most

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<sup>15</sup> Weintraub's detailed examination of dhalang Asep Sunaryo's style in *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*, and Lysloff's *Srikandhi Dances Lènggèr: A performance of music and shadow theater*, a detailed look at the style of Banyumasan legend Sugino Siswocarito, fall out of the scope of this work as not Solo-style. Both, however, contain audio material as well as transcripts and translations, both focus on one dhalang's stylistics, and both reflect a close relationship between dhalang and researcher, as is the case with this work. Hence Weintraub's study of Asep Sunaryo's Sundanese style, Lysloff's study of Sugino Siswocarito's Banyumasan style, Arps's study of Anom Soeroto's classical performance, and this study of Purbo Asmoro's Solonese contemporary style, will form a useful quartet for researchers.

recent examination of stylistics to be published, and forms the basis of this dissertation. The intent of the Lontar work, and of this dissertation as well, is manifold: to explore the term "classical" and offer a current interpretation of the term that includes palace-style, village-style, and Nartosabdo-style; to present a detailed timeline of how the condensed style developed at ASKI in the 1970s; to document the emergence of the *hura-hura* era of wayang; and finally, to analyze how Purbo Asmoro, affected by all these styles and movements, came to develop his all-night *garapan* style. Unlike previous works on style, both the Lontar project and this dissertation are comparative studies, since they arose during an era in which at least four broad categories of styles co-exist in performance practice: classical, condensed, *hura-hura*, and contemporary-interpretive. The Lontar books and DVDs offer complete Javanese transcripts, full translations of six performances into both English and Indonesian, uncut audio-visual material of all six performances (with subtitles in both languages) and extensive introductory, appendix, and footnote material. While the *Wayang Educational Package* is 90% raw material and 10% analysis and commentary, this dissertation offers a more highly detailed history and analysis of Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* style. It benefits from the extensive collection, exploration, and discussions of material that occurred between Purbo Asmoro and this author in the seven years the Lontar project was coming into being.

### ***Writings Focused on the Dhalang***

The dhalang himself has not often been at the center of previous discussions or documentations of classical or condensed style. In the lakon translations listed above, only McGuire and Lukman had extensive consultations with the dhalang, Tristuti. Although Gaib Widopandoyo, Panut Darmoko, Anom Soeroto, Manteb Soedharsono, and almost all of the *pakeliran padat* practitioners, are still alive and well, it was not a priority of the translators and authors mentioned to consult with them. In this dissertation, as well as the Lontar material that preceded it, I chose to place a high priority on direct consultation with Purbo Asmoro. My intent from the beginning has been to present his all-night *garapan* style as he sees it, to translate his words with the meaning he feels he is conveying, and to comment on other practitioners and future developments through his critical lens.

Clara van Groenendael's landmark *The Dhalang Behind The Wayang* (1985) was the first major work to examine each aspect of wayang through the perspective of the dhalang himself, his place in society, and the specific challenges and pressures he faces. Her work, to this day, is the most-quoted foreign work among Javanese dhalang themselves. This is perhaps because it is readily available in Indonesian, or alternatively, maybe the Indonesian version is so prevalent because of its importance. Her perspective that the dhalang is the primary creative force behind wayang and that the history of wayang is the history of the dhalang's creativity, obviously rings true and has become a source of pride for Javanese dhalang and wayang scholars.

The only other work to date that has focused solely on the general "idea" of the dhalang himself is the prolific Bambang Murtiyoso's master's thesis: "Faktor-faktor Pendukung Popularitas Dhalang (Factors Affecting the Popularity of a Dhalang)" from 1995. This much-quoted work is a cynical, tongue-in-cheek, yet realistic, look at all the factors that influence a contemporary dhalang's rise to stardom aside from talent. Items on the author's list of necessary qualities are frequently referred to among members of the Solonese artistic community, as a way of explaining a particular dhalang's success.

While not focusing exclusively on the dhalang, there are authors that view their material through that context. Feinstein et al. presented a detailed examination of *lakon carangan* in 1986, which was based on interviews with 46 Javanese dhalang. It includes complete transcripts from eight live performances by eight different dhalang, presenting a total of three different *carangan* in their entirety, as well as short synopses of 116 distinct *carangan*. In the introduction to the three-volume set, the authors focus on the many different interpretations throughout history of the term *lakon carangan*, primarily from the viewpoints of practicing dhalang.

Umar Kayam's *Kelir Tanpa Batas*, quoted at the beginning of this work, examines the wayang scene from 1993 to 1995 through the artistry of the dhalang and the choices he must make. By speaking with and observing the experiences of high-profile dhalang from that decade, Kayam analyzes the career pressures and sponsor-dhalang conflicts that can arise in a new era of wayang performance-practice.

All the above works, like this one, present the dhalang himself as a profound force in determining the direction of performance practice. Rather than an undefined presence behind the screen, carrying out a generic ritual following a prescribed format, the dhalang is presented as central to creativity and change. This work focuses on one dhalang in detail, tracing the development of his creative processes and examining the choices he has made in facing the uniqueness of his era. Similar stylistically focused biographies have been made of Nartosabdo, Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra, Manteb Soedharsono, Gandadarman, and Enthus Susmono, all in the context of their considerable innovations, as described in the next section.

### *Writings on Innovation in Wayang*

Wayang performance practice has always been in a constant, fluid state of innovation. Some innovations can be termed as large-scale, such as when: the arms of the wayang figures became moveable, the *pélog* gamelan tuning was added to the existing *sléndro*, animal figures were introduced, the scene structure started reflecting the protocol of a Central Javanese court, the *keprak* was invented, or the electric bulb replaced oil and flame.<sup>16</sup> Small innovations have happened routinely throughout history, such as when a dhalang weaves a new version of a standard tale, uses a new gamelan piece, or engages with his female singers in a different way, and it catches on in his locality. As Mrázek states at the beginning of his chapter on innovation (1995, 363):

I will be discussing some extreme innovations, but one must keep in mind that in different performances, and in different parts of a performance, innovation is present to different degrees, and in all cases the newness is only one aspect of the performance. Moreover, as we will see, past and innovation are relative, because wayang has been constantly developing—there are newer and older innovations (as well as innovations that are not new anymore and thus do not feel like innovations).

Innovations since the 1990s have spread in a unique way due to the presence of video documentation, radio and television broadcasts, and the internet. The discourse on these innovations has been particularly vigorous among scholars since 1990.

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<sup>16</sup> I do not attempt to cite a year, as dating these innovations is controversial and beyond the scope of this work.

### Writings on Substantive Innovations

Since the late 1990s, scholarship at ISI Surakarta has produced a number of works addressing the substantive stylistic innovations and influences that specific dhalang have introduced within the *pedhalangan* community. By “substantive” I am referring to innovations in the presentation of the lakon, not in the shape or content of the entertainment interludes. An example of a work on substantive innovations is Sugeng Nugroho’s master’s thesis (2003), which discusses in detail the new paradigm in wayang performance practice forged by Tegal-based Enthus Susmono. Another example is Edy Sulistyono’s 1996 examination of Sragen-based Gandadarman, who was widely popular in the 1980s, focused on innovations in movement technique and dramatic structure. Purbo Asmoro’s master’s thesis (2004) delineates the pronounced effect Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra’s writings had on the Solonese *pedhalangan* community in the 1990s.

Other works include ISI professor Sumanto’s biography outlining the major innovations of Nartosabdo (2002), former ISI rector Soetarno’s study on revered classical dhalang Pujosumarto with stylistic comparisons both to Nartosabdo and post-Nartosabdo performers (2002), ISI professor Bambang Murtiyoso’s biography of Anom Soeroto (2008), and the official biography of Manteb Soedharsono and his role in the *pedhalangan* world by Wahyono (2008). This dissertation, similarly, chronicles a specific dhalang’s effect on the community, by describing how Purbo Asmoro created a new style, which is now imitated in some way by the majority of younger dhalang.

A detailed examination of all-night *garapan* is conspicuously absent in the research though, and is vital to understanding performers of Purbo Asmoro’s generation and younger. There are a number of recent works coming out of ISI that include Purbo Asmoro in the analysis, without addressing the truly radical new style within which he is working. Sunardi, in his PhD thesis entitled “Nuksma dan Mungguh” (2012), compares the aesthetics of six dhalang: Nartosabdo, Harjoko Joko Pandoyo “Mokaton,” Gandadarman, Anom Soeroto, Manteb Soedharsono, and Purbo Asmoro. He looks specifically at whether their characterizations are believable (*nuksma*), and their story interpretations appropriate to the dramatic context (*mungguh*). It is a fascinating comparative study, yet it misses the stylistic

context unique, among those six dhalang, to Purbo Asmoro's work. Sugeng Nugroho is the first researcher to examine the form known as *banjaran* (biographies of wayang characters that span cross-sections of traditional lakon), in his PhD thesis (2012). He describes and compares the techniques of constructing *banjaran*, using case studies from four performers: Nartosabdo, Anom Soeroto, Manteb Soedharsono, and Purbo Asmoro. This is a pioneering work in an era where *banjaran* performances are becoming more and more commonplace. But because it skirts the question of stylistics entirely, there is an incomplete picture of why and how Purbo Asmoro does what he does in *banjaran*, and how, by extension, younger dhalang also approach the form.

While informative and thoughtful, much of the work so far out of ISI takes as a given the radical shift from classical style to all-night *garapan*. Even the dozens of ISI Pedalangan students who have written master's level analyses of individual all-night *garapan* performances by Purbo Asmoro have examined the chosen performance in isolation from the wider style that Purbo Asmoro created. The Pedalangan Department research at ISI through 2014 takes the shift to all-night *garapan* style as a given, and starts from there, without an examination of this shift. This work fills the gap, by focusing exclusively on Purbo Asmoro's shift from classical to contemporary-interpretive style, via concepts introduced in the condensed style.

### Entertainment and Special Effects

A large portion of scholarship on wayang since 1990 has focused on the entertainment interludes or the use of special effects. This is typically viewed as a deteriorating situation. Umar Kayam's *Kelir Tanpa Batas* (2001), ISI instructor Kuwato's master's thesis on the large-scale productions of the *hura-hura* era (2001), and Supanggah's thoughtful book of essays, *Dunia Pewayangan di Hati Seorang Pangrawit (The World of Wayang From the Heart of a Musician, 2011)* use the state of the entertainment interludes as the primary barometer to judge the state of contemporary wayang. Mrázek's (2005) attention to new trends is focused in one lengthy chapter entitled "Gara-gara! Or wayang in the time of comedy." Suratno examines the stylistic differences of the *Limbukan* interlude among Anom Soeroto,

Purbo Asmoro, and Warseno Slenk in his recent book *Kajian Sosiopragmatik Tindak Tutur Adegan Limbukan* (2013), also an examination of the entertainment section of contemporary wayang.

Another work to mention is a fascinating compilation of 23 essays, by as many authors, entitled *Contemporary Puppet Theater in Indonesia: New Approaches to Performance Events* and edited by Jan Mrázek (2002). The contributing authors are experienced in the field and from a variety of nationalities. Each examines a narrow topic and offers a unique perspective in this collection of snapshots of various types of contemporary wayang across Indonesia. Australian dhalang Helen Pausacker explores contemporary changes in the portrayal of the queen's maid servants, Limbuk and Cangik. Two of the essays touch on a specific Central Javanese dhalang's work: Suratno's essay on the popularity of Warseno "Slenk" in "Saya Lebih Suka Nonton Kamu," and Curtis's essay on Enthus Susmono's appeal to the masses through wayang. Both are primarily focused on how the entertainment interludes are shaped by these performers.

The present work offers a look at innovation in contemporary wayang that is entirely separate from any major consideration of the entertainment interludes. While changes in these interludes since the late 1980s are extreme and shocking to many, they are no longer innovations but have been around for some 25 years now. The length, format, and various elements have either become the norm or, in some cases, have died out. Either way, their introduction to audiences was in the *hura-hura* era and has been well-documented by researchers. Purbo Asmoro's contemporary-interpretive style is a phenomenon of innovation within the lakon itself, not the entertainment interludes—until this dissertation, a stylistic innovation undocumented in the scholarly world.

### ***Insider versus Outsider***

Many of the works cited here were written by insiders who absorbed the wayang tradition through years of exposure and study, who are native speakers of Javanese, and who indeed are both themselves dhalang and come from dhalang families. They display all of the virtues and drawbacks of the insider viewpoint: on one hand, deep knowledge of, and insight into, every aspect of wayang, and

sensitivity to its subtlest nuances; on the other hand, less of a contextual or global view, and heavy reliance on the reader's prior knowledge.

One dissertation to mention here, written by an outsider, is the first so far to dedicate space to Purbo Asmoro's career by a non-Indonesian. Sadiyah Boonstra's "Changing Wayang Scenes: Heritage formation and wayang performance-practice in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia" (2014, University of Amsterdam) focuses on the global dimension, specifically UNESCO's 2003 declaration of wayang as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, using Purbo Asmoro, Manteb Soedharsono, and Enthus Susmono as case studies. This work displays the virtues and drawbacks of the outsider viewpoint. The subject of heritage formation is timely, and has started to attract attention from anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and other scholars. As one of the first dissertations to bring this perspective to Indonesian culture, Boonstra's work is useful relevant. The second half, where the author discusses wayang performance practice, dhalang innovation and creativity, and audience-sponsor-performer dynamics, is perhaps less useful. Due to a limited period of fieldwork and a lack of the technical, linguistic, and cultural background knowledge these complex topics demand, the author's sections on both Purbo Asmoro and Manteb Soedharsono contain a number of factual inaccuracies, then leading to fragile conclusions.<sup>17</sup>

The work at hand, examines the development of Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* style from an outsider's inside view. Written by an outsider, of course, yet with significant insider opportunities as a result of consistent access to informants and performances, decades of experience and study, a spouse of 12 years who is a respected Javanese drummer, Wakidi Dwidjomartono, and a significant level of working knowledge in Javanese, wayang traditions, and gamelan. The question for most foreigners who last saw an all-night wayang in the early 1990s, or earlier, and

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<sup>17</sup> As a side note: I was involved in Boonstra's fieldwork as a liaison with the dhalang community, and for Purbo Asmoro in particular. I accompanied her to many of Purbo Asmoro's performances where I translated the narration and dialogue into English. Boonstra writes in her 2014 dissertation (p. 156) that I left out all the entertainment interlude material in the Lontar project (Asmoro 2013), and concludes that this reflects colonial and post-colonial tendencies. In fact, every word of Purbo Asmoro's six performances was published in full in the books (Javanese, Indonesian, and English volumes) and the DVDs. Both Purbo Asmoro and I made public speeches outlining our philosophy on unabridged documentation at a partial launching of the translations, which Boonstra attended, in Solo on 23 July 2010.

return to Java in 2015, is inevitably, “What happened? Where is wayang as I once knew it?” A superficial and partial answer lies in addressing the entertainment interludes. This has been addressed extensively in the literature. Far more profound, however, is how dhalang are radically altering the way the actual lakon portion of the performance is presented. In this regard, understanding Purbo Asmoro’s development of all-night *garapan* is key to understanding “What happened?”

### The Dhalang as an Informant

A portion of the data I have collected has been the result of simply attending wayang with a fully present ear, heart, and mind, and proficient *basa pedhalangan*—the unique mix of Javanese language levels, vocabulary sets, styles, and figures of speech used in wayang. Since 2001 I have not only lived permanently in Java, but have focused on the study of Javanese and wayang. While working fulltime in Jakarta, I have managed to attend a steady rate of over 80 *wayang kulit purwa* performances per year for 14 years. I do not just stop in to performances. The vast majority of the time, I arrive before the wayang begins, sit right behind the dhalang near the *gendèr* and *rebab* players, stay all night, audio or video record, follow the lakon with intense focus, and communicate with the dhalang at some point afterward regarding the performance. Although about 65 percent of these performances have been by Purbo Asmoro, the other 35 percent have been by some 30 to 40 other dhalang. I have taken extensive notes and kept close records of these activities in a series of small books familiar to anyone who has been to one of these events with me, or seen me on stage. Many observations throughout this work regarding trends, 2001–2015, are backed up by this obsessive record-keeping. However, most important to this study of Purbo Asmoro's distinctive style has been my access to Purbo Asmoro himself, and his creative processes, as tricky as this sometimes is.

Javanese dhalang are as wise, talented, and inspiring a group of human beings as exist, but proved to be enigmatic informants. They are storytellers, creators, authors, and entertainers.

Laurie Sears  
(1996, xiii)

Surely this statement will ring true to anyone who works with dhalang. Dhalang are brought up from a young age to be dramatic “storytellers, creators, authors, and entertainers” and many seem to feel they are expected to be such when approached by a researcher as well. This can be both a stumbling block and a pleasure to anyone working in the world of wayang. One is sure to receive a wondrous and detailed story in response to any inquiry, because the dhalang will create it for his audience without hesitation out of bits of truth, personal perspective, and storyteller’s embellishment. Common among dhalang is for most any question regarding the origin a performance element or point of interpretation to come down to some version of “I created that,” “My father created that,” “My grandfather created that,” or, at the very least, “I popularized that.” This is particularly true among superstar dhalang, and is not in line with the general Javanese distaste for overt self-recognition. Similarly, a request for an opinion will often quickly transform into an impassioned soliloquy—dhalang of course not having any problem with talking for long periods of time uninterrupted. This is what we love about dhalang, this is what we need and expect from dhalang, and yet this is the major challenge when using their input during research.

Although I feel I have a special relationship with Purbo Asmoro, and although I have been communicating with him on a daily basis for 12 years, I am certainly not immune to the pitfalls the quotation above warns of, as really no one is. Being a Westerner, a woman, and a non-dhalang has certainly had both its limitations and its benefits in terms of forging closeness to an enigmatic Javanese male dhalang. However, I have learned over time that openness, neutrality, professionalism, modernity, and integrity are hallmarks of Purbo Asmoro’s character, and he is unique in this combination of qualities for a dhalang of his stature and fame. Partially this is a result of his extended educational background, through which he has learned to examine issues in a more scholarly way. As Felicia Katz-Harris, Curator of Asian Folk Art at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, marveled during her work with Purbo Asmoro on *Inside the Puppet Box*: “That man is a scholar. No question about it. A dhalang, yes. But also, most certainly, a scholar.” Time and time again over the past decade I have been able to confirm the accuracy of his acclamations or verbal citations, far beyond what is

often the case with these enigmatic informants. Sometimes it has taken years, sometimes only months, but what he claims as his during an interview or brief interaction, truly does eventually come to light as being true. At the same time, when he has adopted something through exposure to someone else's work he is always the first to articulate this. He is both humble and yet willing to distinguish clearly and accurately his own innovations from those of others.

While most researchers in Java work with their informants through scheduled interviews, and some through time in residence with the artist in question, my access to Purbo Asmoro's thought processes has been through seven different types of interaction, in this descending order of frequency: text messaging, informal group gatherings, one-on-one casual conversation, monologues during *Limbukan* or *Gara-gara*, seminars or other formal settings, phone calls, and, finally, formal interview sessions. With all many other informants involved in this dissertation, I collected what I needed either from formal, planned interview sessions or from listening to them speak at seminars.

On a daily basis over 12 years, Purbo Asmoro has been open to discussion of issues of all kinds through text messaging. This method of communication seems to fit his personality best, in that he prides himself on being accurate and to the point, while being on the move, modern, and a multi-tasker. He is also an extremely private and quiet man when not on stage. Hence text messaging works for him, being a written communication, directed to only one person and almost diary-like. If he thinks of something to add, hours or even days later a message will appear with his revised thoughts. His musings or challenges before performances, his self-evaluation after a performance, his observations during other peoples' performances, his reaction to criticism, his reflections on all-night *garapan* have all come to life for me daily, over a decade, through the unlikely medium of shorthand text messages in Javanese that resemble a semi-private diary when collected.

Second in frequency have been informal, fortuitous gatherings of the artistic community in Jakarta or Solo. A small group of eclectic artists (dhalang, musicians, critics, composers, writers) might lounge around for hours on the porch of my house in Jakarta, savoring the rare access to Purbo Asmoro's thinking during his stay in connection with a performance. A group of trusted friends may have gathered in the

pavilion of Purbo Asmoro's Solo home, while he somewhat holds court on whatever issue is discussed. These, on average, monthly happenings have been rich sources of stories, data, and anecdotes from Purbo Asmoro.

Third in frequency have been one-on-one casual interactions—conversations on 16-hour cross-continental flights for a tour, in airport waiting rooms, in taxis, or at restaurant tables, all have been intensely focused on *pedhalangan* topics over the years. The most unusual method has manifested itself when, after posing a question earlier in the week, I find myself at a wayang performance only to hear Purbo Asmoro address the issue in an extensive monologue during *Limbukan* or *Gara-gara*. Finally there are the more traditional methods of gathering information: phone calls, listening to him speak on panels and at seminars, and, of course, the formal interview session, all of which I have experienced in plenty over the last decade.

There is no doubt in my mind, closeness and relationship longevity aside, that Purbo Asmoro has only let me in on precisely what he intends to, and there is much that remains closed about his creative process. I often tell him that I would give anything to examine up close the mass of papers and tidbits that cover his seated area during any performance. He usually responds simply with a secretive smile. On one occasion, when he happened to mention feeling like he owed me a favor, I joked that all I wanted was to peek into his mysterious briefcase before a performance and read all the bits and pieces he was about to weave into an inspired creation: handwritten poetry from past performances, torn bits of old publications from his father's collection, photocopied extracts of lakon publications, ideas jotted down in the car on a piece of cardboard on the way to the event, well-kept notebooks of his collected tidbits, messages from the sponsor. Since then, he has granted me an upclose look at bits of treasures here and there, but of course ultimately he is always in control of what to filter through.

Enigma, mystery, and professional secrets aside, the focus of this work in general, remains a personal study of Purbo Asmoro's creative processes, both when initially developing the contemporary-interpretive style, and through to the present day as he prepares to perform. It is a necessarily personal perspective: a look at how Purbo Asmoro created what is now the most influential style among the younger generation of Solonese-style dhalang.