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Shaping the Javanese Play : improvisation of the script in theatre performance

Bosnak, J.E.

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CHAPTER II

Communicating the essentials of the plot

This chapter is about Javanese stage plays produced mainly through improvisation. During a briefing session the playwright-director provides the actors with a summary of the play. The actors then ad-lib on the spot with a 'play schema' as point of reference. I aim to explain the way a playwright-director produces a play schema and how he transmits this to his actors. Furthermore, I show how the actors shape their knowledge about the characteristics of the production process, what I call their 'script in mind', and how they explore conventions and traditions of the theatre form they represent.

First I describe three different kethoprak performances I witnessed, focusing on the use of the script during the production process. Before a performance takes place, the playwright provides a play schema and he gives instructions to the actors during a short briefing (*penuangan*).

Secondly, I describe the performance of dhagelan at the radio station RRI Nusantara II in Yogya. The group works with a summary script written by the playwright.

Kethoprak in Yogyakarta

As mentioned in the first chapter, many kethoprak groups ceased to exist due to the monetary crisis that began in 1997. The few groups still surviving were invited occasionally by families to give a nightlong performance during a ritual celebration. Sometimes they were asked to become part of festivities of a larger scale like the anniversary of a political party or the opening of a newly established company.

In this chapter, four kethoprak groups appear which were active at the time I carried out my fieldwork (1999-2002). In one case two groups appear together. All Yogyakarta-based, the groups generally played in town or in villages nearby. The oldest group is Kethoprak Mataram RRI. From 1950 onwards the RRI Nusantara II, the local branch of the Radio Republik Indonesia, broadcast kethoprak performances

on a weekly basis. In this chapter, I focus on a stage performance by the RRI group and in Chapter III I focus on their radio performances. In 1964 the twin brothers Sugito and Sugati established the group PS Bayu (Acronym of Paguyuban Seni Bagian Yogyakarta Utara, Art Association of the Northern Part of Yogya). The actor Basuki set up a 'humorous' kethoprak group in 1998 called Jampi Stress (Stress Medicine), which started to perform for the television channel Indosiar from 1999 onwards. Playwright and director Nano Asmarandana established the group Sasrabahu (Thousand Forces) in 1999.

The production of the script

Brandon examined production systems of plays in Southeast Asia. He stated that there are numerous similarities between the theatre production systems of several Southeast Asian countries and remarked the following:

In Southeast Asia the aim of production is not to produce one play, or even ten or a hundred separate plays, but to stage examples of a specific genre. The genre, not the play, is the unit of production. (Brandon 1967:147.)

If we consider the production process of Javanese popular theatre plays, the genre indeed is at the core. This genre embodies a certain set of conventions, which affect the character of the script and the performance. It has to be noted, however, that 'specific' genres always seem to overlap with others. Borders between different genres are not clear-cut and they are subject to continuous change.

In the case of kethoprak production a 'genre model' can be traced at the basis of each play; the play is shaped around the conventions of the genre. Kethoprak is characterised among other things by the following features: the kethoprak player enacts a stock character. He or she acts, sings and dances in front of painted backdrops that depict standard settings like the palace, the garden, the woods or the street. Each play involves at least four standard scenes that may occur twice: the love scene, the battle scene, the comic scene and the palace scene. A wooden slit drum (*keprak*) signals the start and end of a scene as well as the beginning of a musical cue.

Spoken dialogues are alternated with singing and dancing accompanied by a gamelan orchestra.

The genre model as described above serves as the starting point of the creative process: a process in which the theatre makers either apply, modify, resist or parody the conventions of the genre, as will become clear from my case studies.

The following sections show the peculiarities of the kethoprak staging process as encountered during my fieldwork, strengthened by the observations of other researchers.

Sources of inspiration

The kethoprak genre has produced a wide range of plays (generally referred to as *lakon*) since its inception in the first decades of the 20th century. As shown in the first chapter, these plays seldom reached the printing press. They were passed on from one generation to the next, either through individuals or the performance itself. The *lakon* have always been subject to continuous transformation, but nevertheless gained a more or less standardised format through the years.

Each kethoprak group works with its own 'standard' repertory of kethoprak plays. These plays are based on local legends, folktales and (historical) novels. The playwright-director is called *dhalang* as in wayang kulit and wayang wong. Ever since he started to learn his profession he has been collecting plays in the field. He writes them down or types them out on his typewriter. More recently, some playwrights also write and store plays on their computer. The more experienced a playwright, the more plays he knows by heart and one can actually say that the plays are 'stored' in his mind.

When a performance is desired, the playwright chooses a play from his own collection, one he considers suitable for the occasion. He makes a selection of the standard ingredients of this play. As playwright Singgih Hadi Mintardja put it: 'The kethoprak playwrights have to quarry the hidden possibilities of the story, the order of the story, the features of the characters and the conflict within the story (Singgih Hadi

Mintardja 1997:39).¹ After choosing the main elements of the play, the playwright starts reconstructing the story adding new elements to it. These new elements often have their roots in contemporary news that has reached the playwright through gossip or by (electronic) media. In this way the play is kept ‘up to date’. Depending on the occasion for which the play was written, the playwright either sticks to a conventional story pattern or deliberately changes the initial story.

Many forms of popular theatre in Indonesia share the same characteristic way of creating a new play on the basis of ingredients from an existing lakon. Playwrights tend to use a variety of sources to refresh their own stock of plays. For example, a *loddrok* playwright produces his play by extracting ideas from historical stories or movies. *Loddrok* is a theatre form from Madura, an island situated north of East Java. Anthropologist H  l  ne Bouvier, who carried out extensive research into *loddrok*, provides the following description of the creation of a *loddrok* play:

[U]n ‘sc  nariste/metteur en sc  ne’, le *sutradara* [Indonesian word for director], tire les grandes lignes de r  cits historiques, de *komik* (bandes dessin  es historico-l  gendaires) ou de films, pour cr  er un sc  nario plus ou moins original, tr  s succinct, qui servira de canevas    l’improvisation de chaque acteur. Ces recopiations ou ces adaptations, selon les cas, sont consign  es en quelques lignes dans des cahiers, en indon  sien ou en madourais, parfois compl  t  s de la distribution des r  les et de formules et sch  ma magiques pour le succ  s du spectacle. (Bouvier 1994:101.)²

Here we see how the playwright-director of *loddrok*, like his *kethoprak* colleague, allows himself to be inspired by different sources. The result is a ‘more or less original scenario’: a scenario with new elements embedded in the conventions of the *loddrok* genre. Bouvier stresses the importance of new additions to the repertory while maintaining its traditional features:

¹ [P]ara penulis naskah ketoprak harus menggali kemungkinan-kemungkinan yang tersimpan pada cerita-cerita itu. Urutan ceritanya, karakter para peran-perannya serta konflik yang ada di dalam cerita itu.

² It has to be noted that unlike the *loddrok* notebook [cahiers] mentioned by Bouvier the *kethoprak* notebook I saw in Yogyakarta did not contain any magic formulas.

The loddrok scenarist must be able to renew his troupe's repertory through innovative additions while anchoring it within a certain theatrical tradition and practice (Bouvier 1995: 84).

The kethoprak and loddrok playwright share an eclectic approach towards their sources. They do not hesitate to combine local stories with contemporary news items. This bears resemblance to the way a Balinese mask-theatre actor 'embellishes' his story using 'bits and pieces from many sources' (Emigh 1996:177). In the case of *topeng pajegan* (mask theatre), the actor acts as well as directs his own play. His main source is a personal notebook with a collection of semi-historical chronicles:

He will have to be flexible. For now, his preparation consists of deciding how the material might be parceled out among his masks, what particular emphases might be given to the story on this occasion, what supplementary material might be appropriate, what special dance movements he might introduce, and what opportunities might be present for jokes and topical comments. The 'script' arrived at in this manner is always incomplete. (Emigh 1996: 177, 180.)

The preparations do not lead to the creation of a fixed performance plan, but rather result in the development of a flexible framework functioning as the starting point of the performance. Here we see how the performer in his triple function of playwright-director-actor prepares his show by combining heterogeneous sources. Theatre anthropologist John Emigh calls this way of 'script-building' 'an act of *bricolage*'. He refers to Levi-Strauss's terminology in *The savage mind* (Emigh 1996: 177).

The *bricoleur* constructs his *bricolage* in a retrospective way. He chooses elements from his already existing oeuvre, restructuring these elements into a 'new' assemblage (Lévi-Strauss 1962:28):

Son univers instrumental est clos, et la règle de son jeu est de toujours s'arranger avec les «moyens du bord», c'est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d'outils et de matériaux, hétéroclites au surplus, parce que la composition de l'ensemble n'est pas en rapport avec le projet du moment, ni d'ailleurs avec aucun projet particulier, mais est le résultat contingent de toutes les occasions qui se sont présentées de renouveler ou d'enrichir le stock, ou de l'entretenir avec les résidus de constructions et de destructions antérieures. (Lévi-Strauss 1962:27.)

As a *bricoleur* the playwright-director of kethoprak, loddrok and topeng pajegan prepare their performance by combining and recombining different elements of their repertory. This structured process of improvisation results in a ‘play schema’ that is unique in form and content, but at the same time resembles its predecessors.

Structuring of scenes: the play schema

I use the compound ‘play schema’ to refer to the kethoprak play as produced by the playwright. The word ‘schema’ literally means ‘proposed arrangement’. In other words, the ‘play schema’ is the proposed arrangement of the play. Javanese theatre makers I met often refer to the play schema as *dhapukan*, Javanese for ‘arrangement’ or ‘plan’. I came across the word ‘scene list’ in English-language literature about kethoprak (example given Hatley 1985a/b), but this translation only partly covers the meaning of *dhapukan*.

The playwright writes the play schema by hand on paper. It has a tabular form: it basically consists of a list of the scenes, a list of the names of the characters and a list of the different settings. It does not provide any dialogue.

Before a performance takes place the handwritten play schema circulates among the actors. If there is a blackboard available the dhalang draws up the structure of the play. The text is divided in three columns: *pakeliran*, *dhapukan* and *paraga* (see Illustration 2.1).

On the left side, the *pakeliran* is written down: a list of names of the different scenes that are to be enacted. *Pakeliran* is derived from the word *kelir*, which means screen. It literally translates as ‘what happens on screen’ and was originally used to describe a wayang kulit performance. The name of each scene refers to the location of the scene. In the centre, the *dhapukan* is written down. As mentioned above, *dhapukan* means ‘arrangement’ or ‘plan’ and is often used to refer to the play schema as a whole. In this context it can be translated as ‘casting’: a list of the characters. This list corresponds with the third of the three columns called *paraga*: a list of the names of the players who enact the characters of the second column. The word *paraga* literally means ‘personifier’ and can be translated as ‘actor’.

Court audiences, battles, clown interludes and love scenes make up the basic framework of the performance. The *pakeliran* shows this basic framework: it consists of standard scene types linked to a certain location. For example *Kraton*, ‘the Palace’ is the place of court scenes and *Taman*, ‘the Garden’ is the place of love scenes. Barbara Hatley describes the value of the play schema (which she calls ‘scene list’) as follows:

The scene list [...] constitutes a vital element in the production of performances, the one explicitly-stated, common reference point ordering the presentation of the show. This list is significant also not merely as a practical organizational tool but as an embodiment of basic structural principles of ketoprak form. For each list contains in differing order and combination, a store of scene types common to all performances. (Hatley 1985b:106.)

Each play schema provides insight into the way a performance can be or is likely to be arranged. It serves as the basis of the briefing (*penuangan*) that takes place before each performance.

Delivering the plot during the penuangan

Approximately an hour before performance, a so-called *penuangan* takes place: the playwright-director exchanges views with the actors about the play schema. The Indonesian word *penuangan* literally means ‘to cast in a mould’ and can roughly be translated as ‘briefing session’. The *penuangan* serves as structuring device for the actors. The playwright-director adds information to the play schema on the blackboard, which reveals the structure of the performance. He briefly explains the plot, scene by scene, in chronological order of the performance. His instructions are limited to an explanation of the plot and the points at which the actors have to enter and leave the stage. Storyline and character development receive little attention.

Common feature of the *penuangan* is its informal character. They take place in the ‘greenroom’, or at least a space used for dressing up, close to the stage.³ The actors sit around their *dhalang* listening to his résumé, while smoking and socialising with their colleagues. They eat the snacks served in little paper boxes offered by their

host family. At times the actors interrupt their playwright-director by asking questions about the plot. More often, however, they blurt out humorous remarks, which add to the lively atmosphere. The actors walk in and out, give a final touch to their make-up as well as their clothes and glance at the play schema on paper or blackboard if available.

Shaping and consulting the 'script in mind'

When the performance starts it is time for the actors to actively 'consult' their 'script in mind'. The 'script in mind' is the term I use for the invisible script that kethoprak players bear in mind, which helps them to make sense of the play schema and the instructions of their playwright-director. It is knowledge the actors have gained and shaped in practice.

Over the years, actors become acquainted with many plays. They 'collect' several plays they come across and 'store' bits and pieces of the content of these plays (*lakon*) in their head. They learn to differentiate between character types in terms of behaviour, movements, speech level and language code. With the help of the *penuangan* and play schema as mnemonic and structuring devices, the actors are able to recall specific characteristics of a *lakon* they bear in mind. The script in mind of an experienced actor is more complete than the one of his junior fellow.

Young actors often receive special treatment. Before the performance begins the *dhalang* gives them instructions backstage on their way of acting and dialogue (Singih Hadi Mintardja 1997:31). Playwright-directors explained to me that it is important to stimulate the young actors of a group to develop their improvisation skills. Senior actors hardly need any extra advice from their *dhalang* during performance as they can rely on their own experience on stage.

In former times most actors learned by doing. They imitated what they observed on stage and received instructions from their fellow actors. From the 1960s until the 1980s many actors travelled around Java with a kethoprak company. This 'shifting' kethoprak was called *kethoprak tobong*. The word *tobong* refers to the makeshift theatre buildings that were used by the professional kethoprak players. Young children started their kethoprak career by watching their parents performing on

³ Note that in case of a radio performance the *penuangan* takes place in the studio.

stage and then they began to participate themselves. It was considered important to learn to play in a flexible way, changing characters all the time (Budi Susanto 2000:132-3). Nowadays however, young players no longer grow up in a shifting kethoprak culture and opportunities to observe performances occur less. This has stimulated playwrights to write more detailed scripts. In practice though the actors tend to disregard scripts and still learn by doing. I will return to this in Chapter V.

The flexible character of the performance

During the performance the play schema on the blackboard is placed backstage. The playwright-director often wipes away the name of a scene that has just been finished. In this way, the appearance of the play schema keeps changing while the performance progresses. By the end of the performance the play schema has vanished into thin air. The actors sometimes glance at the blackboard to make sure when they have to give *acte de présence*. It is more likely though in practice that the dhalang gives signs from the wings to 'tell' the individual actor when it is his time to go on or off stage. Sometimes when an actor is almost due to play, the dhalang literally has to search for him. In this case, it is likely that he or she wandered off socialising elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

The actors improvise on the basis of their knowledge of the conventions that belong to the genre. They know how to interpret the behaviour of stock characters and the content of stock scenes. In other words, they know how to adjust to each role and scene type. Furthermore, the actors share a basic knowledge of each kethoprak play. The play schema helps them to provide a structured performance.

Kethoprak performances always vary in duration and content even if they are based on similar plays. In the first chapter of her dissertation, Barbara Hatley shows the similarities and differences of three performances based on the same lakon by three different kethoprak troupes. This comparison shows 'recognition of a standard sequence of scenes' (Hatley 1985a:86). She explains: 'variations of presentation [...] occur within the framework of a shared plot structure, a single story line' (Hatley 1985a:83). The kethoprak groups all present the play in their own way, but they do adhere to the same plot and the same framework of scenes.

Hatley (implicitly) makes a link between the shape of the script and the shape of the performance: ‘Many factors related to the contingencies of improvised, unscripted, flexibly organised performance intervene to affect the shape of the show’ (Hatley 1985a:105). In other words, in the absence of a detailed scenario it is very likely that the performance is subject to change all the time. As an example of intervening factors Hatley notes the late arrival of actors and the enthusiasm of improvising actors that call for a change of the play schema:

If some of the players are late arriving—if for example, they have transport difficulties, or the star actress of the troupe is involved in a television broadcast that night—the scene in which they first appear must be delayed and another section of the lakon played out beforehand. [...] sometimes the clowns, urged on by enthusiastic audience response, continue so long with their antics, or the participants in battle scenes take so many acrobatic tumbles, that later events must be raced through and pared down. What should have been the logical climax of the lakon gets obscured in the rush. (Hatley 1985a:105.)

Many different factors determine the final appearance of the performance. Due to circumstances certain parts of the lakon are skipped, prolonged or changed. The actors improvise according to the kethoprak ‘genre model’ that I described earlier in this chapter. At times, however, the participants of the production process (deliberately) disregard this genre model, as will become clear from my case studies.

As in other forms of popular theatre, the musicians of the gamelan orchestra or the *campursari* (Javanese-language pop music) orchestra play an important role in developments on stage. Apart from accompanying in an instrumental way they also add to the dialogue of the actors by commenting from the side. In his case study of *tarling* popular theatre from Cirebon (West-Java), anthropologist Cohen shows how the musicians actively participate in the play. Although this specific type of participation is not common in Yogyakarta, I often came across musicians commenting on the play. Cohen about *tarling*:

Such comments, referred to as *senggakan*, are thought to give life and spirit to performances. Frequently, one of the onstage musicians will stand up, grab a

microphone, and interact briefly with the main actors, becoming almost (but not quite) a full-fledged character in the play. (Cohen 1999a:149.)

In this way, musicians get involved in the dialogue on stage. At times this also happens to audience members who react to on-stage developments by shouting comments to the actors. The actors often answer these comments, making them part of the onstage dialogue. Furthermore, spectators often throw packets of cigarettes on stage with little notes attached to it. These notes most likely contain song requests and fan mail. While playing, the actors grab the notes from the floor and read them out aloud, adding them to their utterances.

The play schema and *penuangan* leave much room for improvisation. Playwright and actors create their performance on the basis of the play schema, *penuangan* and the conventions of standard characters and standard scenes. While acting on stage the actors are directly influenced by remarks from the musicians as well as by comments from their other spectators around.

In order to analyse the way different groups make use of their script, I observed several *kethoprak* performances of which I describe three here. They all took place in Yogyakarta and surroundings as part of a celebration of a rite of passage.

Kethoprak Sasrabahu in Nanggulan

The first performance took place on 24 February 2001 in the village of Nanggulan, situated approximately 20 kilometres west of the centre of Yogyakarta. It started at around 9:30 pm and lasted about six hours. This performance was held as fulfilment of a vow (*ngluwari ujar*). Hatley describes the vow as follows: 'The phenomenon of *kaul* ['vow'] represents a kind of spiritual 'bargain', in which one promises to hold a ritual, an outing or performance if a desired state of affairs comes about' (Hatley 1985a:344). In this case, a couple promised to celebrate the birth of their son with a *kethoprak* performance. Once their son had been circumcised on his 12th birthday they decided to fulfil their vow. They hired a mixed group of *kethoprak* players from Yogyakarta, the group *Sasrabahu* together with some famous players from PS Bayu.

Nano Asmarandana, a well-known playwright-director from Yogya and the founder of Sasrabahu, directed the play.

For this occasion, the family erected an iron framework in front of their home with a high wooden stage covered by a tarpaulin. A red cotton backdrop announced in colourful letters, manually cut out from paper, the occasion of the performance: ‘Celebration of the fulfilment of a vow, [geographical position] Jatisarono, Karangbaru Nanggulan’ (*Syukuran ngluwari ujar, Jatisarono Karangbaru Nanggulan*).

At around 8 pm the kethoprak players gather inside one room of the house to dress up. In this ‘greenroom’ they are served plenty of drinks and food. Meanwhile the director presents a play schema and delivers a *penuangan* of the play *Erlangga Narotama*. He encourages the players to make a lot of jokes, because, he explains, the family has asked for *kethoprak humor*. The family referred to a very popular TV programme at that time called *kethoprak humor*. (This programme is one of my case studies in Chapter III.) Meanwhile, members of the *campursari gamelan* orchestra accompanying the show get seated below the stage next to the house. As a prelude to the acting on stage the orchestra starts playing (see Illustration 2.2).

During most of the play Nano Asmarandana is standing next to the little stairs leading to the temporary stage giving directions to the actors. He focuses on the developments on stage. He signals to the actors when their time is due to go on or off stage. When necessary he interferes, making the actors finish their topic and suggesting a new topic. When he senses that the audience is losing interest he gives instructions for fights or jokes on stage.

Nano, known by his artist name Nano Asmarandana, was born in 1957 in the area of Ngampilan, Northwest of the Sultan’s Palace of Yogyakarta. As a child he became acquainted with kethoprak because his parents were professional kethoprak players. He started his career guarding the diesel generator (used to generate electricity for illumination of the stage) of a travelling kethoprak company. After that he worked as parking lot attendant for the troupe, cleaned the theatre and finally in 1973 he got his first job on stage as warrior (*bala kepruk*). As a young warrior Nano had to display his skills in martial arts during the popular fighting scenes of each kethoprak performance. At the time it was very common that young boys made their debut on stage in battle scenes.

Nano travelled all over Java, frequently changing from one group to another. In the 1980s, he settled down in Yogyakarta where he established his own *kethoprak ongkek* group and started to write scripts. *Kethoprak ongkek* is a simple, village-style form of kethoprak. Nano wrote *ongkek* scripts in a mixture of colloquial Javanese and Indonesian. In 1999 Nano established a small dhagelan group called Sasrabahu, which grew into a large kethoprak company. As senior member of Sasrabahu he wrote scripts, directed plays and performed on stage as well (personal communication with Nano Asmarandana 2001).

Many villagers, including children, come to witness the performance sitting en masse in the street. Also many food vendors come to sell their food. Once in a while a car or truck has to pass and everybody has to move aside. Because of amplification over loudspeakers the play is clearly audible throughout the neighbourhood. Both musicians and actors use microphones.

Around midnight the parents and the son are invited to come on stage and the comedian Sugati from the PS Bayu group divides the ritual rice dish *sega tumpeng*. After this ritual some hilarious stock routines follow enacted by Ki Sugati (see Illustration 2.3) and his nephew Bambang Rabies (the son of Sugati's late twin brother Sugito). I recognise some of their (practical) jokes from other performances I saw earlier this season. When the clown scene is finished many villagers go home without witnessing the end of the play. The performance lasts until about 3:30 am when only a small group of people remains.

Kethoprak RRI in Sambilegi

My second case study is the play called *Putri pembayun* (The eldest daughter) performed by the group Kethoprak Mataram RRI Nusantara II. This performance took place on Saturday night, 8 September 2001 in the village Sambilegi, Kabupaten Sleman. Mr Sunarto (retired head of the Regional Office of Information in Yogyakarta) organised and sponsored the performance to celebrate the inauguration of the new meeting hall of the village and to celebrate the 56th anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia.

The actors are assembled in the house of Sunarto. The host family welcomes them warmly with food and drinks. Seated on the floor of the neatly decorated living

room they start putting on make-up and changing their clothes. Playwright-director Sugiarto gives a 15-minute résumé of the lakon. After that Sunarto tells me that his hobby is kethoprak and that he is looking forward to play along this night. Then he studies the play schema, typed out by Sugiarto for this occasion.

While the actors are still preparing their performance at Sunarto's, the inauguration celebrations have already started at the meeting hall (*balai desa*) of the village. The head of the village gives a speech in which he welcomes the villagers who have gathered in and around the new meeting hall and expresses his gratitude to the dignitaries of the village who have sponsored the kethoprak performance. The gamelan orchestra of the RRI is playing popular songs.

About half an hour before the performance starts, Sunarto's driver brings the actors by van to the meeting hall of the village. They gather in a small room next to the stage floor. Once the welcome speeches have been delivered, the actors open with a court scene in the new meeting hall.

At the court of Mataram the ruler Panembahan Senapati Ingalaga asks his counsellors about developments in the rebellious region of Mangir. The plot that develops concerns the war between the kingdom of Mataram and the region of Mangir. 'Panembahan Senapati Ingalaga (r. c. 1584-1601) is described in Javanese chronicles as the founder of Mataram's imperial expansion' (Ricklefs 1993:40).

Playwright-director Sugiarto told me that he prefers a serious approach to the *lakon*. He makes studies of chronicles and enjoys reading the works of the Dutch historian Hermanus Johannes de Graaf (1899-1984), which have been published in Indonesian translation. In this case he used the book *Awal kebangkitan Mataram; Masa pemerintahan Senapati*, 'The rise of Mataram; The era of the reign of Senapati'.⁴

Sugiarto had provided a play schema in which he emphasised the dramatic plot rather than grotesque sidetracks. Since he had been working for a long time with the professional performers of the radio RRI Yogyakarta he knew what to expect of them. He even took part in the play himself relying on the skills of his group (personal communication with Sugiarto 2001).

⁴ Graaf 1987; Original Dutch title: *De regering van panembahan sénapati Ingalaga*, Verhandelingen van het KITLV no. 13, 1954.

The actors approach each topic seriously and work them out in detail. They use sophisticated Javanese and stick to the appropriate speech level of their character. In the scenes reserved for comedy (*dhagelan*) the clown servants come up with farce and jokes in colloquial Javanese.

Most of the spectators are seated right in front of the stage, sitting on straw mats in the meeting hall. They walk in and out, stretch their legs and buy snacks from the food vendors close by. At a certain point I had trouble focusing on the story as little children had started to surround me. This seemed like a good opportunity to ask them questions about the performance. Do they often watch a theatre performance? Yes, they often watch kethoprak, but as a boy assures me: 'This is boring, I prefer watching Dennis Bergkamp [Dutch soccer player]' and a little girl: 'I prefer dancing myself.' They leave me puzzled with all sorts of questions like 'Can you show me your traditional dance?' 'Do you have teletubbies in your country?' 'Does everybody there have "Barbie hair" like you?' But when the clowns appear on stage they run up to the front laughing out aloud and forget about the strange foreigner interested in kethoprak.

Kethoprak Campursari Jampi Stress

The group Jampi Stress performed at the compound of an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in the village of Mlangi, a few kilometres north of Yogyakarta. The show took place on 23 October 2001 and lasted about two hours. Like the first performance I described, playwright-director Nano Asmarandana directed the play.

The *pesantren* of Mlangi, located between dry paddy fields, commemorated the death of its beloved *kyai* (spiritual leader). Different performances took place each night over a week, attracting lots of people from the neighbourhood. A temporary stage had been erected where wayang, kethoprak, *campursari* (Javanese-language pop music) and *dangdut* (Indonesian-language pop music) were performed. Each nightly performance started with the delivery of Islamic prayers by an imam.

On the night of 23 October, the kethoprak players gather together in an open hall (*pendhapa*) where they are served some rice and drinks. While the actors start putting on their make-up, director Nano announces the casting and distributes the costumes that were each bundled separately. He gives a short *penuangan* of the play

Umarmaya Umarmadi. This lakon is derived from the Islamic epic cycle of Menak Amir Hamzah.

Nano Asmarandana described his penuangan session as an act of *ngewosi*. The verb *ngewosi* is derived from *wos*, which means ‘the main point, the essentials’. *Ngewosi* refers to the action of handing on the essentials to another person. Nano Asmarandana explained to me that he did not consider himself a playwright-director while working with the group Jampi Stress:

With Jampi Stress you cannot call me ‘playwright’. But yes, you can call me ‘the director’. I come up with the idea of a story, delivering it to the actors by using the method of *ngewosi*.⁵ (Personal communication with Nano Asmarandana 2001.)

By way of *ngewosi* the actors were informed quickly about their tasks on stage. There were hardly any other preparations before the performance took place. Nano Asmarandana did not prepare a play schema for this occasion but he just made a list with the casting.

While the players changed their clothes and put on make-up, more and more people surrounded the open stage where the campursari orchestra plays. With the help of a sound-system the musicians produce quite a lot of noise. Teenage girls wearing sexy dresses sang campursari while moving their bodies in a sensual way. They impress the predominantly male audience with their sweet voices and smooth movements. Their appearance and pelvic gyrations resemble those of dangdut singer-dancers performing at local fairs and festivities in Yogyakarta:

Heavily made-up bespangled female singers in body-hugging micro-mini’s, some as young as fourteen, perform to the backing of an all-male band. The singers are almost exclusively women from *kampungs*, their audience predominantly (90%) young, lower-class males. The singers’ stylised pelvic gyrations (*goyang pinggul*) are ritualised flirtations in a-matter-of-fact, even bored, manner. They periodically bend backwards, legs apart, pelvis thrust forward, as the audience cranes to view a sequinned g-string. (Sen and Hill 2000:175.)

⁵ Kalau di Jampi Stress saya tidak bisa disebut sebagai penulis naskah. Tetapi saya sebagai sutradara dan ide cerita, dengan menggunakan cara *ngewosi*.

Songs like ‘Mendem wedokan’ (Nuts about women) and ‘Sakit rindu’ (Pain of longing), which at that moment happen to be on the top of the hit lists, make the audience wild. Men in the first rows are jumping up and down shouting at the singers. Famous pop singer Didi Kempot adds to the lively atmosphere with his ‘Sewu Kutha’ (Thousand towns) and ‘Stasiun Balapan’ (Balapan station [the railway station in the centre of Solo]). The number of people dancing (*goyang-goyang*) increases. The wildly dancing men are shouting out louder and louder, pushing each other towards the stage and reaching out their hands towards the dancing girls. As the atmosphere turns increasingly ‘wild’ my assistant tells me: ‘Judging from their rude remarks and offensive behaviour these men are the “criminals” (*preman*) of Yogya’.

Apparently though, this ‘lively’ atmosphere is characteristic of regular Jampi Stress performances, which always start with a concert. Furthermore, it is comparable to performances of other popular theatre genres of which dangdut or campursari concerts form a part. For example, performances of the West Javanese popular theatre genre *tarling* start with a dangdut concert, which lasts three hours and mainly attracts men:

Large audiences of boys and young men dance around the stage, occasionally yelling obscene comments at the scantily clad female singers and fighting among themselves. [...] At midnight, the *dangdut* musicians and dedicated singers are replaced by the *tarling* crew. (Cohen 1999a:147.)

In the case of a Jampi Stress show, the kethoprak actors start the play at around eleven, after approximately two and a half hours of campursari and dangdut.

The players perform standard scenes on stage like the battle scene (*perang*), the court scene (*jejer*) and the clown scene (*dhagelan*). The story line, however, remains obscure. The focus seems to be on the endless jokes of experienced comedians and guest stars. Most jokes are about women and have a clear sexual connotation: perfect jokes for the titillated crowd. There is also a running gag about the buck teeth (*mrongos*) of the most popular player Marwoto. Members of the audience tend to repeat keywords from the jokes made on stage while adding their own comments. The actors in turn react to the remarks from the audience. In this way the dialogue turns into an endless exchange of jokes between actors and audience members.

In the first scene court soldiers do war training. They have to stand in line and are checked by their commander. They have to show their skills in pairs. All the action on stage looks like a chaotic mess: a parody of a well-trained army.

The second scene is located at the court of the King of Koristam who talks with his counsellors (*para punggawa*). This is clearly a parody of a standard court scene in regular kethoprak performances. As a rule, the King inquires about the situation in his country. But rather than politely answering this standard question the counsellors come up with other topics.

In the third scene the characters Umarmaya and Umarmadi mainly talk about each other's physical features. Furthermore, they start a discussion with a member of the technical crew who happens to be filming them with a video camera from the side. They pose for him in several different ways, even statically as if for a regular photo 'shoot'.

The fourth scene is the clown scene starring Marwoto and Ki Enthus Susmono, a famous wayang puppeteer from Tegal. They entertain the audience with vulgar jokes. All of the remarks contain sexual innuendo of the following kind: '[Women] can straighten what is bent and bend what is straight' (*bisa njejegke barang sing bengkong lan mbengkongke barang sing jejeg*).

Puppeteer Susmono has been scheduled to give a wayang performance on the following day. He is renowned as the 'crazy puppeteer' (*dhalang edan*) who gives 'mischievous' wayang performances (Curtis 2002:137).

After the midnight dhagelan, many people start going home. As a result the director decides to somehow speed up the last part of the story. He increases the tempo of the dialogues by quickly sending the actors on and off stage. Finally, he decides to finish the performance before there is an actual end to it.

Nano Asmarandana always tries to find a story that is suitable for the occasion. He calls his way of interpreting and dramatising stories one of *sembrana parikena*: raising questions by way of joking. He tries to fit traditional lakon into contemporary settings and is not afraid of social criticism.

While directing in the village Nanggulan, Nano Asmarandana seriously focused on the content of the story. He had to make sure that part of the dhagelan scene would be dedicated to the special ceremony to celebrate the fulfilment of the

vow. In the *pesantren* however, he did not focus on the story but was instead preoccupied with the overall campursari show, which had to be humorous and glamorous. He admits that a performance like *Umarmaya Umarmadi* did not succeed in bringing more than entertainment. In this case the audience got what it wanted: loud music, swaying hips and erotic jokes (personal communication with Nano Asmarandana 2001).

The performances I witnessed share a similar process of production. Once the professional actors have received instructions from their playwright-director they are able to improvise all night long. However, the approach of the playwright to the actors is different in each case.

In Nanggulan director Nano Asmarandana worked with a group that consisted of actors of two different groups. He felt obliged to stay in close contact with all the actors all night long, literally pushing them on stage when their time was due. In the *pesantren* of Mlangi he gave fewer instructions because he knew that his actors were able to work out the plot themselves. During the second performance in *Sambilegi* playwright-director Sugiarto played along, trusting the capacities of his group members.

In the first and second performance, the players improvised according to the play schema, the penugangan and individual instructions from their playwright. They presented the whole lakon from beginning to end. In the third performance, the lakon was awarded minor attention. The focus was on a never-ending stream of jokes without any connection to the plot.

The following section is about the production of a dhagelan radio play. I show how the playwright and actors make their script into performance, noting the similarities and differences with the kethoprak productions mentioned above.

Dhagelan Mataram radio in Yogyakarta

Since 1945 *dhagelan Mataram* has been broadcast by Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Nusantara II, the local branch of the state-owned Republic of Indonesia Radio. When I carried out my fieldwork (between 1999 and 2001) dhagelan was on the air

every Sunday from 12:10 to 1 pm. Depending on the length of the 12 o'clock news, which was relayed from Jakarta, the programme duration varied between 45 and 50 minutes. Recording of the programme took place on Saturday morning.

The core of the dhagelan group consisted of seven actors. A gamelan orchestra always accompanied them during performance. Playwright-director Ngabdul, a member of the RRI dhagelan Mataram group since 1975, was their leader. He was also part of the Kethoprak Mataram group of the RRI like most of the other members (see Chapter III).

Born in 1947 Ngabdul grew up in Tirtanirmala, a tiny village near Kasihan, southwest of Yogyakarta. He made a living as gamelan player. Attracted by the wayang wong and kethoprak artists he accompanied, Ngabdul decided to become an actor himself. He joined several theatre groups and specialised in the role of female clown servant (*emban*). In the beginning of the 1970s he worked for Komedi Bhayangkara, a dhagelan group affiliated with the local police department. This group had the task of informing the citizens of Yogyakarta about discipline in traffic. Furthermore, Ngabdul performed dhagelan Mataram with the comedians Basiyo and Junaedi, was part of the dhagelan group Sandiwara Jenaka KR and started working for the RRI in 1975 (personal communication with Ngabdul 2001).

The production of the script

Daily experiences inspire playwright-director Ngabdul to produce a dhagelan story for his radio troupe. He composes his script mixing older memories with newly encountered anecdotes. Not only his own experiences serve as a source of inspiration, also those of his friends. Other media like radio, newspaper and television are useful sources too. Stories composed by Ngabdul in 2000 were for example about a job promotion entitled *Ngenteni bayar* (Waiting for pay) and about a beauty salon entitled *Salon ayu* (Beauty salon).

Because Ngabdul is aware of the specific qualities of each of his actors, he casts them in a role that fits these individual qualities. Although the actors have different roles in each dhagelan play they never receive a specific character name, but keep their real-life names. This appears to be the case in other Javanese forms of

dhagelan as well, like in the situation comedies *Srimulat* (see Chapter III), *Obrolan Angkring* (Chapter IV) and *Sandiwara Jenaka KR* (Chapter IV).

The night before the performance takes place, Ngabdul writes down a short synopsis of the story he has created in his head. It always consists of one or two folio-sized pages. This synopsis serves as a starting point for the instructions he will give to the actors the next day (personal communication with Ngabdul 2001).

Apart from preparing the script and directing the play, Ngabdul also takes part in the performance itself. He acts and directs at the same time. How this process of acting and directing takes place becomes clear from the following sections. I describe a regular dhagelan performance illustrated by examples from a recording of the play *Waiting for pay*.

The instructions

The players gather at the RRI on Saturday at around 10 am. Playwright-director Ngabdul introduces the story. He tells about the plot of the play in general and gives more detailed information on certain parts of the story, which are considered important. But rather than addressing his talk to all of the players at once, Ngabdul tends to speak to them one by one. As a result some individual discussions arise between the director and one of the actors, although often interrupted by questions of the others.

The instruction session resembles the *penuangan* of a *kethoprak* performance. In both cases the playwright introduces the story to the actors. However, the main difference is that the dhagelan playwright does not convey his story to the whole group. He gives individual instructions to his group members. The actors hardly take any notice of the folio written by their director. They listen to his instructions and do not study the plot on paper. Ngabdul gives them all the freedom to fill in their own role:

I tell [the actor/actress] the content of the story and then, depending on his skills, he will deal in his own way with the problems of appearance. The RRI actors all have their own capability.⁶ (Personal communication with Ngabdul 2001.)

⁶ Saya memberi isi ceritanya, nanti masalah penampilan itu tergantung kemampuan si pemain itu. Sebab RRI kan semua mempunyai kemampuan sendiri-sendiri.

The instruction session is rather chaotic. Ngabdul and his fellow actors talk to each other continuously, chewing cakes and smoking cigarettes. The subject of their conversation is more likely the increase of the price of petrol or the television show of last night than the forthcoming performance. In between the small talk, Ngabdul delivers (parts of) his story.

The recording session

At around 10:45 am recording starts in the studio. The gamelan orchestra plays the opening tune of the programme. Radio presenter Slamet H.S. welcomes the listeners in polite Javanese. He uses standard phrases to address the audience:

Welcome listeners, wishing you a happy get together with the Dhagelan Mataram Family, which is now ready to present the story *Waiting for Pay* written by Mr Ngabdul. The group will be accompanied by the Gamelan orchestra of the Javanese Art Association of the RRI Yogyakarta.⁷

After the words of welcome, presenter Slamet introduces the leader of the orchestra, the actors, the programme director and the operator. Once the whole crew has been mentioned the orchestra resumes play. One of the actors opens with a soliloquy (*ngudarasa*).

Ngabdul considers this soliloquy an essential starting point of the performance. It is one of the main characteristics of a dhagelan performance. During the *ngudarasa*, the actor talks mainly about himself in an attempt to reconsider his life. After a few minutes alone on stage he is likely to be interrupted by his partner or a guest. They start a lively and humorous conversation and the plot develops further (personal communication with Ngabdul 2001).

Playwright-director Ngabdul often opens an RRI dhagelan play himself. In this way he makes sure that the performance starts in a structured way. In other words, by

⁷ Nuwun para miyarsa ngaturaken pambagya wilujeng, sugeng pepanggihan kaliyan Keluarga Dhagelan Mataram gabungan ingkeng sapunika sampun siyaga ngaturaken siaran dhagelan kanthi badhe ngaturaken cariyos *Ngenteni Bayar* karipta dening sedherek Ngabdul. Dipuniringi Karawitan Keluarga Kesenian Jawa RRI Yogyakarta.

taking full responsibility for the first part of the play Ngabdul has a comfortable 'steering' position with regard to the development of the plot.

The recording is done in one take. Occasionally, however, the programme director or the playwright-director asks for a short interruption. This happens for example when an actor has used inappropriate words or when one of the singers of the gamelan has forgotten the lyrics of his or her song.

The players make use of two standing microphones. They act behind these mikes making a lot of gestures. At times, they move and gesticulate in a grotesque way as if acting on stage in front of a large audience. While talking they have to stay close to their mike since it is not possible to drag it around. Ngabdul gives directions from the side; sometimes whispering his comments into the ear of one of the performers delivering his or her dialogue.

I steer the progress of the recording. If I feel something funny might come up, I pick out [one of the actors having a dialogue] and help him by providing him with 'spontaneous stuff'. Radio listeners do not know anyway that I am giving this or that suggestion to the actor in order to create a humorous point⁸ (Personal communication with Ngabdul 2001.)

Ngabdul allows his actors to improvise freely as long as they do not lose track and use proper Javanese: 'There is freedom to express feelings and fill in a dialogue, but this freedom has its limits, because we have to recall that this is a *tontonan*, 'performance'.⁹ He refers to the slogan of Harmoko, Minister of Information under Soeharto: 'performances give us guidance for living' (*tontonan menjadi tuntunan*). In other words:

So don't let us end up [saying things] that are not pleasant for a general public to listen to, like *porno* and things that affect ethics [*etika*], etiquette [*tatakrama*] and good manners [*unggah-ungguh*]. Because for Javanese people these kind of things are still crucial.¹⁰ (Personal communication with Ngabdul 2001.)

⁸ Saya menggiring perjalanan rekaman. Sepertinya kok ada hal yang lucu, lalu saya tarik, saya beri bahan spontanitas untuk melayani si pembicara. Kan kalau di radio dengan publik tidak tahu kalau pemain itu saya *sangoni* dengan ini-ini sehingga menjadi hal yang lucu.

⁹ Ngabdul uses 'tontonan' to describe his radio play, literally 'that which can be seen', 'spectacle'.

In order to create a fruitful performance one has to adhere to the rules of Javanese language and etiquette.

Sometimes Ngabdul has to remind the actors of the plot if they happen to get lost. 'I give all friends [actors] the main ingredients ("wos") of a fixed story but sometimes they get stuck while improvising. Sometimes, problems from home block their thoughts.' Apparently Ngabdul has to be continuously 'stand by'. He takes his task seriously, feeling responsible for the smooth development of the play. If his instructions from aside are not successfully picked up, he adopts a more radical approach to developments on stage:

The director has to observe his players well: 'What kind of acting is this? It's kind of boring and does not develop. How to make it develop again quickly?' I am what you call a 'chaser' (*tungka*).¹¹ For example, I'm a guest or something like that. I let the music announce my arrival so as to quickly turn the problem into something funny¹² (Personal communication with Ngabdul 2001.)

Here we see how Ngabdul 'chases' his group members, literally bringing them and the performance back on track.

The members of the gamelan orchestra also participate in the performance. They laugh about the actors' dialogues and react with their own remarks. In this way they play a shaping role: they help to develop the performance. In the play *Waiting for pay* (described in the next section) they even have a 'double' role: they accompany the actors like they regularly do, but at the same time they 'act' as campursari musicians who are part of the plot.

Every ten to fifteen minutes, one or two of the actors sing, accompanied by the gamelan. Most of the time, the lyrics of the songs are connected to the storyline. Sometimes, however, a song is an independent part of the performance and serves merely as a musical interlude to brighten up the show. The female singers of the

¹⁰ Jadi jangan sampai itu tidak enak didengar oleh orang umum, seperti porno, masalah menonjok etika, *tatakrama, unggah-ungguh*. Itu kalau orang Jawa itu masih tajam.

¹¹ The Javanese verb *ketungka* or *ditungka* can be translated as 'immediately followed by /chased by someone' (Pigeaud 1994). In this context Ngabdul refers to himself as 'the one who chases the other': as playwright he literally follows his actors on stage when they need help.

¹² Jadi sutradara harus mencermati perjalanannya permainan itu: 'Kok apa toh ini permainan kok *mboseni* kok kaya *ora* berkembang-berkembang. Inti terus lekas gimana bisa lekas berkembang?' Saya yang dinamakan *tungka* seperti ada tamu atau apa. Lalu saya komando dengan ilustrasi iringan saya datangkan, supaya lekas berkembang persoalannya menjadi kelucuan.

gamelan (*pesindhen*) as well as most of the dhagelan actresses bring their own song book in which they have written down the lines of a wide variety of songs. They keep this personal music volume up to date by adding songs when a new hit comes out.

Script and 'performance text': a comparison

The script entitled *Ngenteni Bayar* (*Waiting for pay*) consists of two typewritten pages on thin typing paper of folio size. The names of the actors are typed out on the first page. On the second page, the synopsis is typed in *staccato* telegram style (see Illustration 2.4). The story is divided into two parts, two locations:

- The house of Ngabdul (*Omah Ngabdul*)
- The house of Sardjono (*Omah Sardjono*)¹³

The actors improvised for approximately 45 minutes on the basis of this script and the instructions of their playwright-director.¹⁴ A transliteration of the performance text counts around 8,500 words.

The play *Waiting for pay* (*Ngenteni bayar*) can be summarised as follows:

Sardjono is about to celebrate his job promotion. He has organised a party at his home. The campursari orchestra that has been invited especially for the occasion, starts rehearsing at the house of group leader Ngabdul. Meanwhile Sardjono and his wife Tuminten are busy preparing their home for the festivities. Suddenly Poniman arrives with a letter for Sardjono. This letter contains an urgent message from Sardjono's boss: a colleague will be promoted instead of him. Apparently there has been a mistake in names: not Sardjono but Sadjono receives the new position. The campursari singers desperately wait to be paid by the furious Sardjono who has decided to cancel the party.

As an example of the way in which the actors improvise on the basis of the script and the instructions of their director Ngabdul, I present one section of the second part of

¹³ Spelling of the name Sardjono is according to the script.

¹⁴ Recording of *Waiting for pay* took place on 11 March 2000 and the programme was broadcast on Sunday afternoon 12 March 2000.

the script followed by the dialogue that appeared during the broadcasting session. The spelling is according to the original text.

[...] a guest arrives, P. Poniman, to give a letter to *Pak Sardjono*. [Sardjono] receives and reads it, it becomes clear from the letter that his promotion to the position of Head of the Sub-Department is cancelled. *Pak Sardjono* is angry, he gets mad at P. Poniman, how can this be wrong. How can a resolution [of the board] be wrong, they cannot even manage a simple typing task.

([...] ana dayoh teko P. Poniman, menehi layang kanggo Pak Sardjono. layang ditompo, diwoco jebul layang mbatalake anggone nampa jabatan Kasubsi. P.Sardjono nesu-nesu sing dinesoni P. Poniman. kok isa kleru, surat keputusan kok biso kleru. ming kon nyambut gawe ngetik wae kok biso kleru.)

In the following transcription of the performance text, three actors have a conversation: Sardjono (who receives the letter), Minten (Sardjono's wife) and Poniman (who brings the letter). Sardjono is just about to open his letter and read it out to his friends who have gathered in his house to celebrate his job promotion.

- Sardjono: As to let the guests know that now I have become the head of the department: (*pauses and calls out*) TA-DA!!!!¹⁵ (*pauses again; dhagelan crew starts laughing*).
- Minten: Hey, it's the mouth that produces the sound ta-da!
- Sardjono (*starts reading out aloud in Indonesian*): We regret Mister Sardjono, Sardjono Master of Arts, to let you know that there was a mistake in the resolution [of the board] about the promotion of the head of the department.
- Minten: What kind of mistake?
- Sardjono: (*in Indonesian*): The one who got a job promotion is in fact *Sadjono* (*in Javanese*). Hey, how is it possible (*in polite Javanese*), what is this about Poniman?
- Poniman: The meaning of the letter, that's what it is about.

¹⁵ Ngabdul makes the onomatopoeic sound 'regèdèg' of dragging something along the ground. In this context the Javanese word 'regèdèg' is comparable to the English exclamation 'ta-da'. Here it is meant to increase the tension of the moment and to introduce the dramatic announcement in the letter.

- Sardjono: (*loud, with angry voice*): Sadjono became Sardjono. What sort of typing is that? Just a simple typing task is too difficult for them!
- Minten: This is a big problem with those mistakes.
- Sardjono: They cannot even handle a simple typing task, and this is not even *kethoprak!* (*loud laughing sounds*). Oh, oh, this is ridiculous, and what about me now? (*talks to Poniman*). And what about you?
- Minten: (*screaming*): Stop keeping silent *Mas Poniman*. I'm embarrassed.
- Poniman: Why embarrassed?
- Minten: My husband and I are feeling embarrassed. My husband was convinced that he would become head of the department and then eh...head of the staff.
- Poniman: Yes, that is characteristic of the human being.
- (Sardjono: Ben para tamu padha ngerti nek aku kuwi saiki dadi kepala seksi. Regèdèg!!!!)
- Minten: Kok sing muni regèdèg kok cangkeme!
- Sardjono: *Maaf Pak Sardjono, Pak Dokterandus Sardjono bahwa SK pengangkatan kepala seksi ada kekeliruan.*
- Minten: *Kekeliruan pripun?*
- Sardjono: *Sebetulnya yang diangkat itu Bapak Sadjono. We lha kok kepriye iki kok pripun niki Mas Poniman?*
- Poniman: Suraosipun ngaten ta.
- Sardjono: Sadjono kok dadi Sarjono le ngetik kok piye kok? Ming ngetik wae kok yakleru walah!
- Minten: Niki perkara gedhe lho, kok nganggo klera-kleru lho.
- Sardjono: Ming ngetik wae kleru kok andekna nek karo kethoprak kok wa!! Wis wis edan banget iki aku njur kepriye iki. Niki sampeyan pripun niki?
- Minten: Sampeyan ki ora ming meneng mawon lho mas Poniman, kula niki kewirangan lho niki.
- Poniman: Kewirangan pripun ta?
- Minten: Kula kalih bojo kula niki rak njur kewirangan to niki, bojoku wis manteb banget dadi Kasi sesuk njur dadi, apa... Kepsta.
- Poniman: Ha enggih njuk gilok-gilok pun anggone menungsa.)

As Sardjono becomes more and more annoyed by the bad news from his employees a quarrel develops between him and the campursari singers who are waiting to get paid. The play ends with the desperate scream of campursari singer Yuningsih: 'I'm waiting to get paid!!!' (Aku ngenteni bayare!!!)

If we compare the script with the 'performance text' we see how the actors develop the telegram-style script into a more elaborate dialogue. They act in a very lively manner, quickly responding to each other's remarks. Constantly aware of their task as comedians they try to squeeze out as many jokes as possible.

Judging by the reactions in the studio the following moments can be noted as successful attempts to entertain the audience: Sardjana makes his group members laugh by using the strange word *ta-da* (*regèdèg*). By copying this remark his wife Tuminten scores. It is again Sardjana who makes the crowd laugh by a peculiar sentence in which he refers to the awkward position he suddenly finds himself: '[A]nd this is not even *kethoprak*.' Finally, it is the emotional outburst of Tuminten answered by Poniman in a contrastingly plain way that makes out for a hilarious moment.

During this section as quoted above there was no significant help or interference from playwright-director Ngabdul. He was observing from aside while walking up and down the studio. Although his main focus was on 'the outbursts of humour' (*ledakan-ledakan kelucuan*) he did not necessarily interfere when dialogues had a more serious undertone. In his triple function as playwright-director-actor he tended to leave his colleagues as much room for improvisation as possible.

If we look at the production process as a whole there are several script-like phenomena, apart from the on-stage interaction between the actors that enhance the development of the performance text. First, there is the folio script itself. Second, the playwright-director gives personal instructions during the group meeting. Third, the director gives instructions from the side during the performance. Lastly, the musicians' input helps to shape the story. With their jokes, they trigger extra remarks from the players.

Both script as a skeleton of scenes and the instruction session as an overview of the plot can be considered mnemonic and structuring devices. Instructions given during the performance as well as remarks from the musicians help to shape the

performance too. These triggering comments serve as stimulation for the actor to fully develop his creativity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I showed how the playwright-directors of kethoprak and dhagelan produce their script, how the story is delivered to the actors and how the actors use the script. The kethoprak playwright-director picks out a standard lakon from his repertory. By restructuring and revising the existing lakon he creates a new play schema. The dhagelan playwright-director gains inspiration from local history and/or stories, but does not use a specific lakon as a starting point.

The script, the *penuangan* and/or personal instructions are prerequisites for staging a play. The play schema (for a kethoprak play), the summary script (for dhagelan), the *penuangan* (for kethoprak) and the instruction session (for dhagelan) serve as mnemonic and structuring devices for the playwright and actors alike. Most of the actors never take notice of the actual play schema or summary script. The oral résumé of the playwright is sufficient for them to shape their ‘script in mind’. They can rely on their own experience as skilled improvisers. In the case of kethoprak, the actors stick to the set pattern of conventions associated with each character.

The conventions of the genre influence the shape of the entire production process of a kethoprak and a dhagelan play. The borders of a genre like kethoprak are far from clear-cut, however, as became clear from my case studies. Although the three performances I witnessed are produced on stage under the title ‘kethoprak’, they are quite different in style and presentation. This is because the director and actors do not necessarily follow the genre model. While conventions are at the root of each performance, the way they are applied changes from case to case.

In the first performance, the playwright and actors approach the script and the lakon in a conventional way. Their approach is conventional in the sense that they work out the whole story in detail. Moreover, the playwright maintains close contact with his players throughout the performance. Unconventional at times, however, is the way the actors tend to parody parts of the story.

The second performance has all the traits of the basic kethoprak model: the plot develops according to the play schema, scenes are worked out in detail and language is used according to speech levels.

The third performance is one big parody of the conventional kethoprak model. Since the aim of the show is to bring as much humour to the stage as possible, the actors work according to their initial goal. The whole show is about vulgar jokes and swinging hips, leaving no room for plot development.

In all of the case studies, we see how the actors are accustomed to improvising. The play schema, the summary script and the *penuangan* are the most important tools for actors to be able to start performing. During the performance, it is their script in mind, their knowledge of genre conventions and the input from either playwright or audience that helps them to be flexible ad-libbers on the spot.