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

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CHAPTER IV

Improvising the full script

In this chapter I compare three groups that use full scripts for their stage performances. I examine the way playwright-directors produce and use their scripts. What is the role of the full script within the production process and how do the performers approach the text?

I analyse a situation comedy broadcast by TVRI Yogyakarta called *Obrolan Angkring*. The producer of this programme also directs the play and provides a full script. The actors improvise around the plot while the shooting session takes place. They never learn the dialogues of the script by heart. Then I provide a description of the group Sandiwara Jenaka KR that shows social criticism in its performances based on full scripts. The actors have to rehearse their text thoroughly. Lastly, I examine a radio play, *Sandiwara radio daerah*, broadcast by RRI Yogyakarta. During the recording session the actors read the script aloud. There is little room for improvisation.

*The birth and background of Obrolan Angkring*¹

The openings tune reveals something about the content of the programme:

It's what we call the food stall

It's not for intellectual reasons but definitely something we long for, isn't it?

Students, pedicab drivers, artists, weirdoes²

We all come together to have fun

We talk about this and that like experts

¹ The programme title *Obrolan Angkring* can be translated as 'food-stall talk'. *Obrolan* means 'talk' or 'gossip'. *Angkring* or *angkringan* means 'food vendor', but it is also the name of the artefact that the food vendor uses to carry his food around. It consists of two baskets that are carried across the shoulder on a bamboo stick. In this context, however, the term is applied to a food stall on wheels that can be pushed forward. Another term for this last type of food stall is *warung gaul*, a 'trendy food stand'.

² The word *senèwen* (weird) combined with *seniman* (artists) becomes an alliterated pun. In this context, it means that the food stall is visited by all kinds of people including those with mental problems.

In the end gossiping about the neighbours' affairs
 Watch out not to be too reckless with your jokes
 If you say something wrong the police can capture you
 Please come ahead and buy snacks here
 Sit at the food stall, eat 'cat's rice' (*sega kucing*)³ and drink coffee
 Please go ahead, if you don't buy your snacks here you miss out⁴

In April 1997, TVRI Yogyakarta started broadcasting the Javanese situation comedy *Obrolan Angkring* (food-stall talk). This sit-com aimed to depict the atmosphere of Yogyakarta at a simple food stall. In the initial years, the programme was on television once or twice a month. From April 2000 onwards it was broadcast every Saturday night from 7 pm to 7:30 pm. After January 2005, it was still scheduled on a weekly basis in the late afternoon from 4:30 pm to 5 pm (see Illustration 4.1).

In each episode the main (stock) characters meet at the food stall: Wisben and his wife Dewi, the food vendor, Heri, the student, Jonet who always has trouble with his health, Yu Beruk the clever old woman and Dalijo, the guy who acts as a woman. According to playwright and director Kristiadi these characters symbolise the citizens of Yogyakarta.

Heri Dwirudi, who studied at the theatre department of the Indonesian Institute of Arts (ISI) from 1988 until his graduation in 1997, initiated the programme. He acted himself as the *Obrolan Angkring* student who visited the food stall frequently. While studying, he used to perform short humorous sketches with his theatre friends in front of the big Mall in Malioboro Street, the main shopping area of Yogyakarta. A traditional food stall covered by a tarpaulin cloth served as the decor of their play. It was located next to the entrance of the mall. Heri fell in love with the place:

How is it possible that people who don't know each other yet, intellectuals, tramps, street musicians are able to communicate very well once they meet at a food stall?
 Their backgrounds are very different, maybe the tramp has never met a student, but

³ Javanese slang for a small portion of rice wrapped in banana leaf and newspaper.

⁴ Warung angkring sebutane/ Ra ngintelek ning mesti dho dikangeni, apa hiya/Mahasiswa, tukang becak, seniman, senewen/ Kabeh kumpul dadi siji dhuh gayenge/ Ngobrol rana, ngobrol rene kaya ahli
 Wusanane ngrasani nggone tanggane/ Sing waspadha aja keladhuk sembrana/ Salah ngomong bisa dicidhuk polisi/ Ngga-mangga jajan wonten mriki/ Lenggah angkring, nyega kucing kalih ngopi/ Ngga-mangga sing ra jajan mesti rugi.

anyhow at the food stall... The food stall is a unique meeting place for sharing thoughts.⁵ (Personal communication with Heri Dwirudi 2000.)

For many people from Yogyakarta, the sidewalk food stall is an important part of their social life. They praise the informal atmosphere of the sidewalk food stall where simple food and hot drinks are served. As a youngster put it (4 March 2006) on the Gudegnet website that focuses on Yogyakarta [Jogja]:

As a citizen from Jogja who moved to Jakarta I really miss the atmosphere of Jogja especially that of the ‘trendy food stand’ alias food stall where there is ‘cat’s rice’, satay of intestines, [a range of] fried food, chicken leg, for sure hot ginger... don’t consider yourself as a ‘trendy person’ unless you have tried ‘cat’s rice’... love and peace dude.⁶ (Yadi 2006.)

This remark called for a response under the ‘Jogja discussion’ (*Diskusi Jogja*) section. For example on 28 March Alfred wrote the following:

[...] What is clear is that the *warung gaul* is an alternative for the people of Jogja to have ‘breakfast’ in the middle of the night when other food stalls are still closed⁷ (Alfred 2006).

Apparently, it was the special atmosphere of the food stall that attracted the Internet chatters in 2006, in the same way as it drew the attention of Heri Dwirudi approximately a decade earlier. Heri Dwirudi proposed his idea to make a new programme around the food stall to his former study friend Kristiadi who worked for TVRI Yogyakarta. Brainstorming sessions between the two friends finally resulted in the birth of *Obrolan Angkring*. In the beginning, Heri Dwirudi wrote the script whereas Kristiadi was the director of the group. After a while, however, they agreed

⁵ Kenapa di angkringan orang yang belum kenal, orang istilahnya intelektualisme di sini, orang gelandangan, orang pengamen, begitu kumpul di angkringan kenapa mereka bisa berdialog? Latar belakang sangat berbeda, mungkin si gelandangan tidak pernah ketemu dengan mahasiswa, tapi ngapain ketika di angkringan... Soal angkringan mempunyai kekuatan untuk bisa menyampaikan gagasan mereka.

⁶ [Spelling is according to the original text on the Internet] sebagai salah seorang warga jogja yg merantau ke jakarta ,saya sangat kangen dengan suasana jogja terlebih dg warung gaul alias angkringan disana ada nasi kucing sate usus, gorengan, ceker so pasti wedang jahe.....jangan ngaku wong gaul yen durung nyoba sego kucing.....love and peace dab

⁷ Yang jelas ‘warung gaul’ ni salah satu alternatif terakhir bagi masyarakat jogja buat ‘sarapan’ di

that Heri should dedicate himself to the acting and that Kristiadi would become the playwright-director.

As live interaction with an audience was part of their concept, they initially had to invite their own friends to come to the studio. They paid the bus tickets for their guests and offered them free drinks and snacks from the food stall. But once the citizens of Yogyakarta became acquainted with the programme they started coming of their own accord.

The playwright and his script

Raden Mas Kristiadi (henceforth Kristiadi) was born in Yogyakarta in 1966. At a young age Kristiadi received dancing lessons from his grandfather who was a court dancer. His uncle who was a dancer too, often invited him to watch performances of traditional dance and theatre. Kristiadi was very attracted to all aspects of these performances. During primary school he started writing kethoprak scripts, inspired by his uncle who worked as a playwright for the RRI. In high school he helped his uncle to prepare and direct kethoprak performances. From 1987 onwards he studied dance at the Institute of Arts in Yogyakarta. After graduating in 1993, he worked as a dancer and choreographer. In 1996 he started to work for TVRI as a developer and planner of programmes about Javanese performing arts (personal communication with Kristiadi 2000).

About a week before a shooting session took place, playwright-director Kristiadi prepared two scripts on his computer at TVRI. They were meant as the basis of two different episodes. Each script consisted of about six to ten pages that contained the dialogue between the characters. Occasionally the script opened with a short description of the properties on stage, but generally it just said: 'characters A and B are already there'. This meant that these two characters had to be seated at the food stall to open the stage dialogue. It was noted when a new character had to enter the stage, but there was no remark about the point a character had to leave. Kristiadi also did not provide any information about the character's mood.

Each *Obrolan Angkring* script consisted of three columns. The left side was marked as ‘video’, the middle as ‘audio’ and the right side as ‘explanation’ (*keterangan*). This is the standard format of a television-drama script. In the video column Kristiadi typed the words ‘theme song *obrolan angkring*’ followed by the remark ‘characters A and B are already there’. The audio column contained the whole dialogue. When a new character had to enter and join the conversation it was written down in the video column on the left. This information was relevant for the cameramen because it enabled them to anticipate on the developments on stage. Curiously, the ‘explanation’ column was always empty. This was probably due to the fact that Kristiadi had nothing to explain in this particular column: he simply used this type of script layout since it is a common script format in television circles (see Illustration 4.3).

The dialogues of an *Obrolan Angkring* script were for the greater part written in colloquial Javanese, alternating with high Javanese and Indonesian. Kristiadi explained that code switching helped to create a natural atmosphere, because many Javanese people switch language in this way. The language use of the script represented the language spoken in the street. But Kristiadi not only wanted to create ‘realistic’ dialogues. He also deliberately switched from one language to the other in order to stress (part of) a sentence and to give the dialogue more variety (personal communication with Kristiadi 2000).

Kristiadi always signed his scripts with *Plencing*, a nickname his TVRI colleagues once gave him. It is derived from the Javanese verb *plencang-plencing*, used to describe the activities of someone who is always going places and is difficult to track. Kristiadi indeed often left his office to find inspiration for his scripts on the street. He always carried a little notebook with him and wrote down notes of things happening around. Scripts always dwelled upon local issues and involved social criticism. When a performance was due, Kristiadi chose an up-to-date topic from his own notebook. His stories were very diverse, for example about pickpockets on the bus, about floods in the rainy season and about the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

The reading session

Rehearsing of the script always took place a few days before recording in the studio. The actors had to rehearse two scripts because two episodes were recorded during each shooting session. The members of the Obrolan Angkring group, their director Kristiadi and sometimes a guest player gathered in the house of the actress Yuningsih (called *Yu Beruk* in the sit-com). The atmosphere was relaxed. Yuningsih's children served tea and all kinds of homemade snacks (see Illustration 4.2).

Kristiadi handed out copies of the two scripts prepared at his office and the actors read through them together. The reading session lasted approximately one and a half hours. While reading through the script from beginning to end, some spelling mistakes were corrected as well as parts of the dialogue that were considered unclear or inappropriate. The actors freely discussed their ideas on the script, brainstorming about difficult parts and jokes to be added.

The actors read aloud quickly, sticking to the text as written in the script. After reading through the script twice, the players started improvising more and more around the text, laughing about each other's jokes and mistakes. They did not learn the text by heart: when the first rehearsal was finished Kristiadi took the scripts with him. It has to be noted that this kind of improvisation required a good understanding between the players. It was only after about a year of playing together and getting to know each other well, that the Obrolan Angkring group could do with no more than two short rehearsals in preparation of a performance. Kristiadi about the reading method he introduced:

I searched for a method. People suggested rehearsals like in theatre. We rehearsed and then [in the studio] 'cut!', 'repeat!', 'cut!' It was really tiring. Imagine we'd have to do that every week. Wouldn't they [the actors] spill all their energy just by rehearsing? Then I made a kind of reading method. I made a script, they read it and that was it. They identified themselves [with their roles], they knew the storyline. They acted independently. The script served as inspiration. That means that they [the actors] are also real artists. Not only the playwright is an artist and the players are just

robots. They are skilled artists with creative power.⁸ (Personal communication with Kristiadi 2000.)

As becomes clear from Kristiadi's words he found it important for his actors to have the freedom to improvise. According to Kristiadi an actor can be considered a 'real artist' if he or she is able to create his or her own text. Making use of a fixed play text is 'robot-like', artificial, uncreative, just repeating the voice of the playwright. In other words, being able to act means being able to improvise and does not mean reproducing a text.

Heri Dwirudi called the script a guideline (*pathokan*) or a lure (*pancingan*).⁹ By reading it, the actors could take out the main points of the plot and prepare themselves for improvisation. An advantage of the script was, according to Heri Dwirudi, the positive influence it could have on the structure of the performance and the freshness of the comedy:

The script is just a guideline for the reading session. You look for material and then the script also shapes the friends [the actors]. Because I'm aware of the fact that Wisben and Jonet are comedians. I'm worried... how can I prevent them from making jokes... let's say jokes that have just been used by DMB [the comedy group Dagelan Mataram Baru of which Wisben and Jonet were members too]. If they would use them here I wouldn't like it. So in the end the script continues to be considered important in order to entice the friends to, how could you say, be creative with their jokes.¹⁰ (Personal communication with Heri Dwirudi 2000.)

⁸ Saya mencari metode. Ada yang menawarkan latihan seperti teater. Latihan lalu 'cut', 'diulang ini', 'cut', capai sekali waktu itu. Bayangkan kalau itu seminggu sekali. Apakah mereka tidak hanya habis untuk latihan energi mereka? Lalu saya buat sebuah metode *reading*, hanya membaca. Saya membuat naskah, jadi mereka membaca, sudah. Mereka identifikasi, sudah tahu alur ceritanya. Mereka jalan sendiri. Artinya naskah itu sebagai pegangan dirinya, sebagai inspirasi. Artinya mereka juga menjadi seorang seniman. Bukan hanya penulis naskahnya yang seniman, lalu pelaku-pelakunya hanya sebagai robot. Mereka seorang seniman yang handel, yang punya kreativitas, yang punya daya cipta.

⁹ The word *pancingan* literally means 'a hook'.

¹⁰ Naskah ya cuma pathokan untuk reading. Mencari bahan terus berikutnya naskah ini juga yang membentuk teman-teman. Karena saya sadar betul ya, Wisben, Jonet itu seorang pelawak. Saya punya ketakutan...bagaimana saya bisa membatasi mereka supaya dhagelan tidak...ya istilahnya dhagelan yang habis dipakai DMB dipakai di sini, ini saya nggak suka. Makanya naskah akhirnya tetap dipentingkan untuk memancing teman-teman supaya bagaimana dengan dhagelannya ini...kreatif.

During the reading session there was ample room for the input of the players:

[...] Jonet has his own experience? How can we combine the experiences without erasing the theme we are presenting? We just stir it till it gets a definite shape.¹¹ Then how to make it funny? So what we focus on during the rehearsals [reading session] is how to catch these ideas.¹² (Personal communication with Heri Dwirudi 2000.)

Although Heri Dwirudi believed in a script as starting point of the improvisation process, he was convinced that the *Obrolan Angkring* members could do without a detailed script. However, the programme needed one because it functioned as tangible proof for the TVRI administration of the activities of the group (personal communication with Heri Dwirudi 2000).

The actors were happy with the reading method for practical reasons. They had many other jobs so that they could make a living. The obligation of just two reading sessions gave them freedom and flexibility. They often joined in *kethoprak* or *wayang wong* performances or acted as the master of ceremony during *rites de passage*. While acting as master of ceremonies they made use of their own 'stock of jokes'. These little books with personal collections of jokes served as a source for their presentation. In the production of an *Obrolan Angkring* episode, these booklets were useful too. The actors often decided in couples which jokes were appropriate to make just before shooting started (personal communication with Jonet). These books in themselves can be considered a kind of script.

A comparable joke collection, be it in a more sophisticated format, can be found in the archives of the Sundanese radio programme *Dongeng Plesetan* (Tales of Punning) of the private radio station Shinta Buana in Bandung (West Java). The so-called 'humour data bank' (*bank humor*) consists of numerous scripts with humorous anecdotes that are used for daily broadcasting. One of the main arguments for Shinta Buana to produce and use their *bank humor* is that it prevents them from repeating

¹¹ Heri Dwirudi uses a specific expression to explain the fact that different experiences have to be accommodated during the briefing session. He refers to the process in which tea gets strong in boiling water. He literally says: 'Just boiling it till it is strong (*kenthel*).'

¹² Jonet punya pengalaman sendiri? Bagaimana kita bisa menggabungkan pengalaman-pengalaman tanpa menggeser tema yang kita sodorkan? Cuman menggodhohnya saja supaya kenthel. *Terus lucune nggon endi?* Jadi memang yang diutamakan saat latihan bagaimana menampung gagasan itu.

jokes. Furthermore, it makes the programme ‘less dependent on the improvisatory qualities and mood of the actors’ (Jurriëns 2004:165).

The idea to make use of scripts in order to be funny and original is something Heri Dwirudi and Kristiadi from *Obrolan Angkring* had in mind too. Although they stimulated the actors to improvise, they wanted them to get to know the content of the script first. Whereas the comedians of *Obrolan Angkring* picked out an anecdote from their stock of jokes from time to time while improvising a performance, the radio makers of *Dongeng Plesetan* mainly based their show on scripts from their *bank humor* that they had prepared beforehand.

The performance and shooting

Recording of each performance took place in the studio in front of an audience. It lasted almost thirty minutes and was shot in one take. Usually, two different plays were recorded during one recording session with a short break in between. As an example, these are my impressions of the shooting session of the play entitled *Ora rumangsa beda* (Not feeling different) about the celebration of Chinese New Year:

TVRI Yogyakarta, 10 February 2000

When I arrive at the studio people are busy painting and decorating the stage. As a decor they have erected the façade of a colourful Chinese temple (see Illustration 4.4). The food stall is situated in front of the entrance gate of the temple. While the stage is being decorated, the players get together in the changing room. Especially for the ones who have to wear Chinese clothes (Jonet, Yu Beruk, Dalijo) dressing takes a while. Dewi is still reading through the script. She lives in Jakarta and rarely joins the reading sessions. The players take their time. In pairs they briefly discuss what the funny points could be in their dialogue. Approximately twenty minutes before shooting starts, ‘blocking’ is done: the programme director Heruwati and the producer Kristiadi give directions to the players where they should enter and leave the stage.

After these instructions, the actors take place on stage around the food stall. Some of them check the script for the last time. The audience is already seated on mats. Kris gives some last explanations to the players. Heri, Wisben and Dewi remain seated around the *angkringan* while the others leave the stage. Kris writes down on the back of his hand the approximate minute Jonet (7) and later on Dalijo and Yu Beruk (14) have to enter the stage.

Facing the audience he welcomes the people and invites them to laugh: 'Even if it's not really funny, but somebody already starts laughing, just don't feel ashamed and join in!' Small children are kindly requested to refrain from shouting and crying. Kristiadi's assistant Widhi hands out lottery numbers to the audience members for the *Obrolan Angkring* T-shirt contest.

Although shooting is scheduled at 13:00 hours it does not start until 14:00 hours. For a few minutes, the whole audience turns backwards to get a glimpse of the small television screen in the back of the studio viewing the video clip with the title song of the programme. When the video clip ends, the two cameramen in front of the stage start shooting the stage. Dewi, Wisben and Heri talk about Chinese New Year. Sometimes Kris gesticulates to the players, often reaching with his hands in the air as if asking for the jokes to rain down. When time has come he sends the other actors onto the stage.

Dalijo, Jonet and Yu Beruk are playing Chinese people from Jakarta. They are invited by their relatives from Yogyakarta to celebrate the Chinese New Year in the *klenheng*, the Chinese temple in Yogyakarta. They talk Javanese and Indonesian in a stereotypically Chinese way, pronouncing the l instead of an r.

It is becoming very hot in the studio because the air-conditioning system is out of order. A mother leaves the studio with her kids because they are too noisy. When the story is finished the spectators jump onto the stage to grab some tasty food from the food stall.

The food sharing at the very end of the performance was an integral part of the programme. What counted apparently was the symbolic idea of offering food free of charge to the common man and thus making him part of the event. Kristiadi called it *rebutan*, a 'struggle among rivals fighting over power-laden objects' (Pemberton 1994:18). He compared it to the *rebutan* that takes place in front of the Kraton at several festive occasions, during which the audience plunders the food offerings. Apparently the simple snacks and drinks at the food stall turned into 'power-laden objects' since the audience had the opportunity to grab them. At the very moment the play finished, the spectators ran up to the stage and got hold of 'cat's rice', fried food and bunches of banana. They grabbed as much as they could, triumphantly bringing it back to their seats where they started to eat.

Each shooting session took place under the supervision of playwright-director Kristiadi. He continuously followed the developments on stage. He did not allow moments of rest during the performance. According to him the play would get stuck if players spoke too slowly and formally with long pauses. Everything needed to be expressed with a certain speed in order to keep the joke-making players alert and the

audience awake. By steering from aside Kristiadi influenced the dialogues on stage (personal communication with Kristiadi 2000).

In the following sections I portray the shooting session of the episode *Sinden karaoke* (The karaoke divas). First, I present my own synopsis of the script, followed by a description of the last preparations that took place before the shooting session and, finally, I provide a chronological overview of the performance itself. This overview is interspersed with quotes from the stage. I draw a comparison between these quotes and the corresponding text, if present, from the original script. In this way, the relationship between script and performance text becomes visible.

TVRI Yogyakarta, 4 October 2001

A synopsis of the script:

The script *The karaoke divas* (Sinden¹³ karaoke) tells the story of a karaoke competition between divas. The contest takes place at the food stall. Masters of Ceremony Jonet and Dalijo have prepared everything to create a fancy show. The jury arrives consisting of two guest stars: Mrs Prapto who has catered the food and Anik Sunyahni who is a famous Javanese singer. Once the jury has received instructions from the masters of ceremony the participants arrive one by one. The first participant is Yu Beruk who presents herself as Atik Sunyahni. There is some confusion about her age and identity but finally she sings her karaoke song. Secondly, Heri enters the stage, disguised as a diva named Ari Sumahri. She brought her own karaoke VCD¹⁴ along with children's songs. Although the masters of ceremony are not happy with her choice, they allow her to sing a song for children. Finally, Wisben arrives dressed like a diva referring to herself as Bawuk Surani. She sings the song 'Sephia' of the Yogyaneese pop group Sheila on Seven.

The script provides some insight into the conditions on stage:

Near the food stall, two chairs and a table are already neatly put in place for the jury.

A television is set up too, a CD player including VCD and a microphone are ready to

¹³ *Sinden* is the spelling used by the playwright. The correct Javanese spelling is *sindhen*. *Sindhen* is short for *pesindhen* which means female singer. I have chosen for the translation 'diva' as it refers to 'a distinguished female singer' (Brown 1993).

use for karaoke. Food dishes are prepared like a wedding banquet. Jonet and Dalijo are already there. They are preparing *The karaoke divas* show.

(Di Angkringan sudah tertata rapih 2 buah kursi meja untuk yuri. Juga tertata sebuah televisi, sebuah CD player lengkap dengan VCD & mick-nya yang siap sewaktu-waktu untuk karaoke. Tertata juga hidangan secara prasmanan seperti mantenan. Jonet dan Dalijo sudah ada disitu. Mereka sedang mempersiapkan acara Sinden Karaoke.¹⁵)

In this episode we witness a karaoke competition. The original title *Sinden karaoke* shows that the karaoke competition is meant for *sindhén*. *Sindhén* (derived from *pesindhén*) are female singers in a gamelan orchestra. In this case, the *sindhén* are invited at the *Obrolan Angkring* food stall to sing karaoke style. The stage is fully equipped for the competition with television, VCD player and microphone.

The actors Dalijo and Jonet act as the masters of ceremony of the karaoke competition. They have to wear a suit for the occasion. Once they are dressed properly and have their faces brightened with make-up, they take their places on stage. With their script present, they discuss the possibilities of their lines. They mark specific points in their shared dialogue as suitable moments to add humorous anecdotes. They exchange jokes from their own stock of jokes that they consider suitable to add. When the shooting session is about to start Kristiadi gives his last instructions to Jonet and Dalijo who remain seated on stage.

As indicated in the script Jonet and Dalijo start the performance by talking about today's special occasion: the karaoke show for divas. Dalijo proudly presents the trophies that would be given to the winners. The trophies have a peculiar background: they have been donated by the President of Afghanistan, the President of the United States and by a Saudi Arabian millionaire named Osama bin Laden.¹⁶ Jonet, looking surprised, asks him:

You are organising a *sindhén karaoke* competition or you want to invite us to war?
They are all at war. Or has this been organised to get closer to one another?

¹⁴ This type of VCD (Video Compact Disc) is especially meant for karaoke. It provides background music and song lyrics.

¹⁵ Spelling of this section is according to the original script.

¹⁶ Note that this performance took place about three weeks after the 9-11 tragedy in New York.

(Mboten sampeyan niku nganakake lomba karaoke sindhen apa ngejak perang? Niki lagi dha perang. Napa niki *dalam rangka mengakrabkan?*)

Dalijo answers that it is good to give shape to a beautiful piece of art, even during times of difficulty.

Jonet starts to improvise on the theme of prizes. He says that he has some other presents available from different sponsors. He makes jokes about freezers and televisions but does not show the actual objects. These jokes are not part of the original script but come from Jonet's personal stock of jokes.

Dalijo in turn introduces another prize from a local sponsor. Before the performance he received instructions from the playwright-director that he has to promote the new sponsor of the programme. Dalijo takes a little bottle from the food stall and announces the brand: *Gladiator Sari Pace Mengkudu* ('Gladiator' extract of the Indian mulberry tree).¹⁷ This herbal medicine (*jamu*) is a remedy for all kinds of physical complaints. Jonet and Dalijo start reading the cover aloud and making humorous remarks about the potential of the medicine. Jonet for example, who has buckteeth, is a bit worried about a specific quality of the medicine:

Jonet: Oh dear, this is a bit tricky *Mas*.

Dalijo: What?

Jonet: [reading from the bottle:] 'Enhances growth of teeth and bones.'
Teeth, that's the problem!

(Jonet: Wah, niki sing rada repot niki *Mas*.)

Dalijo: Napa?

Jonet: *Menambah pertumbuhan gigi dan tulang, gigi sing berat.*)

While Jonet and Dalijo keep talking about the medicine the first guest player, Mrs Prapto, is brought in by pedicab. Dalijo shows the bottle with the herbal medicine once more to the audience shouting 'Don't forget!' (*Aja lali*) and he hurries to help Mrs Prapto out of the pedicab. She acts as a jury member in the competition. Mrs Prapto, in real life, has a catering service of traditional Javanese food. For this

¹⁷ *Pace mengkudu* or Indian mulberry is a tree: *Morinda citrifolia* L.

occasion, she provided food for the winners of the competition. Her nicely decorated food dishes are displayed on a table at the back of the stage.

Dalijo and Jonet ask Mrs Prapto many questions about her work and her food. Here several jokes, connected to either food or drink that Dalijo and Jonet have discussed beforehand turn out to be useful. An anecdote from Jonet:

Jonet: Yesterday there was a person who made a drink that you could not even drink.

Prapto: Why?

Jonet: Because that drink was really strong.

Dalijo: How come?

Jonet: It was a drink 'from the tank' [*Wedang sekoteng* is a warm and spicy drink made of ginger. In this case, however, the word *sekoteng* can also be interpreted as *saka teng*, 'from a tank'.]

(Jonet: Wingi ana wong nggawe wedang kuwi malah ora kena diombe

Prapto: Sebabe.

Jonet: Lho atos wedange punika Bu.

Dalijo: Kok isa.

Jonet: Lho wedang sekoteng.)

More word games like this follow until the next guest player arrives by pedicab: the popular Javanese *pesindhèn* Anik Sunyahni (see Illustration 4.5). She was born in a tiny village near Gondang in the regency of Sragen (northeast of Surakarta). Since the second half of the 1980s she often performed with famous dhalang. In the 1990s she became famous as *keroncong* and campursari singer. As a guest star of *Obrolan Angkring* she has to play a member of the jury together with Mrs Prapto.

The masters of ceremony welcome Anik Sunyahni warmly. They lead her to the special jury table where Mrs Prapto is waiting. While the women introduce themselves to each other the first participant of the competition appears: Yu Beruk. The masters of ceremony try to check if she has already registered for the competition. A lively dialogue develops between Dalijo, Jonet and Yu Beruk.

As an example of the way the initial text of the script gets transformed on stage I quote from the script, followed by the corresponding performance text. This

part of the script holds three ‘ingredients’ as extemporising sources: age, name and experience of the participant.

- Jonet: *Mas* Dalijo there is the first participant.
- Dalijo: Oh yes, are you taking part in the *sindhen* competition *Mbak?*
- Yu Beruk: Yes. I take part in the *sindhen* competition.
- Jonet: This is already quite an old *sindhen*. It doesn’t matter. We didn’t set an age limit. [subject 1: age]
What is your name *Mbah?* [subject 2: name]
- Yu Beruk: I’m a *sindhen* with a lot of experience *Mas*. I performed everywhere. [subject 3: experience]
- Jonet: Yes indeed. But I asked, what is your name?
- Yu Beruk: I’m Atik. Atik Sunyahni.
-
- (Jonet: *Mas* Dalijo, pesertane wis teka siji lho...
- Dalijo: Wo..iyo, ajeng tumut lomba sinden mbak
- Yu Beruk: Inggih...kula ajeng tumut lomba sinden.
- Jonet: Iki sinden ning wis tuwo. Ora apa-apa wong karang umur tidak dibatasi. Asmane sinten mbah?
- Yu Beruk: Kulo sinden sampun pengalaman lho mas. Kulo empun pajeng teng pundi-pundi kok...
- Jonet: Lha enggih. Kulo niku taken, jeneng sampeyan sinten?
- Yu Beruk: Kula Atik...Atik Sunyahni.¹⁸⁾

The following dialogue develops on stage. Note that the overall conversation is in the Javanese language, unless stated otherwise.

[Yu Beruk enters the stage on the left side and starts walking all the way to the right, looking downwards, without seeming to notice the other people on stage]

- Jonet: A participant... a participant!
- Dalijo: *Mbak! Mbak!* [claps his hands to get her attention] who are you looking for? Are you going to the market?

¹⁸

The spelling of this section is according to the original script.

- Yu Beruk: Going to the market dressed like this? [Indonesian] What an offending question!
- Jonet: Excuse me, what brings you here?
- Yu Beruk: The *sindhen* competition.
- Jonet: That doesn't matter, we don't have an age limit. So quite an old *sindhen* doesn't matter.
- Yu Beruk: Who says I'm old?
[...] [Here the dialogue dwells upon the age of Yu Beruk]
- (Jonet: Peserta...peserta!
- Dalijo: Mbak! Mbak! Madosi sinten, ajeng teng peken?
- Yu Beruk: Dandan kaya ngene kok neng pasar...Pertanyaannya kok menyakitkan!
- Jonet: Nuwun sewu, keperluanipun mriki, tindak mriki?
- Yu Beruk: Lomba *sindhen* punika.
- Jonet: Iki ora apa-apa wong ora dibatasi umur, dadi *sindhen* rada tuwa ora apa-apa.
- Yu Beruk: Sing omong tuwa kuwi sapa?)

What happens on stage physically appears to be just as important to the development of the text as the verbal expression itself. The way Yu Beruk is walking on stage triggers the others to question her intentions. This absentminded older woman cannot be expected to participate in a *sindhen* competition, or can she? Here we see the link with the subject of age.

The subjects of name and experience as mentioned in the script are developed on stage as follows:

- Jonet: [Indonesian:] What is your name *Mbak*?
- Yu Beruk: [Indonesian:] My name, wait a moment...
[Yu Beruk sits down on the bench in front of the food stall. She takes some big books out of her bag]
- Jonet: You brought a lot of books!
- Yu Beruk: This is the text of the *sindhen* to memorise.
- Jonet: So much text!
- Yu Beruk: In a full night's performance I get through the lot.
- Dalijo: So when it was over, you massaged your lips.

[Yu Beruk starts powdering her cheeks]

Jonet: This white powder is old fashioned. Lime mortar. [Indonesian:] What is your name *Mbak*? [Javanese:] Name, name?

[Yu Beruk whispers something into Jonet's ear and he starts laughing]

Dalijo: What?

Jonet: She does not make a sound yet. [Indonesian:] What is your name?

Dalijo: Her name is chicken. [The Javanese word *pitik* rhymes with the name Atik]

Jonet: Say it clearly!

Yu Beruk: [Indonesian:] Everybody already knows my name, [Javanese:] you read it in the magazines.

Jonet: Magazines?

Yu Beruk: You often read magazines, do you?

Jonet: Often. Health magazines, sports magazines... And you, which one? Must be the agricultural magazine.

Jonet: [Indonesian:] Your name?

Yu Beruk: Atik.

(Jonet: *Namanya siapa Mbak?*)

Yu Beruk: *Nama saya, sebentar...*

Jonet: Ngasta buku okeh banget!

Yu Beruk: Iki apalan sindhen.

Jonet: Iki apalan sindhen ngantos semanten niki.

Yu Beruk: Nek tanggapan sewengi kuwi tak unekake kabeh kok.

Dalijo: Dadi tanggapane rampung pijet lambe.

Jonet: Iki pupure antik iki.

Bubukan gamping, *namanya siapa Mbak?* Asma-asma?

Dalijo: Sapa-sapa?

Jonet: Durung muni. *Namanya siapa?*

Dalijo: Jenenge pitik.

Jonet: Sing cetha ngana lho!

Yu Beruk: Wong *semua orang sudah tahu nama saya kok*, majalah-majalah kuwi dha maca.

Jonet: We majalah?

Yu Beruk: Kowe sok maca majalah ora?

- Jonet: Kerep, majalah *kesehatan*, majalah olah raga, panjenengan majalah apa? Pertanian ki mesthi?
- Jonet: *Namanya?*
- Yu Beruk: Atik.)

The subject of name as written in the script received attention during the performance by the fact that Yu Beruk ignored it. She did not want to give her name and dwelled on her experience as a *sindhen*. The masters of ceremony Dalijo and Jonet had no choice but to follow her remarks. The main ingredients of the script (age, name, experience) all came back on stage, be it in a slightly transformed way. Like in the case of kethoprak humor (Chapter III), the players improvised jokes based on phonological parallelism such as rhyme (Jonet turns female name Atik into *pitik*, chicken) and punning (Jonet's anecdote about *wedang sekoteng*). The anecdote came from Jonet's personal stock of jokes.

After Yu Beruk makes her entrance on stage two other participants follow. The three divas appear to have almost identical names, which sound like the name of guest star Anik Sunyahni: Atik Sunyahni (Yu Beruk), Ari Sumahri (Heri) and Bawuk Surani (Wisben). The audience reacts with great enthusiasm when they see Heri and Wisben neatly dressed like women. Only their big shoes and hairy upper lips betray their masculinity.

One by one the divas provide lousy karaoke performances, moving strangely and hardly following any of the karaoke text that appears on screen. The jury, however, praises their show and rewards them all with the same amount of money.

Most dialogues of the performance can be traced back to the original script. Some parts though had no clear link to the script, but originated from the personal stock of jokes of an actor. For example when Wisben entered the stage to register as a participant of the karaoke competition he asked: 'A bike is safe here isn't it?' With this question a 'new' topic was born that was not part of the initial script. Wisben introduced the topics 'bike' (*rodha loro*) and 'car' (*mobil*). All the other characters gave their opinion, improvising far from the plot.

- Wisben: A bike is safe here, isn't?
- Jonet: You brought a bike, did you?
- Wisben: It isn't safe here, is it?

Jonet: It is safe!
Wisben: And a car is safe here too, right?
Jonet: Yes, it is safe. Here is the watchman.
Dalijo: You brought a car?
Yu Beruk: Seems better to bring it here.
Anik Sunyahni: Rather than running a risk [of it being stolen].
Dalijo: You brought a car?
Wisben: What did I bring?
Anik Sunyahni: Well, that car, isn't it?
Wisben: Who says I brought a car?
Jonet: You just asked about it and we said it's safe.
Wisben: So a bike is safe?
Jonet: Yes!
Wisben: Oh, OK then.
Yu Beruk: But, just bring it here.
Wisben: What?
Yu Beruk: The car and...
Wisben: Whose car?
Dalijo: You brought a vehicle or what?
Wisben: I walked of course, till my two sandals got worn out.

(Wisben: Nek rodha loro aman nggih?
Jonet: Lho ngasta rodha loro ta?
Wisben: Mboten aman ta nggih?
Jonet: Aman!
Wisben: Mobil-mobil nggih aman ta nggih?
Jonet: Aman, riki keamanane.
Dalijo: Sampeyan mbekta mobil?
Yu Beruk: Mbok digawa mreng wae.
Anik Sunyahni: Mbangane resiko.
Dalijo: Sampeyan nggawa mobil?
Wisben: Napane sing digawa?
Anik Sunyahni: Lha ya mobile ta...
Wisben: Sing kandha sapa nggawa mobil?
Jonet: Lho mau takon jarene mobil aman.
Wisben: Rodha loro ya aman.

Jonet: Aman.
 Wisben: O.... nggih pun.
 Yu Beruk: Ning gawa rene wae mobile.
 Wisben: Napane?
 Yu Beruk: Mobile karo...
 Wisben: Mobile sinten...?
 Dalijo: Sampeyan niku nggawa kendharaan napa?
 Wisben: Wong mlaku kok ya! Nganti sandhale entek loro ngene.)

There seems to be a humorous connection here between the word ‘bike’ (*rodha loro*, literally ‘two rubber tyres’) and the word ‘sandal’ (*sandhal*). Wisben’s ‘two sandals’ (*sandhale loro*) that got worn out are probably made from rubber tyres (*rodha*) as is generally the case with poor people.

Quite similar humorous dialogues are regularly brought onto the stage by Javanese comedians. In his book about the comedy group Srimulat, writer Janarto refers to this type of dialogue as ‘a *dhagelan Mataram* dialogue.’ This is ‘a dialogue with bent logics or a distorted line of reasoning. Normally, the joke develops out of misunderstanding someone or misunderstanding the words of another person, which leads to a dialogue with a weird atmosphere’ (Herry Gendut Janarto 1999:38). Herry Gendut Janarto provides the following example of a *dhagelan Mataram* dialogue that bears a lot of resemblance to that of Wisben:

There is a young man visiting his girlfriend’s home. After sitting for a while in the reception room he asks his girlfriend in a serious tone:

- *Dik*, if I bring my bike here it’s safe, right?
- Yes it’s safe here. There are no thieves. But it can’t do any harm to you, put your bike inside. You never know.
- Yes, in case I bring it.
- So did you bring your bike or not?
- I only asked if a bike is safe here or not. I didn’t say I brought a bike.
- OK, if you don’t have one just say so. I was surprised that every time you passed by you were always ringing your bell: ‘Ring, ring’! Apparently you just walked and brought along a bicycle bell.

- Hey, who says that I don't have a bike? It's just that I'm afraid to get on my bike, because if I get on it I'm afraid to fall off again.¹⁹

That having a bike is a precious thing becomes clear from the two anecdotes above. I am aware that variations on this theme are endless and by no means limited to the realm of Javanese dhagelan. Wisben picked up this anecdote one day, saved it in his stock of jokes and presented it again because he considered it suitable for the occasion.

The editing process and broadcasting

Editing usually took place under the supervision of the playwright-director immediately after the shooting session. The main elements that had to be added to the one-take shot were the title of the episode, the title song and the credit titles. Occasionally, small parts of the shoot were censored. For example, vulgar words were faded out in sound. When the actors had exceeded the time limits some small parts were cut. In such cases, the editor and the playwright-director decided together which part or parts had to be cut. The production team of *Obrolan Angkring* always tried to keep within the time limits, because this type of editing was considered time consuming and expensive.

Towards the end of *The karaoke divas* shooting session, Kristiadi noticed that they were behind schedule. He tried to make his actors aware of this problem by signalling from aside that they had to hurry up. The time problem could only partly be resolved and the one-take shot turned out to be a few minutes too long for the available broadcasting time. It was decided to cut at the very end of the show. As a result the spectators at home who watched the Saturday night broadcasting of *Obrolan Angkring* missed some of the jury's comments.

¹⁹ Ada seorang pemuda bertamu ke rumah pacarnya. Setelah duduk beberapa saat di ruang tamu, pemuda tersebut dengan nada serius bertanya kepada sang pacar: Dik, kalau bawa sepeda di sini aman kan?/ O di sini aman, tidak ada pencuri. Tapi tidak ada salahnya, sepeda Mas dimasukkan ke dalam. Eh, siapa tahu /Ya kalau bawa/ Ya memangnya Mas bawa sepeda atau tidak?/ Saya kan cuma tanya kalau bawa sepeda di sini aman atau tidak. Saya kan tidak bilang bawa sepeda!/ Sudahlah, kalau memang tidak punya bilang saja tidak punya. Saya juga heran, setiap kali Mas lewat sini selalu menyembunyikan bel sepeda...kring...kring! Eh, ternyata Mas cuma jalan kaki dan cuma bawa bel sepeda saja. /He, siapa bilang saya tidak punya sepeda. Saya cuma takut naik sepeda, sebab kalau saya naik sepeda tidak bisa turun lagi.

Outside the studio

Although the Obrolan Angkring group usually performed in the TVRI studio, it sometimes received an invitation to play at special events like fairs, art manifestations or celebrations on the occasion of rites of passage. For example, on 19 February 2000, Obrolan Angkring performed at the Sardjito hospital, which was celebrating its 18th anniversary. The actors improvised for about half an hour on a half-page plot provided by Kristiadi on happenings in the hospital. In this case, they did not have a reading session beforehand but just quickly ‘scanned’ the short plot. Kristiadi gave some individual instructions to the players.

The actors often tended to work without a script and without reading sessions when they had to perform outside of the studio. In this way, they could save time and money. Kristiadi’s role as director was limited. The content of the story allowed the actors to do without much preparation. Their goal was to brighten up a show with their jokes rather than bring a complete story to the stage. Here we see that the actors worked as stand up comedians of sorts. Their little books with their personal stock of jokes came in handy again. They did not perform as a group as much as they did in the studio, but more as individuals. People, however, referred to them as ‘the food stall community’ (*komunitas angkringan*).

Wisben and Jonet often worked as masters of ceremony at several kinds of festive events. With their humorous speeches, rhymes, riddles and songs they communicated with the audience. They offered prizes to those spectators who could answer silly questions or to those who allowed themselves to be fooled on stage. Yu Beruk and Dalijo delivered humorous skits, commenting on the event they were part of. Often they also performed in a more serious way. Yu Beruk sang a few Javanese songs from her extensive repertoire and Dalijo performed a traditional dance.

Another representative of Javanese theatre from Yogyakarta is the group Sandiwara Jenaka KR. Like Obrolan Angkring, this group became famous through the local television station TVRI Yogyakarta.

Sandiwara Jenaka KR

Sandiwara Jenaka KR (henceforth referred to as SJKR) can be translated as ‘witty theatre of (the local periodical) *Kedaulatan Rakyat*’ (KR). The Yogyakarta-based newspaper KR was the group’s sponsor. Several members worked as journalists for the newspaper. SJKR used to be a very popular theatre group in the 1980s under the leadership of playwright-director Handung Kus Sudyarsana. It produced stage plays and appeared on TVRI Yogyakarta weekly until 1992. As a product of the New Order, SJKR plays were characterised by their subtle way of criticising society. In order to deal with political repression, one had to be creative (Indra Tranggono 2001c: 11).

In October 2001, members of the SJKR group gathered for a reunion. In mid-October they had a shooting session at the studio of the TVRI and on 30 October they performed at the theatre Purna Budaya. It is this reunion group that became one of my case studies. The reunion group consisted of a mixture of old and new members.

The playwright and the script

Playwright and director Bondan Nusantara adapted and revised a play by his predecessor Handung Kus Sudyarsana called *Politikus menjelang pemilu* (The Politician before the Elections), which was performed on 30 October 2001 as *Yang terhormat anggota dewan* (The honourable councillor).

Bondan Nusantara, who was born in 1953, had always been inspired by the political turmoil of his country. His personal history somehow explains his desire to write about politics. His mother was a professional kethoprak player and his father worked at a cinema. After the coup in 1965, his mother was accused being involved with the communist party and was sent to jail for eight years.

From 1970 onwards Bondan Nusantara started playing kethoprak. Over a period of ten years, he became acquainted with a wide range of different kethoprak styles from different parts of Java. Senior kethoprak playwrights Handung Kus Sudyarsana and Widayat from Yogyakarta and Siswondo from Tulungagung (East Java) taught Bondan Nusantara important elements of their profession. In the 1980s, he decided to specialise in writing himself. He combined working as journalist for the

periodical *Kedaulatan Rakyat* with writing scripts for several kethoprak groups. In the meantime, he was also part of SJKR group and wrote scripts for television and stage performances under the leadership of Handung Kus Sudyarsana.

Bondan Nusantara established his own theatre group called Dhagelan Mataram Baru (DMB) in the 1990s. With humorous performances about serious socio-political problems, DMB became very popular in Yogyakarta.

Bondan Nusantara described himself as a Javanese playwright who worked according to Western dramaturgy:

When I write a script, I use a method indeed, let's say a model that is usually used in modern theatre. So there is an exposition, followed by a conflict, a climax and sometimes an anti-climax. Meanwhile, older kethoprak uses a structuring pattern like *wayang kulit*. I don't, I use a dramaturgy pattern of Western dramaturgy. Why do I do that? Because I see that pattern is much more suitable for contemporary kethoprak. That's why a relatively short performance time of one and a half to two hours is already enough.²⁰(Personal communication with Bondan Nusantara 1999).

Bondan Nusantara was convinced that he would attract and keep a broader audience if the performance had a clear structure and did not last more than two hours. He preferred to provide a full script for each performance. The use of a script prevented the actors from allowing the story get out of hand. There was no room for endless elaboration. This helped to create a well-structured performance.

I believe that nowadays we are used to see performances, news shows on television or events that are broadcast by television, that are structured neatly. If a script is not fully fledged I'm afraid that talking will be longwinded. [...] If we use a script, at least we can control the rhythm of the performance, the cadence of the performance. We can also check if the actor talks the way it was meant by the director. (...) If it is

²⁰ Saya, kalau menulis naskah memang menggunakan metode, katakanlah model yang biasa digunakan oleh teater modern. Jadi ada pemaparan, kemudian penggawatan, konflik, klimaks, kadang-kadang anti-klimaks. Sementara kalau kethoprak yang lama itu menggunakan pola penyusunan seperti wayang kulit. Kalau saya tidak, saya menggunakan pola dramaturgi, dramaturgi Barat. Karena kenapa begitu? Karena saya melihat bahwa pola itu lebih cocok digunakan oleh kethoprak untuk masa kini. Sehingga waktu pertunjukan yang agak pendek, satu setengah sampai dua jam, sudah cukup.

improvised it can be misunderstood and [the dialogue] might take another direction.²¹
(Personal communication with Bondan Nusantara in 1999.)

Using a script, Bondan Nusantara could control the words of his actors. He took full responsibility for his play texts. In cases where spectators disagreed with the contents of the performance, he was the one to be blamed. Although the political situation improved after Soeharto resigned in 1998, freedom of expression remained limited in Indonesia and theatre productions could still get banned (personal communications with Bondan Nusantara in 1999 and 2001).

The honourable councillor script consists of 22 A4-sized pages. Each scene opens with a short description of the setting, the time and the atmosphere followed by an ‘explanation’ (*katrangan*) of the present situation on stage. For example, Scene Two entitled ‘The reception room of Mr Hasmi’s house’ (*Kamar tamu omahe Pak Hasmi*), opens as follows:

Setting: Furniture pieces all nice, classical, antique
 Time: Afternoon
 Atmosphere: Tense
 Explanation: Mr Hasmi enters guest room, takes a cigarette. Wariyun and Marsidah [guests] follow into the room. Mr Hasmi sits down in a chair. Wariyun and Marsidah sit down too.

(Setting: Perabote sarwa apik, klasik, antik
 Waktu: Awan
 Swasana: Tegang
 Katrangan: Pak Hasmi mlebu kamar tamu, njupuk rokok. Wariyun lan Marsidah nututi mlebu kamar. Pak Hasmi lungguh kursi. Wariyun lan Marsidah uga lungguh.)

²¹ Saya beranggapan bahwa sekarang ini kita sudah biasa melihat pertunjukan, berita di televisi atau peristiwa-peristiwa yang diangkat oleh televisi itu, tertata rapi. Kalau naskah itu tidak *full play* saya khawatir pembicaraannya akan menjadi berpanjang lebar. (...) Kalau kita pakai naskah itu minimal kita bisa mengontrol ritme pertunjukan, irama pertunjukan. Kan juga bisa mengontrol apakah pemain itu bicara seperti yang dimaksudkan oleh sutradara. (...) Kalau diimprovisasi bisa salah tangkap, dan mungkin akan arahnya lain.

The lines of the characters are numbered and often preceded by an instruction about the characters' state of mind like 'relaxed' (*santai*), 'angry' (*mangkel*) or a specific action the character has to fulfil like 'lighting cigarette' (*nyumed rokok*) and 'while typing' (*karo ngetik*) (see Illustration 4.6).

Bondan Nusantara used second-hand paper to print the script. Because of this reason part of the back of the script-pages was filled with kethoprak dialogues that belonged to some of his other scripts.

The rehearsals and the performance

During the production process Bondan Nusantara stressed the need for discipline. He asked his players to participate very actively and seriously from the beginning until the end. Dramatis personae outside the Javanese wayang and kethoprak realm asked for conventions and speech styles unknown to the regular kethoprak performer. This meant that some of the actors with a kethoprak background had to change their attitude towards the text. Rather than improvising most of the dialogues, they had to learn the script by heart (personal communication with Bondan Nusantara 1999).

During the first rehearsals all the production members read through the script together, discussing possible corrections and changes to the text. When consensus was reached, the actual rehearsals started. Initially, the director left little room for improvisation, continually reminding the actors that they had to keep within the time limits. When the actors mastered their text, however, the director allowed them to extend their dialogues step by step during the rehearsals. The more experienced the actors, the more they tended to take their freedom to change the original text. Bondan Nusantara tolerated this creative process, but he also made sure that the content of every dialogue was still similar to the content of the initial dialogue:

Indeed there is the idea that the use of a script restricts the actor. Yes, I admit that. But it also does not mean that the actor is not allowed to develop [the text] himself. He is allowed to change the original sentence as long as it does not deviate from the main big theme that I wish to present, the mission, the content I give to the audience. [...] But [these changes] are only allowed during the rehearsals. On stage, I strongly

forbid changes. Why? Because I just don't want that the other players are surprised.²²
(Personal communication with Bondan Nusantara 1999.)

Actress Marsidah who was already a member of SJKR in the 1980s enjoyed rehearsing with the old and the new players of the group. As a prominent kethoprak player and skilled improviser, she agreed with the strategy of the director to rehearse frequently: 'Every rehearsal I always come. The play pattern of [Sandiwara] Jenaka KR asks for rehearsals in order to create fresh and intelligent comedy' (Job and Cil 2001:10).

As a rule Bondan Nusantara did not allow his actors to make new changes during the performance. In case of emergency, if one of the actors did not remember his or her text a prompt was ready to assist. When I witnessed the final performance though, some parts turned out to be very different from both the script and the rehearsals. The moment guest stars appeared on stage, unexpected dialogues were created.

The main guest stars were Marwoto and Hargi Sundari. Marwoto was senior member of SJKR. He often appeared on local and national television stations (see Chapter III on kethoprak humor) and was undoubtedly one of the most popular comedians around the turn of the 20th century. Hargi Sundari was a well-known actress from the Kethoprak Mataram RRI group (see last chapter on Kethoprak Mataram RRI) and the Dhagelan Mataram Baru group. It is interesting to note that in his effort to plan the whole performance from A to Z, Bondan Nusantara chose to work with 'guest players' of this order. Was it not highly likely that guest stars like these would change the plot in one way or another?

Although Marwoto had indeed been member of the group in the 1980s, he did not take part in the production process this time. His name did not appear in the script. Hargi Sundari's name did not appear in the script either and she did not join any of the rehearsals. As both of the guest players were skilled improvisers the play did not get stuck. On the contrary, the final performance was more lively even than the grand

²² Memang ada pendapat bahwa dengan menggunakan naskah pemain menjadi terikat. Ya saya akui, iya. Tetapi juga bukan berarti bahwa pemain tidak boleh mengembangkan dirinya sendiri. Dia boleh menggantikan kalimat usul sejauh tidak menyimpang dari tema besar yang ingin saya suguhkan: misi, muatan saya berikan kepada penonton. [...] Tapi itu hanya boleh dilakukan di dalam latihan. Di pentas saya sangat mengharamkan perubahan. Kenapa? Karena saya hanya ingin supaya teman yang lain tidak kaget.

rehearsal. But was the show still in line with the initial idea of a well-structured, time-managed performance?

We observe the pressure to follow trends: inviting *selebritis* was hot and would in all likelihood increase the number of spectators. As I watched the final performance, Marwoto made such elaborate improvisations that it clearly influenced all the dialogues following. This made the whole performance much longer than planned. Judging from the reactions of the audience this part, which did not appear in the script, happened to be one of the most hilarious moments of the whole performance.

Yang terhormat anggota dewan (The honourable councillor), 30 October 2001

This performance takes place at the Purna Budaya theatre at the Gadjah Mada University (UGM) campus. Entrance is free and the theatre hall is extremely crowded. On stage we see the house of Mr Hasmi, the honourable member of the local council. We look straight into his living room with a table, chairs, paintings and a computer. Beside the living room there is a porch with a bench.

The main focus of the script is on the household of Mister Hasmi, member of the Provincial Council. He receives a lot of guests who all turn out to be after his money and connections. Suddenly village people start demonstrating in front of Hasmi's door. Rumour has spread that an extramarital love affair between Hasmi and his servant Titik has lead to pregnancy.

The play starts with an argument between the female servant Cempluk and her husband Khocil who both work for Hasmi. The story develops with several guests visiting Hasmi. They introduce themselves as friends and family of Hasmi and all ask him for a favour. In quite a hypocritical way, they all want to take advantage of the position of power enjoyed by their 'friend'. For example the couple Wariyun and Marsidah come to ask for Hasmi's support. Wariyun, who did not even finish primary school, turns out to have aspirations to become district officer.

Below I quote from the script at the point the couple arrives on Hasmi's veranda. While waiting to be welcomed by Hasmi, they start arguing.

HASMI ARRIVES

Hasmi: Did you finish your discussion?

Wariyun: Yes, *Pak*.

Marsidah: Not yet at all, *Pak*.

Hasmi: If you didn't finish yet, then finish it. I'll take a nap.

HASMI ENTERS RECEPTION ROOM- WARIYUN& MARSIDAH FOLLOW

Wariyun: Sorry *Pak*.

(HASMI TEKA

Hasmi: Wis rampung le diskusi?

Wariyun: Sudah *Pak*.

Marsidah: Dering dhing *Pak*.

Hasmi: Nek durung rampung, ditutugke. Aku tak ngaso.

HASMI MLEBU KAMAR TAMU-WARIYUN & MARSIDAH NUTUTI

Wariyun: Maaf *Pak*.)

During the stage performance the dialogue above is extended with improvisation. Jokes appear that resemble those of the comedians of kethoprak and dhagelan. By mocking conventions the actors create humorous remarks. The guests switch from Javanese into Indonesian slang, take a seat without permission from their host and raise their voices from time to time:

Hasmi: OK *Mas*. I didn't make my house for people who use it as a battle place, right? If you want to keep discussing I will go to sleep.

Marsidah: [High Javanese:] Please *Pak*, [Indonesian slang:] excuse me *Pak*. [Colloquial Javanese] I want to show off by using a bit of Indonesian.

Wariyun: Yes, yes I would like to visit you *Pak*!

Hasmi: Ooh, you are actually quite strange.

Wariyun: Why, *Pak* Hasmi?

Hasmi: You are guests, aren't you? Without permission you were already walking up and down here, isn't that right?

Marsidah: Hmm *Pak*, that was just because of our ambition.

Wariyun: Actually we just had a drama rehearsal.

Marsidah: [shouting:] A rehearsal, what? That was for real. You ask for rehearsals? Rehearsals we had in the past, now it's serious. You don't understand planning.

Hasmi: Hang on, hang on, if you want to have a second round of quarrelling, keep it till later, okay!'

Marsidah: Sorry *Pak*, sorry *Pak*.

Wariyun: Please sit down, please sit down *Pak*! Sit!

- Hasmi: But this is my house. The one who gives permission is me, not you.
- Wariyun: [colloquial Javanese] I'm wrong again. Please you talk.
- Hasmi: Sit down please.
- Wariyun: Thank you.
- (Hasmi: Ngeten nggih Mas. Kula nggawe omah niki mboten kula ngge ajang wong padu, nggih? Nek tesih ajeng dhiskusi tutuge, kula tak-turu.
- Marsidah: Ampun ngoten ta Pak, *maafin gue* Pak. Ben ketok gaya sithik ngono l ho basa Indonesia.
- Wariyun: Ya ya, saya mau sowan Pak!
- Hasmi: Oo, sebenarnya aneh lho anda ini.
- Wariyun: Bagaimana, Pak Hasmi?
- Hasmi: Tamu toh? Belum dipersilahkan sudah *dlajigan* toh ini tadi?
- Marsidah: Anu Pak, ini tadi karena ambisi Pak.
- Wariyun: Sebenarnya ini tadi ming latihan sandiwara.
- Marsidah: Latihan apa, ya tenanan kok! Njuk latihan? Latihan ki rak ya wingi-wingi, saiki serius. Ora ngerti *planing*.
- Hasmi: Sebentar to sebentar, padunya kalau babak kedua nanti saja ya!
- Marsidah: Maaf Pak, maaf Pak.
- Wariyun: Mangga lenggah, mangga lenggah Pak! Duduk!
- Hasmi: Lho ini rumah saya, yang mempersilahkan itu saya bukan anda.
- Wariyun: Aku kleru meneh. Wis kowe wae ta le omong.
- Hasmi: Silahkan duduk.
- Wariyun: Terima kasih.)

The audience is very noisy, at times commenting on the play. Especially when the popular comedian Marwoto appears on stage the people go wild. Marwoto plays the role of one of Hasmi's servants and quarrels with female servant Titik. The audience gets loud again when local kethoprak star Hargi Sundari joins the other performers on stage. She applies for a job as a servant in Hasmi's household. But since Hasmi already has four servants, there is no place for her.

Suddenly, several villagers knock on Hasmi's door. Rumour has it that Hasmi has made his servant Titik pregnant and they want him to marry her. More and more villagers come to Hasmi's house expressing their anger about the extramarital love affair between the boss and his servant. The growing crowd shouts for justice: Hasmi has to take responsibility and marry Titik before the child is born. Then the male

servant Khocil saves his master by declaring to the now demonstrating crowd that there has been a mistake: not the servant Titik but his own wife, servant Cempluk, is pregnant and he himself is the father. The story ends with Kocil's confession.

Generally speaking, *The honourable councillor* was performed according to the original script. However, parts of the text were changed because the actors improvised. Moreover, the guest stars introduced new dialogue beyond the script.

Scripts for radio plays are highly detailed. The actors literally stick to the script. Compared to the actors of the two other case studies of this chapter, the actors had hardly any freedom to play with the text.

Sandiwara radio daerah in Yogyakarta

RRI Nusantara II has been broadcasting radio plays in the Javanese language since 1965. The so-called 'regional radio play' (*Sandiwara radio daerah*, henceforth referred to as SRD) was usually part of a serialised story. When I carried out my fieldwork between 1999 and 2001, the SRD programme was broadcast Sunday night from 22:15 hours to 23:00 hours.

From when it was formed in 1965 to 1984 playwright-director and actor Soemardjono supervised the group. He wrote approximately 780 scripts for his group. Many of these scripts were based on foreign novels and play texts. His wife who worked as a librarian and mastered English and Dutch told him the content of several Western novels and dramas. Soemardjono adapted and revised these stories into Javanese radio plays (Herry Mardianto and Antonius Darmanto 2001:139,145). As Ras puts it:

The themes of these plays are often borrowed from Western dramas or other literary works. The plot, however, is always recast, and the story becomes a Javanese one in every respect. (Ras 1979:25.)

In other words, Soemardjono's revised play scripts bore little resemblance to the original scripts upon which they were based.

To give an impression of some of the adapted plays, here are some titles of the sources of inspiration and the corresponding new Javanese titles: for example, Soemardjono adapted the play text *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen, which was broadcast in 1968 in four episodes called *Hedda*. Furthermore, he wrote *Anna Karmila* that was inspired by *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy and broadcast in four episodes in 1970. That same year, his new version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the wind* was broadcast in seven episodes entitled *Prahara* (Storm). In 1973 he wrote the radio play entitled *Sangsara dening peng-angen-angen* (Misery caused by longing) based on the novel *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert and broadcast in four episodes (Herry Mardianto and Antonius Darmanto 2001:146-151).

Although for the most part his scripts were based on foreign stories, Soemardjono also adapted Indonesian novels into radio plays such as *Anak perawan di sarang penyamun* (Virgin child in a robbers' den) by Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana. This was broadcast in 1968 under the title *Godril* (name of the main character) (Herry Mardianto and Antonius Darmanto 2001:145).

In 1984 Maria Kadarsih took over the position of playwright-director from Soemardjono. She was born in 1952 in Yogyakarta. She had always been interested in art and literature. In the 1970s she followed several courses at different radio stations about radio broadcasting and radio-script writing. In 1974 she became a member of the SRD group of RRI Yogyakarta. Playwright-director Soemardjono taught her how to write scripts. Over the years, Maria Kadarsih developed her own style of script writing and directing. Unlike Soemardjono, she did not use Western sources. She created stories on the basis of her own ideas and experiences. Furthermore, she derived themes from articles in newspapers and magazines. In the 1990s she frequently received requests from both governmental and commercial institutions to write about certain topics (personal communication with Maria Kadarsih 1999).

Sponsorship and the production of the script

Maria Kadarsih prepared a weekly script, which was handed out to the actors at least one day before the recording took place. Scripts by Maria Kadarsih always consisted of about 14 to 15 pages. Unlike the summary script used by the dhagelan and kethoprak performers at RRI (see Chapters II and III), the SRD script had a full-text

format. Every word of a dialogue was written down, including a remark on the mood of a character and the sound effects, which had to be added during the process of mixing.

Maria Kadarsih created her own stories, interweaving the topics requested by sponsors of the programme. Whereas in Soemardjono's radio plays, commercials were kept separate from the main story, in the scripts of Maria Kadarsih, sponsors' messages were integrated into the story. In the time of Soemardjono, SRD was sponsored mainly by the pharmaceutical industry. Commercials for medicines were broadcast during the programme. In the latter half of the 1980s, under supervision of Maria Kadarsih, governmental departments sponsored SRD: the Department of Labour (Lembaga Tenaga Kerja), the Department of Public Works (Departemen Pekerjaan Umum) and the Regional Department of Justice (Kanwil Departemen Kehakiman Propinsi DIY). As a consequence, the radio plays had to contain messages from these departments (Herry Mardianto and Antonius Darmanto 2001:213-4).

The format of the script

Maria Kadarsih was convinced that her programme would only be successful using a full script. She argued that the actors needed detailed dialogues to be able to get to know their new character:

Without full script the sandiwara daerah radio play does not function. Because you can only get to know the personality of a character within an SRD story via the script. This is different from kethoprak stories of which the characters are known by the people. So [in that case] the actors are able to play without a script, and improvisation suffices.²³ (Personal communication with Maria Kadarsih 1999.)

Unlike kethoprak actors, the SRD performers could not rely on their knowledge of existing plays, because every SRD series had a new content.

²³ Tanpa naskah sandiwara daerah tidak bisa berjalan. Sebab tokoh dalam cerita *sandiwara daerah* hanya bisa dikenal perwatakannya lewat naskah. Berbeda dengan tokoh cerita kethoprak kebanyakan tokohnya sudah dikenal oleh masyarakat. Jadi, pemain bisa main tanpa naskah, cukup improvisasi.

The script consisted of text from the narrator (*narasi*) and text from the characters. Each script opened with the announcement of the *dramatis personae* followed by text of the narrator. At this stage, the narrator gave a run-down of the story broadcast the previous week. The script ended with the narrator asking listeners at home questions about the possible development of the story. For example, on the last page (p.15) of episode four of the *Tumbaling jaman* (Victim of the times) series broadcast on 31 October 1999, the following section appeared:

Listeners, how will Asih hear about Ismadi who is in such a condition? Does Asih still want to marry Ismadi? Is Mrs Wardhono willing to accept the unification between Ismadi and Asih?

(Para miyarsa, piye Asih krungu khabar seka Ismadi sing kahanane kaya ngono? Apa Asih tetep gelem dikawin Ismadi? Apa Bu Wardhono luluh, nyarujuki bebrayane Ismadi lan Asih?)

The listeners were left with several questions. These questions should stimulate them to listen again next time and find satisfying answers. This so-called cliffhanger has always been an important feature of radio plays and soap operas in particular.

The pages of the script were divided into three columns: on the left the number of the section was written down, followed by the name of the character and then the words or sentences the actor or actress had to utter. The beginning and end of a scene were marked by gamelan music (*gendhing*). The state of mind of a character was often written down as an introduction to the dialogue, for example ‘annoyed’ (*mangkel*), ‘sad’ (*sedhih*), ‘surprised’ (*gumun*), etc.

From 10 October to 14 November 1999 the *Victim of the times* serial was broadcast by the SRD group as part of the law information project (Proyek Penyuluhan Hukum) from the provincial department of justice (Kanwil Departemen Kehakiman Propinsi DIY). The serial consisted of six episodes telling the following story:

A young girl named Asih is violated during an outing with some friends. Apparently a pill she took to prevent travel sickness worked like a sedative and she does not remember anything about what happened. When Asih turns out to be pregnant she

wants an abortion. Ismadi, the son of her landlady Mrs Wardhono, offers to marry her and to accept the child as his own. Asih is very surprised and does not trust his intentions. Meanwhile, her sister Palupi who very strongly rejects the abortion plan tries to find out what exactly has happened during the fatal outing. She persists in bringing the case to court. The story ends with a serious marriage proposal by Ismadi. Asih accepts.

At times the script clearly showed the educational messages of the department of justice. For example in the second episode (page 9) the narrator spoke of the regulation of abortion in the Criminal Code (*Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana*). Palupi, the sister of Asih who fell pregnant against her will, is thinking about the consequences of abortion:

Palupi is confused. If her sister does not want to accept the help of Ismadi, it is not only Asih who is in disgrace and ashamed but Palupi gets involved too. But if the baby that her sister carries is aborted, Palupi is afraid to carry the burden of sin. Because Palupi understands that abortion is a violation of the law that is written in the Criminal Code.

(Palupi bingung. Nek adhine ora gelem nampa pitulungane Ismadi, ora mung Asih sing wirang lan isin ning Palupi uga katut. Ning nek bayi sing digembol adhine digugurke, Palupi wedi nyangga dosane. Sebab Palupi ngerti, nggugurke kandhungan, klebu tumindak nerak hukum, kaya sing kamot neng Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana, KUHP)

Palupi literally brings the message of the government: abortion is a crime and a sin. With her political correctness, she has to persuade her sister to find the right solution.

Rehearsing and recording

Sandiwara radio daerah, 1 December 1999

When I arrive at 8 o'clock, most of the players have already gathered in the studio and are rehearsing their script by reading out for themselves and pacing up and down through the studio. Playwright-director Maria Kadarsih invites me to take a place in the recording room next door where Agus Sutopo performs the task of recording. He sits behind his table with recording tools, facing the studio through a window. The players who have to start the first part take their places behind the microphones.

Maria Kadarsih gives an introduction to the play, followed by the part of the narrator and then the dialogue starts.

The players freely add specific Javanese terms of address like *Mbak* or *Mas* or they add the name of the character they are speaking to. Sometimes a sign from Maria Kadarsih interrupts one of the actors and makes him or her repeat the text.

There were three main reasons why the director decided to interrupt. In the first place when the pronunciation was not correct. According to Maria Kadarsih many Javanese native speakers had problems with the pronunciation of their mother tongue. Secondly, Maria Kadarsih interrupted when the intonation was not right. She told me afterwards that some of the actors had to be corrected, because they tended to make a *kethoprak* intonation, which was not appropriate in this case. In the third place, text had to be repeated when an actor used the wrong word or wrong emotion.

The recording was rewound one or two sentences which then had to be repeated; if necessary more than once. Often the players stopped of their own accord, noting that they were not acting correctly. While delivering their text, they moved their hands and heads stressing their lines. Some of the incorrectly uttered sentences made everybody laugh.

Within less than an hour the recording was finished. Agus Sutopo had the task of editing the play under the supervision of Maria Kadarsih who always listened to the whole recording again. Agus Sutopo added sound effects and music from a tape.

The way in which people have dealt with radio play scripts has not changed much over the last decades. As broadcast by government, they were quite conservative and moralistic in terms of content. In comparison with my other case studies, the approach to the script was rather unique: playwright and script left very little room for improvisation. The emphasis on ‘correctness’ of language had, in my opinion, a negative effect on the actors’ spontaneity.

Conclusion

The three case studies described above show the way in which full scripts are produced and used by Javanese theatre makers. The approach of the playwright-director and actor towards the play text turned out to be different in each case.

There were different reasons why playwright-directors decided to work with a full script rather than a short script or synopsis. One important reason to choose for the full script method was the desire for a well-structured performance in terms of both time and content. The three playwright-directors all shared the idea that a full script helps to build a well-structured performance. It gave them the opportunity to schedule the performance time wisely and to work within these limits. However, the way in which they treated the text to reach this 'well-structured' show differed from case to case.

In the case of the Obrolan Angkring group, the playwright-director considered the script a source of inspiration. Once the actors had read through it, they were expected to compose their own sentences. Dialogues from the script appeared on stage in a transformed and extended way. The main topics of the script as well as its general plot remained the same during the performance. While the actors improvised during the shooting session, Kristiadi made sure the performance remained within the time limits. In this way, both actors and playwright-director were responsible for creating the performance text.

In the case of Sandiwara Jenaka KR, the actors had to learn the script by heart. Playwright-director Bondan Nusantara felt responsible for the content of the play and the text delivered on stage. He was very eager to teach his actors their lines. Since many of them had a background in kethoprak they were not used to performing 'realistic' comedy like SJKR. During the performance Bondan Nusantara supported his actors from aside. The appearance of guest stars affected the carefully structured sentences of the original script: the players were forced to change their text when communicating with their new counterparts.

When it comes to discipline, the *sandiwara radio daerah* playwright-director Maria Kadarsih was more severe towards her actors than Bondan Nusantara. As she was very concerned with the use of 'proper' Javanese, she forced her actors to read out the text, only allowing small changes. Sticking to the text seemed to be the proper way of sticking to the conventions (*unggah-ungguh*). As a result, the dialogues of the actors sounded quite artificial.

Whereas Kristiadi stimulated his actors to improvise on stage, both Bondan Nusantara and Maria Kadarsih expected their actors to stick to their lines. On the one hand we see the encouragement of artistic creativity and on the other hand the

idealistic wish to change the acting tradition. According to Bondan Nusantara and Maria Kadarsih there is a need for change to ameliorate the acting tradition.