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

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CHAPTER V

The attitude towards the script

How different information states mingle on stage

In Chapters II, III and IV we encountered the mnemonic and structuring devices of different formats and appearance such as the play schema, the *penuangan*, the short script and the full script. We looked at the attitude different participants in the production process have towards the script. How did they treat the script and script-like phenomena? We examined the script within its context, relating it not only to the performance, but also to the production process as a whole. We discovered specific shaping agents at work; agents that shape the performance in a prominent way such as the playwright-director, the guest star and the guest star's companion. The regular actor is a shaping agent too, but in general terms he or she shapes the performance in a less influential way than the others.

The mnemonic and structuring devices are most important during the preparations before the actual performance takes place. The shaping agents take over the role of the devices during the performance, keeping the actors on the right track. The play schema however remains in the wings as structuring device and sometimes the (short) script circulates amongst the actors too. This chapter elaborates on the way in which shaping agents mould the dramatic action on stage.

From my case studies we learned that irrespective of format or appearance, the script is an essential part of each production process. Generally speaking however, the script and script-like phenomena did not receive much attention from most actors. This may sound paradoxical as the mnemonic and/or structuring devices are at the core of each performance. But is it actually a paradox if you consider the script in its own context? In this chapter I propose several answers to this question, examining the ambiguous relationship between tradition and innovation and between theory and practice.

For Javanese actors, acting means a process of improvisation. They prefer creating their own sentences on stage, rather than literally repeating the text of a playwright. The mnemonic and structuring devices are considered a source of inspiration rather than a fixed plan. To explain this perception, I take a closer look at the interaction between the participants in the production process, comparing their

attitude towards the mnemonic and structuring devices. Several concrete field examples illustrate how the interaction between the participants affects the shape of the whole staging process and performance.

As an introduction to the field examples, I draw a general comparison between the different playwright-directors in my case studies and their attitudes towards their mnemonic and structuring devices.

Between flexibility and fidelity

All playwright-directors considered the creation of a script or script-like phenomenon as the quintessential element of the production process. They composed their play schema, short script or full script on the basis of different sources. During briefings, readings and rehearsals they delivered the plot content to their actors. Generally speaking, they did not expect strict fidelity from their actors towards the scripted text. At the start of the production process they even stimulated them to propose changes to the storyline:

The existence of democracy is very important within art. [...] Because it happens sometimes that performers are just like robots. They do not have the right to bring up suggestions. With *Obrolan Angkring* they have this right. They can argue about the script: ‘Mas Kris, what if the script would be like this?’ OK, if it’s nice why not? [...] It’s impossible that what is written in the script is perfect for the performance, because I’m in front of my computer. [The script] after [it has reached] the field has already changed. Because there isn’t a script that has to be like this, like a holy book. There isn’t.¹ (Personal communication with Kristiadi 2000.)

Bondan Nusantara (Chapter IV) also encouraged his actors to develop their own lines and their own character:

¹ Kehidupan demokrasi dalam kesenian itu sangat penting sekali. [...] Karena pernah pelaku itu hanya robot. Mereka tidak punya sebuah hak untuk melakukan tawaran-tawaran. Dan di *Obrolan Angkring* mereka punya hak untuk itu. Mereka bisa menawar naskah: ‘Bagaimana Mas Kris kalau naskahnya begini?’ Ok kalau bagus kenapa tidak? [...] Sangat tidak mungkin yang tertulis di naskah itu bisa menjamin baik di pertunjukan, karena saya kan berhadapan dengan komputer. Setelah di lapangan kan sudah berubah. Kan tidak ada naskah yang harus seperti ini seperti kitab suci. Tidak.

Sometimes the sentences are mine, right? It's me who is talking. If [these sentences are] uttered by others maybe they don't fit. So [these sentences] have to be adapted to the pronunciation and rhythm of the other actors. [...] I just give a characterisation. This character is like this, tough, arrogant, ambitious, etcetera. This character is humble, refined. In general terms, I give an explanation to the actor to start searching himself. If for example his search hasn't been successful yet I just help him to identify with the character. The rest is up to the actor.² (Personal communication with Bondan Nusantara 1999.)

During the different stages of the production process most playwright-directors kept a keen eye on the junior actors in their group. For example, during penuangan and the rehearsals, they explained those sections of the story in which junior actors had to take part in greater detail. Just before the performance, the junior actors often received additional instruction from their playwright-director. The more experienced actors assisted their playwright-director by looking after their junior colleagues while the performance developed. In cases where a player got stuck while delivering his text, the others tried to help him out.

The playwright-directors of my case studies in Chapter II and III who worked with a play schema and a short script were convinced that a detailed script was of great help to those actors who made their debut on stage. In practice, however, most actors still made their first appearance on stage without studying a full script. Many groups simply had no full scripts available and using them remained an ideal. To be able to use full scripts, actors had to join competitions as described briefly in Chapter I. Playwright-director Sugiarto explained that most of the young actors of Kethoprak Mataram RRI received their first kethoprak 'education' while taking part in a kethoprak competition and by using a full script:

The full script is used in kethoprak to teach the younger generation who does not know the language yet and does not know how to compose a proper sentence in

² Kadang-kadang kalimat dari saya, kan? Saya yang omong. Kalau diekspresikan oleh teman yang lain, barangkali tidak pas. Maka harus disesuaikan dengan lafal dan irama teman-teman yang lain. [...] Saya hanya memberikan karakterisasi saja. Tokoh ini, karakternya begini, keras, arogan, ambisius dan sebagainya. Tokoh ini lemah lembut. Secara global saya memberikan penjelasan pemain untuk mencari sendiri. Kalau pencarian itu misalnya belum ketemu, saya hanya membantu membuka pintu pemain untuk masuk ke karakter itu. Selebihnya terserah pemain.

Javanese. The script is a guideline and slowly but surely the young actor knows how to do it [in other words: he/she knows how to improvise]. In competitions between districts of Yogyakarta young actors get a full script. [...] Because he [the actor] is dedicated he will be able to improvise. By reading the script he will know [how to improvise].³ (Personal communication with Sugiarto 2001.)

Sugiarto considered the full script a practical tool for beginning actors to learn proper Javanese as well as the basics of acting. Professional actors however should be able to do without. Sardjana, Sugiarto's colleague, said on this matter:

With the help of fully-fledged scripts young people can quickly perform kethoprak. In former times without the full script it took much more time [for the youth to take part] because improvisation is difficult. What is difficult about a full script is that the actor has to study and immerse himself in the meaning and the soul of the script. If the young actor plays well with a script then he has to start learning improvisation. Because at its roots kethoprak is an art form that requires improvisation. In former times we had the problem of people who were not able to read or write. Nowadays, however, all the kids go to school and they are able to choose beautiful words from a script and study these words. Everywhere is love, suicide, [the young people] just have to pick out the right words and apply them elsewhere. The full script has value for learning purposes.⁴ (Personal communication with Sardjana 2001.)

In other words, the contemporary actor has the advantage of access to scripts that teach him the basic ingredients of a kethoprak play. However, the kethoprak playwrights agreed that a professional actor must be able to work without a detailed script. As kethoprak actor and dhagelan playwright-director Ngabdul put it: 'The quality [of the performance] is good with the use of a script because it is planned. But

³ Naskah dalam kethoprak itu dipakai untuk mengajari pemain pemula yang belum tahu bahasa, yang belum bisa merangkum kalimat Jawa. Dengan adanya naskah dia dituntun, lambat laun dia akan tahu. Kalau ada lomba kethoprak antar kecamatan, pemain pemula diberi naskah. [...] Karena dia tekun maka dia bisa improvisasi. Karena sering baca naskah dia terus tahu.

⁴ Dengan naskah-naskah yang lengkap itu anak-anak muda itu dengan cepat dapat bermain kethoprak. Kalau dulu itu tanpa naskah *full play* itu lama biasanya karena improvisasi itu sukar. Cuma sukarnya kalau dengan naskah *full play*, pemain harus mempelajari dan menghayati maksud dan rasa naskah itu sendiri. Setelah pakai naskah itu anak-anak muda itu baru belajar untuk improvisasi. [...] Karena pada dasarnya kethoprak itu kesenian improvisasi. Dulu itu kendalanya orang sering nggak bisa baca dan menulis. Anak-anak muda sekarang kan semua sekolah dan bisa mengambil kata-kata bagus dari naskah untuk dipelajari. Di mana-mana ada cinta, ada bunuh diri, tinggal mengambil ini diterapkan di sini. Naskahnya nilai untuk belajar.

a script is just the intellect of one person, not of many people.’⁵ Ngabdul’s remark touches the essence of the perception of most playwrights about the full script: the full script is a threat to the democratic process of staging a play. In Chapter IV, however, we learned that both playwright-director Bondan Nusantara and Maria Kadarsih insisted on using full scripts. Although they appreciated suggestions for changes during the production process, they did not allow alterations during the performance itself.

All directors, irrespective of their preference for a specific script format, felt responsible for the developments on stage. To keep control, they kept busy directing during the whole performance. They gave suggestions from the side to their actors on how to develop their dialogues. In the case of a stage performance, they gave instructions in the wings. While the actors performed on stage, the playwright-directors communicated with them by gestures of the hand. During live kethoprak performances, however, the director often happened to speak out aloud. Spectators in the first rows could hear these comments. Sometimes the playwright-director literally pushed an actor onto the stage when appropriate. When recording in a radio studio, the director often walked to his actors while they were uttering their text in front of a microphone. He whispered his instructions into the ears of one or more actors.

Nano Asmarandana, Sugiarto, Ngabdul (Chapter II) and Timbul (Chapter III) had a double role as playwright-director and actor. They tended to steer the actions of their fellow actors while acting. If they observed the actors were having difficulty finding the right words, they tried to help them out. Apart from acting and directing, Timbul also fulfilled the task of accompanying the guest star. Although the playwright-directors were busy controlling and coordinating the performance, they sometimes failed to keep the actors on the right track as revealed in the following sections.

⁵ Kalau kualitas ya bagus kalau pakai naskah karena direncana. Tapi naskah itu hanya akal pikiran orang satu, bukan orang banyak.

Living up to the expectations of the playwright

Directors sometimes complained about what they called ‘mistakes’ (*kesalahan*) on the part of their actors. At times these ‘mistakes’ led to tension backstage and influenced the plot. Timbul, the playwright-director of kethoprak humor (see Chapter III), explained to me that the junior actors of his group were sometimes too eager to make jokes. As a result they forgot to stick to their role and violated conventions.

As an example, I quote from the third scene of *Behaviour of the Prince*. We witness the arrival of Prince Aria Lintang (in fact Aria Lintang’s servant Marwoto in disguise) accompanied by his servants to the palace garden of Princess Ratnasari. Emban, Belong and Kancil are the servants of Princess Ratnasari. Timbul is the servant of Prince Aria Lintang.

Emban: Hey, there is a guest.
 Kancil: There is a guest.
 Emban: There is a guest who does not say *kula nuwun*? [the correct Javanese way to ask permission to enter] He does not have lips?
 Belong: His lips are too big actually.
 Timbul: There is not even a door and we are asked to *kula nuwun*.

(Emban: E ana dhayoh.
 Kancil: Ana tamu.
 Emban: Ana dhayoh kok ora kula nuwun lho? Apa ora nduwe lambe?
 Belong: Lambene nganti turah ngono lho.
 Timbul: Wong lawange wae ora ana kok kon kula nuwun.)⁶

Here we see that Ratnasari’s servant called Belong makes a joke about the lips of Prince Aria Lintang. The actor Marwoto has buck teeth, a reason why he has pronounced lips. In an interview after the performance, playwright Timbul referred to the remark of Belong as ‘highly inappropriate’. He explained that the servant had to respect the Prince. Belong made the mistake that he showed that he was not dealing

⁶ The following Indonesian subtitles appeared on screen: Ada tamu/Masa tamu tidak permisi apa tidak punya bibir?/Bibirnya sampai kelebihan begitu./Pintunya saja tak ada, masa disuruh permisi.

with a Prince but with a simple servant. In his role Belong was supposed to be impressed by the Prince. According to Timbul especially the less experienced players of his group had difficulties sticking to the *pakem* as they were eager to ‘score’ individually.

The complaints of Timbul about his junior or less experienced kethoprak players struck me as noteworthy because these remarks show his ambivalent approach towards the show. On one hand he expected his actors to stick to the conventions of kethoprak. He appointed ‘companions’ who had to supervise those actors with limited knowledge of the conventions. On the other hand, however, he wanted his actors to perform a story with all the ingredients of a comedy. In order to reach this goal he invited many comedians to play along.

Neither in the script nor in the *penuangan* was it made clear how the servants of Ratnasari should approach the fake Prince. Considering the fact that many young actors (including Belong) were professional comedians, it is not surprising that they made ‘mistakes’ when it came to conventions. In other words, it was to be expected that the comedians would question the status of Prince Aria Lintang.

The performance of *The karaoke divas* by the group Obrolan Angkring (Chapter IV) provides another example of actors being too eager to make jokes. Although the actors were supposed to make their audience laugh, they tended to exaggerate this duty. Playwright-director Kristiadi had written down on his hand roughly when he had to send the actors on and off stage. At times the actors became so preoccupied with their own jokes, they forgot to pay attention to their director. This caused some serious delays in the development of the plot.

For example, the moment that karaoke competition participant Yu Beruk had to start with her song, the masters of ceremony Jonet and Dalijo kept joking around with her. According to Heri his colleagues often got carried away when they were joking:

I’m the controller of my fellow actors. Sometimes when my fellow actors are joking they lose track and I make them return again [to the storyline], because they can’t

control when they are joking. Indeed I have an agreement about this with Kristiadi.⁷
(Personal communication with Heri Dwirudi 2000.)

Noting the delay in plot development, Kristiadi decided not to wait for Yu Beruk's performance and sent Heri on stage. This resulted in a change in the initial storyline: Heri performed first and Yu Beruk second rather than the other way round as written in the script.

Towards the end of the performance Kristiadi consulted his watch several times and started to gesticulate to his actors that they had to hurry up. He was worried that they could not make it within the 30 minutes that were reserved for the programme. Somewhat annoyed, he watched his actors exceed the time limits. As a result, right after the shooting he decided to consult with the production manager and about a minute had to be cut from the end. As editing only took place in case of emergency, Kristiadi was not particularly delighted that these measures had to be taken.

However, Kristiadi was satisfied with the final result on television. When the *Obrolan Angkring* members gathered again for the reading session of the next performance, the playwright-director congratulated his actors on the success of *The karaoke divas* show. He handed out his new script in which he addressed the actors with the following remarks:

Congratulations on [...] *The karaoke divas*. It is very likely that *The karaoke divas* became a success because you went deeply into the material according to your own ability and explored the script in depth.

(Selamat untuk [...] *Sinden Karaoke*. Keberhasilan *Sinden Karaoke* kemungkinan besar karena pendalaman materi, sesuai porsi masing-masing, dan penggalian naskah yang masak.)

Positive remarks like these from the playwright become even more meaningful if compared with the critical notes appearing at the bottom of the script of *The karaoke divas* of 4 October 2001, which referred to the shooting session that took place three weeks before the shooting of *The karaoke divas*.

⁷ Saya sebagai pengontrol teman-teman saja. Kan kadang teman kalau *ndhagel* kan sering lepas. Saya yang memasukan kembali, karena teman tidak kontrol kalau *ndhagel*. Saya memang ada kesepakatan dengan Mas Kris tentang itu.

- Don't be focused on yourself without looking at your partner. You have to be able to play together.
 - Innovation is necessary, but it has to be prepared.
 - The exploration of the script has to be in depth and relevant.
 - Please maximise your intensity. Don't be slack.
-
- jangan [...] suntuk dengan dirinya sendiri tanpa melihat permainan lawan. Harus bisa main bersama.
 - Inofasi harus namun harus dipersiapkan.
 - Eksplorasi naskah harus matang dan kena sasaran.
 - Harap memaksimalkan intensitasnya, jangan kendo.⁸

Apparently, Kristiadi was not satisfied with the result of the last shooting session and warned his actors that they had to work harder, that they had to explore the script and that he would not accept any excuses whatsoever. This example illustrates that the director worked hard before and during the performance to regulate the show. He expected his actors to perform in a creative and independent way. At times, the actors annoyed him and he told them the truth. During the shooting session he never left the studio. As an off-stage shaping agent, he tried to continue to influence the developments on stage. By gesticulating, whispering and maintaining eye contact he communicated with his actors.

Whereas Timbul and Kristiadi had to deal with actors who were at times too funny, playwright-director Ngabdul (Chapter II) faced the opposite problem. During the recording of *Waiting for pay* he noticed that one of his actors was struggling to come up with any jokes:

Yesterday I had the story revolve around Mr Sardjana.⁹ The one I gave the floor first was Mr Marji, but he couldn't develop what I gave him. My idea was to give Sardjana the role of a nasty person. But Marji was not strong enough to face this, so he couldn't produce outbursts of humour. So all actors are given the *wos*. They can take a confident position towards the story. But sometimes at a certain moment

⁸ Spelling of this section is according to the original script.

⁹ Literally Ngabdul said: 'Yesterday I gave the story to Mr Sardjana.'

people's thoughts get stuck because it is improvisation. Sometimes there is a problem at home and that blocks one's thoughts.¹⁰

Although the dhagelan actors were all skilled improvisers, the development of their dialogues was not always smooth. In other words, they could not continuously live up to the expectations of playwright-director Ngabdul who wanted them to produce an endless amount of humorous remarks. But since Ngabdul sympathised with his actor's problems, he did not take him to task for not producing enough jokes. Instead he tried to save the situation himself by increasing his suggestions and instructions to the other actors. At crucial moments he even entered the stage as an unexpected guest (*tungka*, see Chapter II) in order to influence the developments on stage immediately.

The guest star challenges the director

Apart from problems that occurred on stage because actors were either too eager to show their qualities or too slack, I see a more specific problem that affects the outcome of the performance. This problem arose in five of my nine case studies in which guest stars took part in the presentation. Let us observe the dynamics between the shaping agents of director and guest star.

While shooting *The karaoke divas* two guest stars appeared on stage as the jury of the competition: singer Anik Sunyahni and Mrs Prapto who had a food catering service. These guest stars received the script by mail a few days before the performance. They did not take part in any of the reading sessions. Although they presumably read the script and received instructions from the playwright-director before the shooting started, it was obvious that it was not very clear to them how to fulfil their task in the show.

Mrs Prapto was quite timid in terms of trying to find her place in the group, whereas Mrs Anik Sunyahni tended to grab all the attention. This gave the director and the actors of *Obrolan Angkring* the challenging job of keeping their guest stars on

¹⁰ Pak Sardjana kemarin itu saya beri cerita. Yang saya dahulukan Pak Marji, tapi dia belum bisa ngiprahkan apa yang saya berikan. Gambaran saya apabila Sardjana yang saya beri peranan orang yang *mbesiwit*. Tapi ini Marji tidak kuat menghadapi ini, jadi tidak bisa menimbulkan ledakan-ledakan kelucuan. Jadi semua teman-teman diberi *wos* itu. Dengan ceritanya sudah bisa mapan-mapan. Tapi *kala mangsane* pada suatu saat manusia itu kadang *kejendhelan* pikiran sebab itu improvisasi. Kadang dari rumah sudah ada persoalan sehingga itu bisa menyumbatkan pikiran.

the right track. In the case of Prapto they actively had to stimulate her to take part in the dialogue and in the case of Anik Sunyahni they had to prevent her from dominating the stage. The appearance of guest stars during the *Obrolan Angkring* shootings always influenced the plot in one way or another. The fact that it often led to tension on and off stage between the actors was apparently not a reason to stop inviting guest stars. Kristiadi explained that the programme needed the guest stars to be able to compete with all the commercial television channels.

The guest star of *The honourable councillor* of Sandiwara Jenaka KR (SJKR) dominated the stage at times. He had been appointed the role of servant of the councillor Hasmi together with female guest star Hargi Sundari. Neither joined any of the rehearsals. They had been scheduled half way through the performance for a humorous interlude. Marwoto Kawer delivered a spontaneous monologue on stage in which he addressed his director Bondan Nusantara. Awareness of the situation on stage resulted in meta-textual remarks. He complained, tongue-in-cheek, that Bondan Nusantara was narrow minded in his approach towards Yogyakarta. All the director did was to talk about servants and criticise them:

The director has run out of ideas. This Bondan is really stupid actually. From the start till now all he talks about are servants. Is there nothing else or what? It is humiliating for the people of Yogya. [...] He has the guts to criticise, but what he criticises are just servants...

(Sutradharane kentekan idhe. Bondan iki goblog banget kok jane. Sejak awal sampai sekarang kok sing dirembug batur wae, ora ana liyane apa? Ngisin-isini wong Yogya jane. [...] Wanine ngritik, ming ngritik batur aah...)

For around 10 minutes, Marwoto Kawer continued to tease his director. This part did not belong to the initial script; it was totally improvised on the spot. It is interesting to note that Marwoto Kawer fulfilled a double role. He not only acted as a servant in a play, but also performed as himself: as Marwoto Kawer busy competing with his director and fellow artist Bondan Nusantara.

While complaining on stage about the stupidity of his director, Marwoto Kawer stressed the fact that he did not fear the impact of his words:

In case Bondan gets angry about my words I will punch him. He is just my little brother. In blood relationship I'm his senior¹¹ and I'm more famous, that's enough. No way that Bondan wins from me. He is fifteen days older than me. He is the first who lost his teeth because the construction of my teeth is stronger.

(Omong ngene iki tekade Bondan nesu tak-jotos kok, lha wong ming adhiku. Awune tuwa aku, kondhange ya kondhang aku, ha iya wis. Ora ana menange Bondan iki karo aku. Nek umure tuwa kana limalas dina. Omponge dhisik dheweke, merga konstruksi untune kuwat aku.)

There seemed to be a thin line between the fictive world of the stage and the real world of theatre competition. Because Marwoto Kawer and Bondan Nusantara shared the same background of Yogyakarta-based kethoprak families, they had always been rivals in the struggle for fame. In the 1980s they had both been members of the SJKR group. Lately, Marwoto Kawer had become more famous than Bondan Nusantara because of his activities on national television. He took advantage of his position by dominating the stage, ignoring the plot and teasing his director.

The examples above show that the expectations and plans of the playwright-director are not always fulfilled in a satisfactory way. Violation of the performance plan and competition between (guest) actors and the director influence the outcome of the show. Although the directors consider these examples as 'negative', I would rather observe them as moments of creativity. These 'negative' moments of interaction between the playwright-director and his (guest) actors are part of the staging process: moments that have their roots in different approaches towards the script.

The playwright-directors appear to have an ambivalent orientation towards the script. Timbul Suhardi expects his actors to be creative and funny, but at the same time he wants them to stick to conventions and keep within time limits. Director Bondan Nusantara wants his actors to stick to the text, but at the same time he invites a guest star who has no knowledge of the script at all. We see tension between the desire to uphold traditional values and the need to commercialise the theatre. The playwright-directors acknowledged that they felt pressure to invite comedians and

¹¹ The Javanese word *awu* means 'degree of blood relationship'. The expression *awune tuwa aku* is described in the Javanese-Dutch dictionary of J.F.C. Gericke and T. Roorda as: 'in terms of blood relationship I'm older' [in bloedverwantschap ben ik ouder] (Gericke-Roorda 1901:100).

guest stars to brighten up their show. In this way, they were able to attract a reasonable number of spectators and generate a profit, whereas they otherwise ran the risk of losing their audience.

The ambivalent approach of the playwright towards the play text obviously affects the actions of the actors. The actors use the script as a source of inspiration and shape the script in their own way. During performance, they need to maintain close contact with the director and follow direction. At times, however, they are preoccupied with their own creative process and forget or ignore the playwright.

The guest stars do not study the script and do not attend rehearsals or readings. In most cases they only receive a few instructions from the playwright-director before the performance starts. Although they are less informed than the other actors about what is supposed to happen on stage they do not hesitate to participate or even dominate on stage.

All the participants of the staging process have a different level of knowledge about the planned developments on stage. They possess a different ‘information state’, a term used by Goffman in his book *Frame analysis* (1986).

The clash of ‘information states’

In order to explain social events like theatrical performances Erving Goffman developed a theory of basic frameworks. He explained the terms ‘frame’ and ‘frame analysis’ as follows:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase “frame analysis” is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience. (Goffman 1975:10-1.)

In his analysis of the ‘theatrical frame’ Erving Goffman describes how the inner realm of a Western stage play is organised. He does this by focusing on the shared

knowledge amongst the participants of the play of the developments on stage. Unlike real people in daily life, actors have a common knowledge of the outcome of their interaction 'since the playwright has decided in advance just how everything will work out' (Goffman 1986:134). This knowledge can be explained in terms of 'information states':

By an "information state" I mean the knowledge an individual has of why events have happened as they have, what the current forces are, what the properties and intents of the relevant persons are, and what the outcome is likely to be. In brief, each character at each moment is accorded an orientation, a temporal perspective, a "horizon". (Goffman 1986:133-4.)

According to Goffman, participants in the staging process all have a similar information state:

Obviously the playwright, the producer, the prompter, and the players all share a single information state concerning the inner events of the play; they all know what will prove to be involved in the happenings and how the happenings will turn out. Rehearsals make this all too clear. (Goffman 1986:134.)

Goffman illustrates how the performance is shaped and organised on the basis of shared knowledge of the script. Rehearsals serve as an organisational tool to reach the 'single information state' during performance. The ideas of Goffman presume that everything that happens on stage is totally planned in advance. In this view it is 'obvious' that the whole production crew shares a 'single state of information'. Happenings on stage evolve around this shared state of information:

In brief, *during* the play, the person playing the hero acts as if he doesn't know what the villain is going to do, and the person playing the villain acts as if he can hide his intent from the hero, although both these individuals have a common and full knowledge of the play and of the distribution of this knowledge. This means that at least some of the characters will be hoodwinking the other characters, that all will be "ignorant" of certain problematic outcomes. (Goffman 1986:135.)

If we consider the developments on stage in my case studies, it is neither easy nor possible to identify 'a single information state' amongst the performance participants. Only in the case of the radio play *Sandiwara radio daerah* could one speak of a more or less shared information state amongst the members of the production. This shared knowledge, however, concerns each individual episode of the serial rather than knowledge about the development of the serial as a whole. In other words, the actors do not know the content of future episodes. Moreover, it turned out in numerous cases that they were unaware of the content of even the current script. Although they are supposed to study their script before the recording session starts, they often just read it for the first time in the studio. Thus, in general terms, the shared knowledge of the participants on stage is limited.

Obviously the lack of shared knowledge relates to the fact that the theatre makers do not have a detailed script available and do not rehearse before performance. But it is interesting to note that even if one works with a full script and organises rehearsals, information states appear to vary. This was the case in the performance of *Sandiwara Jenaka KR*. Since several guest stars appeared on stage who did not take part in the rehearsals, they had different ideas about the development of the script than the other members of the production crew. Apparently a pre-scripted plan does not necessarily lead to a 'single information state'.

Here we learn about the attitude of the production members towards the script. As I showed in my case studies the 'shaping agents' influence the outcome of the performance. It is very common during performance that the director is busy directing from aside while the actors follow their own script in mind and the guest star adds his own ideas to the plot. By using such mnemonic and structuring devices as play schema and *penuangan* the participants come to share common ideas about the development of the plot. However, their information states differ. It is this difference that determines the final outcome of the play. In other words, the organisation of the inner realm of the play is not based on a single information state but on several different ones.

To illustrate this let us turn to the third scene of *Behaviour of the Prince* by the Kethoprak Humor Samiaji group.

When Aria Lintang meets Ratnasari

Prince Aria Lintang is about to meet Princess Ratnasari. How do their different information states operate on stage? As an introduction I quote from the third scene of the script, followed by the corresponding section in the *penuangan*.

The script of playwright Timbul:

The fake Prince Aria Lintang arrives and tries to seduce Princess Ratnasari in an arrogant way. Princess Ratnasari refuses, moreover the fake Prince Aria Lintang is filled with conceit.

(Datang Pangeran Aria Lintang gadungan yang dengan congkaknya berusaha merayu Putri Ratnasari. Putri Ratnasari menolak apalagi Pangeran Aria Lintang gadungan itu sangat sombong.)

This is a transcription of the *penuangan* as delivered by the director Kies Slamet:

Prince Aria Lintang arrives. ‘You don’t know me, do you?’ [voice in higher pitch:] ‘Who is this? Did a man enter the garden of the Princess?’ The Prince is arrogant. [lowers voice:] ‘I am Prince Aria Lintang.’ [She is] upset. [higher voice:] ‘Prince Aria Lintang? Really? Prince Aria Lintang who will be given in marriage to me?’ ‘That is right sister.’¹² From the first word onwards he scares her. His face is all over the place [actors start laughing], he does not meet the requirements. He is extraordinary arrogant. [Actor Marwoto interrupts the director: ‘Whose behaviour is that?’ Laughing increases in the studio.] Finally he starts seducing her: ‘You who are named Beautiful Flower¹³ Ratnasari, my future wife, I already had the permission to meet you. That is why sister, you my future wife, please come close to me.’ Well, the main point here is that he entices her and she feels disgusted.

(Datangnya Pangeran Aria Lintang. Belum kenal, inggih? Ini siapa? Kok ada pria masuk di taman kaputren? Sombong pangerannya. Sayalah Pangeran Aria Lintang. Kaget. Lho, Pangeran Aria Lintang? Benar? Apakah Pangeran Aria Lintang yang akan dikawinkan dengan saya? Benar diajeng. Wah ini sudah mulai dari satu kata itu

¹² *Dhi-ajeng* is an old-fashioned Javanese term of address for younger sister. Male kethoprak players frequently use it on stage for addressing younger women.

¹³ The Javanese expression *kusumaning ayu* is also the term of address for a woman of aristocratic background.

saja sudah terkejut. Wajahnya sudah nggak karu-karuan, bentuknya juga sudah tidak memenuhi syarat. Sombongnya melebihi. [Marwoto: Iki lakune sapa?] Akhirnya dirayu: kamu yang namanya Kusumaning Ayu Ratnasari, nah calon istriku, aku sudah mendapat izin untuk menemuimu. Maka dari itu diajeng kamu calon istriku, ayolah dekatlah padaku. Wis pokoke dirayu-rayu, sing kana gila.)

Prince Aria Lintang (servant Marwoto in disguise) and his servants have made their entrance to the palace garden of Princess Ratnasari. Timbul acts as one of the servants of the Prince and at the same time tries to steer the actions on stage in his function as playwright-director.

While the servants of both Prince and Princess make a lot of jokes, one of Ratnasari's female servants whispers something in the ear of her mistress. This female servant is the official 'companion' of the guest star Della Puspita alias Princess Ratnasari. She gives instructions and pushes Ratnasari to the front. The following dialogue develops:

Ratnasari: [facing Aria Lintang] Excuse me, who are you?
Aria Lintang: You do not know me yet?
Ratnasari: [asking her servants] Did we just meet already, or what?

(Ratnasari: Maaf, kalian ini siapa ya?
Marwata: Belum kenal dengan saya?
Ratnasari: Tadi sudah kenalan belum sih?)

Ratnasari alias actress Della Puspita looks around puzzled. All servants start to give absurd explanations about the background and the name of the Prince. The flow of weird remarks leaves the young actress even more confused. Servant Timbul in his role as playwright-director brings the conversation back on track, stating:

Timbul: This is the Prince.
Aria Lintang: I am Prince Aria Lintang.
Ratnasari: Prince Aria Lintang who will be given in marriage to me?
Aria Lintang: Yes.
Ratnasari: [shouting] Aaaaaaaaahhhhh! (see Illustration 5.1)

- Aria Lintang: [shouting] Osraaaaaaaaaaam!¹⁴
 Ratnasari: My goodness, why does he do that?
- (Timbul: Ini sang pangeran.
 Aria Lintang: Saya pangeran Aria Lintang.
 Ratnasari: Pengeran Aria Lintang yang mau dijodohin sama saya?
 Aria Lintang: Ya.
 Ratnasari: Aaaaaaaaaahhhhh!
 Aria Lintang: Osraaaaaaaaaaam!
 Ratnasari: Biyung kok begitu?)

Ratnasari looks around desperately for an explanation: Is this horrible man her future husband? The servants follow, joking around about the Prince and the future couple. Timbul makes funny remarks but some have a serious undertone: ‘You have to be polite, this is a Prince’ (‘Kamu harus sopan, ini kan seorang Pangeran’). He warns the comedians that they should not give the ‘secret’ of the disguise of the Prince away too easily.

The two short dialogues between the Prince and the Princess are built up in four stages: First, the companion of the guest star tells her guest star to step forwards. Second, the guest star follows the instructions and starts talking to the Prince: ‘Excuse me, who are you?’ Third, the actors in their role as servants start to discuss name and origin of the Prince. Fourth, the playwright-director interrupts the joking on stage stating: ‘This is the Prince’. Finally, by means of this statement, the dialogue between Prince and Princess can continue.

Several shaping agents were at work to compose these small parts of text on stage. During the *penuangan* all the players were taught the basic ingredients of the story. As a result, everybody shared basic knowledge of the planned development of the plot. However, because this knowledge sank in depending on the actor’s personal skills and interest, everybody possessed slightly different basic knowledge.

For the professional actors for example it was not difficult to keep this information in mind and to use it as a source of improvisation. For the less experienced, however, it was more difficult to recall all this knowledge. Obviously

¹⁴ Marwoto Kawer refers to a commercial of ‘Osram’ lamps. When he shouted this word the audience started laughing very loud.

playwright-director Timbul had a different understanding of the script than the other actors because he wrote it himself. As a famous singer, Della Puspita alias Ratnasari had stage experience, but she did not have a kethoprak background.

Stressing the difference

At times, a difference in information states is a fruitful source of jokes improvised on the spot. In meta-textual remarks, actors explicitly refer to the different information state of their fellow actor or their director. For example, the food stall owner Wisben in the *Obrolan Angkring* episode *Not feeling different* blames his guest Jonet for introducing a topic that is ‘outside of the scenario’:

[In this episode about the celebration of Imlek, the Chinese New Year, Jonet shows his friends at the food stall that he has learned some Chinese for this occasion. Rather than Chinese words however he uses Javanese words that he pronounces in a quasi-Chinese way]

Jonet: [pointing to Wisben] Someone like you the Chinese call *tyaaaaang kakooong!*

Wisben: What is that? That’s quite stupid! Yes it’s true *tiyang kakung*. [*tiyang kakung* is Javanese for ‘male person’ or ‘husband’]

Heri: [pointing at Dewi, the wife of Wisben] And someone like her?

Jonet: [voice in higher pitch] *Theeee-mon*.¹⁵

[The actors and audience start laughing]

Wisben: [Keeps laughing while talking] You are making a wild attempt. Then *theeee-mon*? This is outside of the scenario. There wasn’t a rehearsal with *theeee-mon*. The play that we memorised yesterday, this is outside... [is interrupted by Jonet]

Jonet: But it’s difficult Ben!

(Jonet: Nek kaya kowe ngene iki nek wong Tionghoa ngarani *tyaaaaang kakooong!*

Wisben: Apa kuwi? Iki rada edan! Ha iya bener tyang kakung.

¹⁵ The word *thémon* is Javanese slang for *wédok*, ‘woman’. It is so-called ‘reversed language’ *‘basa walikan’* in which the syllables of the Javanese alphabet are swapped: *thé* becomes *wé* and *dok* becomes *mon*.

- Heri: Nek kaya kuwi?
 Jonet: Theeee-mon.
 Wisben: Ngawur kowe iki. Kok njur theeee-mon? Nek iki di luar skenario.
 Ora ana latihan kok terus ana theeee-mon. Lakone iki sing wingi
 diapalke, kok terus di luar ...
 Jonet: Lha angel ta Ben!)

To learn Chinese is difficult for Jonet just like memorising the script and the rehearsals.

The following example shows how an actor of the group Sandiwara Jenaka KR complains about the fact that his director has failed to inform him correctly. Master Hasmi (the councillor) and servant Marwoto Kawer in *The honourable councillor* have a different opinion about the scenery on stage. Hasmi has just arrived home:

- Marwoto: That is an imaginary wall Mister! [audience starts laughing]
 Hasmi: There's a window here!
 Marwoto: That is again something Bondan didn't tell us, just now.

 (Marwoto: Niki ethok-ethoke temboke Pak!
 Hasmi: Kene iki ana cendhelane!
 Marwoto: Iki Bondan meneh ora ngandhani, iki mau.)

The boss Hasmi questions the information state of his fellow actor Marwoto Kawer alias servant. According to Marwoto Kawer the director Bondan Nusantara has to be blamed because he did not provide him with the information needed.

In the same scene, we witness a conversation between the servant Marwoto Kawer and the girl Hargi Sundari who wants to apply for a job as a servant in the house of Mr Hasmi. Marwoto Kawer tries to impress Hargi Sundari by showing her all the important tasks he has as a servant. Suddenly, he even receives a phone call on his mobile from a VIP in Jakarta. She does not seem to believe him.

Marwoto: [to Hargi Sundari] Wait a moment OK! [on the phone] Hello good morning. Oh yes. That is for the continuation of what? What about the non-budgetary financing?¹⁶

Hargi Sundari: [laughing] What role is that? How come you talk about the non-budgetary financing?

Marwoto: Mister Akbar Tanjung. Yes Sir, we control the regional problems. OK-OK. Oh what a happy coincidence that Mister Amin is already there. Amin Rais?¹⁷

(Marwoto: Nyilih sekedhap nggih! Halo selamat siang. O ya. Itu untuk kelanjutannya apa? Dana non bujeter itu bagaimana?)

Hargi Sundari: Iki dhapakane apa ta? Kok nganggo ngomongke dana non bujeter barang?

Marwoto: Pak Akbar Tandjung. Udah pak, masalah daerah kita yang atasi. Oke-oke. O kebetulan kalau Pak Amin sudah di situ. Amin Rais?)

By asking Marwoto Kawer about his role Hargi Sundari shows that she does not understand the intentions of her counterpart. How is it possible that a Yogya-based servant has connections in Jakarta? The question has a double meaning as it refers to Marwoto as a servant and at the same time to Marwoto as an actor performing in the role of a servant who violates the conventions.

Shared information and improvisation

At times, a difference in information states can lead to miscommunication and tension on stage. In general terms, however, theatre makers are used to dealing with different approaches to the script. Every theatre production starts with meetings such as the *penuangan*, reading sessions or rehearsals in which the playwright-director informs his actors about the script. In this way, the actors come to share similar ideas about their roles and the development of the plot. After this point (apart from some

¹⁶ Marwoto refers to a huge corruption scandal in which the Chairman of Golkar, Akbar Tandjung, got involved. Under Akbar Tandjung's supervision money of the government-run logistics agency for basic foodstuffs (Bulog) was used for Golkar elections in 1999.

¹⁷ Muhammad Amin Rais was the chairman of the People's Congress (MPR).

exceptions), the actors are supposed to improvise. They give shape to their knowledge of the script in their own individual way.

For most actors, improvisation is second nature. When actors improvise, it is impossible for them to share the exact same information states as their partners. On the basis of mnemonic and/or structuring devices, they know more or less what the actions and reactions of their partners will be on stage. However, they can only guess at the exact form of expression their fellow actors may use.

Actors do share information about the dramatic structure and conventions of the particular type of theatre they participate in. This knowledge helps the actors to improvise together. Their shared knowledge may be limited, but it is nonetheless essential for a well-structured performance. For example, the dramatic structure type of the classical Javanese play (Chapters II and III) calls for other convention rules than the situation comedy (see Chapter IV).

Generally speaking, the playwright-director provides his actors with the basic information for a fruitful improvisation process. In some cases, however, he wants to have more influence. The desire to have more influence ties in with specific ideas about the 'improvement' of the staging process by means of the script. Improvement can be explained in terms of innovation and time management. The use of a full script and the organisation of rehearsals should help to reach a better-structured and more attractive performance.

My case studies show that this desire for change in appearance and use of the script remains an ideal. In theory, it would indeed be possible to reach more coherence on stage by increasing the shared knowledge amongst the production members. Suppose the theatre production would be totally based on a scripted plan and there would be no guest stars who could suddenly change the plot, it would be more likely that the play would develop according to the initial plan. In practice though, the theatre makers are not keen on devoting all their attention to a structured plan. Moreover, the play text (if available) does not have much authority. It is considered a prerequisite for staging a play, a practical tool to shape the performance.

If we consider the fact that differences in information states form an integral part of the Javanese staging process, it becomes clear why a script is likely to be neglected. The participants consider a situation on stage in which different approaches to the script prevail 'normal' or even desirable. Rather than learning the script by

heart they need to be able to anticipate their partners responses. A director might have ambitious and innovative ideas about a structured way to lead his actors through the performance; in practice he may not be able to realise these plans.